

## Notes on Philip Glass's Symphonies By Richard Guérin

For a very long time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century composers more or less ceased to compose in the antiquated form of the symphony. There were a number of very practical reasons why composers, Philip Glass included, neglected the form. To some degree, it has come as a surprise to Glass himself that this body of work has evolved to such a degree. In interviews, the self-described "theater composer" seems to not know what quite to make of or how to talk about this now large group of musical children which he has brought into this world. Now with all ten symphonies in view, composed over a period of two decades, we can begin to see how they take their place in the greater musical world and what role these pieces play in the composer's own creative output.

By the 1960s when Philip Glass was coming of age as a composer the world of *new* classical music was largely controlled by the European avant-garde. For more than half a century a certain brand of modern music rose to primacy and had deep influence over the programming in concert halls and opera houses on both sides of the Atlantic. It's fair to say that traditional classical music audiences generally felt forsaken by this turn of historical events. The pleasure principle in music that had existed for over 400 years had been discarded. The music which was being composed by living composers of the approved international style of the time, made no attempt to consider likes or dislikes of the classical music loving public. Moreover, composers who did in fact compose music which aimed to please audiences were, for the most part, pushed to the margins. It's therefore understandable that audiences retreated back into the warm waters of beautiful and proven masterworks of the past.

Seen from the other side, the development of an unchanging canon of classical music masterpieces that had begun before 1900 had diminished the station of living composers, pushing them further away from time-honored traditions of any kind. This included the most old-fashioned and stodgy form in the whole literature, the symphony – a large piece for symphony orchestra, of symphonic dimensions, usually in multiple movements. It's essentially impossible to determine which happened first: Did composers write music that alienated audiences that the audience turned its back? Or did the audience's taste in music become ossified and concentrated in the music of the past therefore leaving composers without an audience, their resulting music becoming music written for no one?

In any case, the end result was a bifurcation between Modernism and canon of tried and true classical chestnuts. This set of circumstances exists almost to this day. Orchestral repertoire became the equivalent of a Fine Arts museum with a permanent collection of Rembrandts, Raphaels, and Monets. As such, the presentation of most modern music by orchestras has become a sort of sideshow curiosity. The term Modernism is used for any piece of art that espouses any post-1900 values. "*Classical Music*" has become a catch-all for music from the earliest pre-baroque music through the late-Romantics. Modernism of all kinds has somehow been held apart.

Whether this system is just or not will not be debated here – it's simply how the classical music world has functioned for the past 100 years. As such, composers who might seek to have a rapprochement with tradition, found few opportunities to do so within the classical music world.

This was the situation in which Glass as a young composer found himself. Glass's generation reacted against the prevailing authority of the time, namely the European Avant-Garde and Serialism, that had held an almost fascistic hold over the programming of new music concerts from Paris and Berlin to New York and Chicago. Young composers were obligated to compose within the approved modern style of the Serialists or they were outcasts. To the Serialists, if one did not compose in the approved style (theirs) one was, as Pierre Boulez put it, "useless." Meanwhile, for the most part all Modern music was useless to the traditional classical music crowd. The trick was to find a state of relevancy for your music in a field whereby all music written would be labeled with the toxic imprimatur of "Modern."

Enter the Minimalists. The divide between traditional classical music and the Minimalists should not be considered very wide. Minimalism was tonal, and it directly and intentionally appealed to audiences. After a period of almost 50 years, we had a new generation of composers writing music with the earnest hope that audiences would enjoy it. The pleasure principle in music had been rediscovered. In 1957, the year that Jean Sibelius died, Philip Glass was 20 years old, working as a crane operator at Bethlehem Steel in Sparrow's Point Maryland and three and a half decades away from writing his first symphony.

The two last great symphonists, the two most responsible for the most reformed concept of what a symphony currently is, were Gustav Mahler and Dmitri Shostakovich. These two composers created in the face of tremendous hardships and in the process redefined what a symphony could be. They are perhaps also the two greatest personal symphonic influences on Philip Glass. In the case of Mahler, he had an all-encompassing concept of the symphony, famously stating: "*the symphony is like the world, it must embrace everything.*" In Shostakovich, we have perhaps the most poignant example of a composer and his direct relationship to the time and place in which he lived and created. Mahler overcame all sorts of emotional turmoil in his own life from an abusive parent, the death of siblings, the death of his own child, anti-Semitism in Vienna, to the news of his own premature fatal heart condition. Such hardship is portrayed in his music but so is the joy in life and the entire bandwidth of human experience. Mahler's symphonies can be viewed as one big coherent whole - they are his own autobiography. Symphony No.1 starts with a feeling of the darkness lifting and spring arriving. His last completed Symphony, his Ninth, ends with a total acceptance of death and it stands as one of the most powerful moments in all of music. Shostakovich lived his life in daily mortal fear of either being killed or sent off to the labor camps by the Soviet authorities. One month he might be the darling of the Politburo, the next he could be denounced. The range of emotion in Shostakovich's music tends towards the dark, grotesque and or the ridiculous. Even in his music that is sometimes seen as a compromise with authorities, it is abundantly clear that he was an extremely gifted composer of the highest degree. Shostakovich lived in constant fear with an acute

awareness of the realities that his music had on the public and the powers that be. This ranged from the condemnation of his opera "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District" in Pravda which resulted in him stashing his Fourth Symphony and suppressing its premiere, to the later triumph of his Seventh Symphony – his Leningrad Symphony - which was a symbol of Soviet resistance. Its premiere took place during bombing campaigns and the score itself was smuggled into Leningrad for the concert and smuggled out of the country by microfilm so it could be played elsewhere.

Each of these composers' lives has very little to do with Philip Glass and his own story and experience as a composer or as a symphonist. Nevertheless, they are the two most pronounced musical models in the creation of his symphonies. Connections between the composers abound not only in their variety, use of form, but in other ways as well: Mahler's pioneering use of song in a symphony when he included his own "*Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld*" in the first movement of his first symphony. Glass's own First Symphony makes extended use of songs by David Bowie as his launching point. When arriving at the watershed moment of having to write a grand choral Ninth Symphony to celebrate the Russian victory over the Nazis, Shostakovich exercised his right to resist doing *what was expected of him* by **not** doing what was expected of him. For his Ninth Symphony he composed a lighter work that could not be connected in any way to the world events happening around him. For Glass, many of his critics considered the very act of his writing a symphony an act of impudence. Mahler was arguably the most radical symphonist since. Shostakovich carried on that tradition to the point where in both men's lifetimes, one could not reasonably predict what the next symphony might sound like. In the case of Glass, more than any other connection to these composers, it's his concept of the symphony being a "container" into which he could import any and all sorts of music that comes from Mahler's and Shostakovich's models. That has been the gift these two composers have given him. Glass's symphonies possess great variety of scale, proportion, subject matter, instrumentation, and duration that would only have been possible in a musical world after Mahler and Shostakovich.

In discussing these composers, we are faced again with the question of relevancy. Mahler was music director of the Vienna Hofoper and needed no permission to premiere and perform his own music. Indeed, there was much resistance to his music during his lifetime and for a long time after. His ascension into the symphonic pantheon is a recent phenomenon from the last 50 years, decades after his death. Shostakovich lived under a dictator in a culture of propaganda. Living artists were very much a part of that machine. His symphonies served a clear social function as did his film music; Shostakovich knew this and his society knew this. After the "Lady Macbeth" fiasco, Shostakovich shunned the theater and made any social commentary he needed to make in his instrumental music. In other words it was a turn to the abstract power of music. So when we consider the symphonies of Philip Glass, we have to wonder about the relevancy of not only his symphonies themselves, but the relevance and purpose behind any new symphony in our time.

Philip Glass has always been a very public composer. His early training included being the youngest student at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore Maryland, later a Masters

degree from Juilliard, and years of private study with Nadia Boulanger. His own juvenilia contains numerous pieces in standard forms including Essays for Orchestra, Overtures, String Quartets, and concertos. In developing his own personal musical language, a process that took the better part of two decades, the composer largely avoided traditional forms, instead he focused on composing in novel or unprecedented formats (*interestingly, what Glass considers the first piece in his new style, the music for Samuel Beckett's Play, he immediately composed a String Quartet (1966) in that new style – thereby applying a concept of new music to a very old form*). This was a period of innovation and personal musical discovery that lasted from 1965 to the early 1980s (or even perhaps to this day).

Glass himself described the trajectory of his career as being that of someone who started at the fringe and headed in the direction of the center. In musical terms, after what Glass considered the end of Minimalism, at least for him was in 1975 after the composition of *Einstein on the Beach*, he had stripped away all he could to discover the essence of music and began to “put back into the system.” It seems hard to imagine today half a century later, but for almost a decade Glass had been working on music that did not address harmony. In the early 1970s he began a series of pieces appropriately named *Another Look at Harmony, Parts I-IV*. Three parts of that work ultimately found their home in *Einstein on the Beach*. Around this point, functional harmony reestablished itself as a part of Glass's music and there has been no going back. Enough distance has passed from this early period that we can see how the road unwound before Glass as he became interested in more traditional forms and how his music might work within them.

After *Einstein on the Beach* came his first “real” opera *Satyagraha*. After that came incidental music for Samuel Beckett's *Company* which when extracted from the play became the composer's *Second String Quartet (1983)*. More traditional opera commissions including *Akhmatov*, *the Civil Wars*, and others started to create enough inertia that opera house, somewhat surprisingly, became the principal focus of Glass's career. Upon receiving an award from Opera News decades later, the composer stated simply that he was left at the door of the opera house like an abandoned baby and he was taken in and cared for by the opera world.

When not ten years removed from composing pieces like his Minimalist magnum opus *Music in 12 Parts*, the move to composing operas for traditional forces was a non sequitur for many in the press. To those people, Glass was a downtown modern artist more than a legitimate composer. Few at this time knew of his intensive education, his personal background, and also his own personal aversion to being cast as nothing more than a “classical composer.” Even today, for Glass writing pieces in traditional forms is just one part of his musical activities.

It was by no means a logical conclusion that Glass's musical language would work on the concert stage. He had spent a lot of time by the mid-1980s writing for orchestra in his operas – but no one knew whether his style would translate well and functionally to the concert stage. In 1987 Glass filled a commission to compose a *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, to be premiered by Dennis Russell Davies and the American Composers Orchestra at Carnegie Hall with soloist Paul Zukovsky. Almost three decades later the

manuscript of that piece still hangs on the wall in the hallway of Carnegie Hall. At this time, Glass was still actively writing for his own ensemble of keyboards and woodwinds. The extension of that palette of sounds was prevalent in most of his work up through the mid-1980s. Writing that first violin concerto can be seen now as a period of transition, not only away from the textural limits of the Philip Glass Ensemble instrumentation, but towards new harmonic expressive possibilities. One of the main questions on the other side was whether a big orchestra would be able to master the rhythmic precision of the Philip Glass Ensemble. The even more general question being would writing orchestral pieces be artistically interesting for Philip Glass and his new musical language?

By the end of the 1980s Glass had officially turned the page on that sound in pieces like his *Fourth String Quartet*, his collaboration with Ravi Shankar called *Passages*, and his music for Jean Genet's *The Screens* and catholic scores like *Powaqqatsi* which had strong connections to world music. Through new works such as the Cocteau Trilogy of operas Glass had tapped into a whole new realm of expressive possibilities that had little to do with his music of the previous decades. Such a thing being perhaps impossible before, it's at this time that the composer began to contemplate the idea of composing a symphony.

### ***Symphony No. 1 "Low"***

*from the music of David Bowie and Brian Eno*

In January 1992 Philip Glass turned 55 years old. It was at this time that Glass received a commission from the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra and its principal conductor Dennis Russell Davies for what turned out to be Glass' First Symphony. Glass tells the story of Davies, at that point in Glass' career of "*not letting him be one of those opera composers who never writes a symphony.*" The Symphony was composed in 1992 and scored for full orchestra with 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, percussion, harp, piano, and strings. The piece is in three movements: I. Subterraneans, II. Some Are, and III. Warszawa. Glass selected these three original sources for the symphony, varying only slightly by using a track, "Some Are" that was not on the original "Low" recording, rather it was a bonus track on the 1991 Rykodisc reissue of the Bowie Low album. The first recording of the Glass work was released in 1993 under the title *Low Symphony*. It was performed by the commissioner, the Brooklyn Philharmonic orchestra under the baton of Dennis Russell Davies.

In Glass' statement in 1992 he says, "*The "Low" Symphony, composed in the Spring of 1992, is based on the record "Low" by David Bowie and Brian Eno first released in 1977. The record consisted of a number of songs and instrumentals and used techniques which were similar to procedures used by composers working in new and experimental music. As such, this record was widely appreciated by musicians working both in the field of "pop" music and in experimental music and was a landmark work of that period. I've taken themes from three of the instrumentals on the record and, combing them with material of my own, have used them as the basis of three movements of the Symphony. Movement one comes from "Subterraneans," movement two from "Some Are" and movement three from "Warszawa." My approach was to treat the themes very much as if they were my own and allow their transformations to follow my own compositional bent when possible. In practice, however,*

*Bowie and Eno's music certainly influenced how I worked, leading me to sometimes surprising music conclusions. In the end I think I arrived at something of a real collaboration between my music and theirs."*

While Glass cited the duo of Bowie and Eno as using techniques and procedures from the world of new and experimental music, Bowie and Eno themselves had been directly influenced by Glass' work of the early 1970s. Glass maintains that his choosing to use this music that is widely seen as being part of rock or popular music, was akin to the old tradition of composers using source music in symphonies, rhapsodies, or themes & variation type compositions. One needs only to think of composers like Brahms, Bartók, Copland or Dvorák using folk tunes in their work. The novelty of *Low Symphony* was that here was had a "serious art composer" using the popular (folk) music of his time. Then there's also the obvious play on a "*Low Symphony*" i.e. "High" culture being invaded by the work of two pop stars and a downtown composer. The original Bowie album "Low" dates from 1977 and is part of what is now known as the Berlin Trilogy (*Low, Heroes, Lodger*). Trying to kick a cocaine habit Bowie moved from Los Angeles to Berlin and began a now legendary collaboration with artist Brian Eno. Some of the music on Bowie's "Low" was originally destined for Nicolas Roeg's film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. In approaching the composition of a full-scale symphony, for Glass the whole matter of adapting and composing using this music was a simple affair: "*These two musicians wrote beautiful melodies.*"

1992 was an interesting point in Glass's career to undertake the composition of his First Symphony. After obtaining his Master's from Juilliard in composition in the late 1950's, in the early 1960's Glass went to work as a composer-in-residence in the Pittsburgh public school system. The ever-prolific composer wrote all sorts of works at this time for orchestra including a violin concerto, divertimenti, and other works in the classical tradition. These pieces have all been discarded or disavowed. It was only after Glass's time in Paris in the mid-1960s that he developed his first pieces as a mature composer with his own musical voice; the music that most people associate with his own unique compositional voice starting in Paris in 1965 with the incidental music to Samuel Beckett's *Play*, known to many as one of the beginning moments of the Minimalist movement.

Shortly after Paris and travels in India, Glass returned to New York City and made his debut with his new music at the Filmmaker's Cinémathèque in May 1968. But this was early solo music or music for his own group which largely had to do with the development of his musical voice and the later development of The Philip Glass Ensemble. It would be only many years later with the commission for his second opera *Satyagraha* that the composer would write for orchestra again. From the early 1960s with his "Pittsburgh" pieces until 1979 with *Satyagraha*, almost 20 years, that Glass did not write for orchestra. By 1980, Glass was well into his mature music and in a rich period of discovery within his own post-*Einstein on the Beach*-style. One can see in pieces like *Koyaanisqatsi* (1981) and the opera *Akhnaten* (1983) that Glass had very clearly begun to move away from the sounds and instrumentation of his own ensemble (woodwinds, keyboards, voice) to enjoy the wider palette of instruments and combinations that the orchestra offered and to extend his musical voice to work well for the medium.

It was by no means a given that Glass's musical language would work so well for orchestra. Writing for the opera house greatly prepared the composer for writing concert music through one big difference. Glass stated that when writing symphonies "the *language of music is the subject of the work. When writing operas the subject of the opera is the subject.*" In writing operas a composer is given weeks of rehearsals to work on the music and usually a generous amount of orchestral rehearsals. By contrast, in modern times a composer is lucky to get a complete read-through of a new concert work before its premiere. With the experience of writing so many operas before attempting to compose his own *First Symphony* Glass had the benefit of lots of experience with the orchestra as well as writing in long-form. Ironically, having written operas that last four or five hours, rather than building up to the point of having the glacial endurance as a composer of symphonies, for Glass the composition of a symphony represented a much shorter more compact form than most of his large works which he was known for at that time.

The trajectory of Glass's post-1965 career has remained steadfast in his self-identification as a "theater composer." With his early work in Paris in the 1960's, his work in the 1970's with Mabou Mines and experimental theater, one could easily share Davies's concern that Glass would be viewed only as an opera or theater composer. If Glass had lived only till the age of Beethoven (56) then we, the listening public, would most likely see the situation that way. However, since his first orchestral work for the concert hall at age 50, and his first symphony at 55, Glass has gone on to compose ten full scale symphonies and over a dozen concerti – arguably more (or just as much) time has been spent since the year 2000 on writing symphonies, concerti, and chamber music than on theater music. At this point, Glass's two decades as a symphonist represent the same amount of time Gustav Mahler spent within the art form.

But that too would miss the fact that from Glass's earliest student days up to and including his Minimalist period, most of what Glass wrote was "absolute music" or purely instrumental music. Glass's early reputation was seen by many to be that of the outsider, a downtowner, or a counter-culture figure. That is to say counter to the classical musical establishment. So to eventually come back to traditional forms was something of a surprise not just to Glass's public, but also to many people who were close to Glass going back to the early 1970s. To some in his immediate circle (some who weren't aware of his rigorous classical formation), the symphonies, concertos, string quartets, piano etudes, and other traditional pieces represented a shocking conservative turn.

Perhaps a forgotten point about the *Low Symphony* is that it had its basis as a recording project. 1992 was the highpoint for recording budgets with major labels. The combining of two stars from the popular music world with Philip Glass, a "legitimate" composer with one foot in both worlds, was deemed a worthy project to record label executives. The second recording of *Low Symphony*, made two decades after the original, features the Swiss orchestra, Sinfonieorchester Basel, and its music director since 2009, Dennis Russell Davies. The recording is an astounding accomplishment. In the 1993 studio recording the musicians were recorded sectionally and performed to a click-track. Much like the recording of a rock band, the whole orchestra would never be in the same room at one time. They would record first violins, then seconds, then violas, etc. This new recording

was made live at the Stadtcasino Musiksaal in Basel with the Sinfonieorchester Basel. To put it simply, this time around Davies and the orchestra were able to let the music breathe outside the confines of the studio. They bring the music to life as it had never been heard before.

It all started in 1992 with the Brooklyn Philharmonic's commission of *Low Symphony*. At age 55 Glass could have no idea he'd have the opportunities to create such an elaborate body of work in the medium. Now 20 years later, Davies decided to go back to the beginning of his symphonic collaboration with Glass and make his first recording with what we now understand and recognize as Glass' *Symphony No. 1*.

## ***Symphony No.2***

Philip Glass states, "*I've been interested in polytonal music for some time, starting with Akhnaten...The great experiments of polytonality carried out in the 1930s and 40s show that there's still a lot of work to be done in that area. Harmonic language and melodic language can coexist closely or at some calculated distance, and their relationship can be worked out in terms of either coexisting harmonies or ambiguous harmonies. Honegger, Milhaud, and Villa-Lobos – to name a few prominent polytonalists – pushed two tonalities together at the same time. But I'm more interested in the ambiguous qualities that can result from polytonality – how what you hear depends on how you focus your ear, how a listener's perception of tonality can vary in the fashion of an optical illusion. We're not talking about inventing a new language, but rather inventing new perceptions of existing languages.*"

Philip Glass's *Symphony No. 2* was commissioned by Brooklyn Academy of Music and premiered October 15, 1994 by the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Dennis Russell Davies. After the commercial success of the album *Low Symphony*, Glass was once again faced the challenge of writing a large symphony. This second time around there would be no recording project, nor connection to any other music, nor would there be any extra musical material, no program, no text, no soloist. The world Glass found himself confronting was the history of symphonic tradition from Haydn and Beethoven through Mahler and Shostakovich.

It needs to be said that the successful composition of *Symphony No.1* probably informed the composition of *Symphony No.2*. In a certain way, *Symphony No.2* follows a similar structural outline as *Low Symphony*. It begins slowly, it has big musical events that loosely coincide to the formal design of *Symphony No.1*, and it's cast in similar proportions as its predecessor. It's possible that in succeeding in composing a true symphony, Glass proved to himself the viability of composing in the form.

That is where similarities end, however. In *Symphony No.2* we see a number of innovations of Glass's own style as a symphonist appear for the first time – hallmarks to which the composer would not return until more than a decade later with his Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. In Glass's *Symphony No.2*, we see for the first time the extensive laying out of material that takes time to be developed. One of the main benefits of musical Minimalism was a totally new conception of time. A certain patience was required of the listener. And



to those patient listeners a new appreciation of musical time would reveal itself. To many, this was the principal innovation of Minimalism that the very concept of time had been adjusted. Inasmuch, basic traditional chord progressions meant very different things when they came from Philip Glass's pencil as opposed to Beethoven's.

Unlike in opera where there might be dramatic concerns or timing at stake, the liberty Glass seems to have found in writing symphonies was that he had the time to set the "stage" musically. In writing a symphony, he had all the time he needed for the music to do what it needed to do. In this way, *Symphony No.2* is far ahead of its time in Glass's own catalogue. Effectively, he did not return to that style of writing for quite a long period of time.

As Glass states, "*Symphony No.2 feels like a late symphony.*" The piece was a mature statement by a composer in his mid-50s, who was experiencing personal sadness, whose career was entering a wildly active period. By 1994, Glass's career was now truly gaining steam and those newly acquired expressive tools he had acquired in his musical language at that time fueled his development. Having made a name for himself in the 1980's as a *new voice coming from the art music world* creating all sorts of different types of music, his career as a symphonist was generally regarded as a sidetrack. What his *Second Symphony* did was prove that that sidetrack was a viable artistic avenue, both to the public and the artist himself. Perhaps most importantly, the *Second Symphony* proved to be a personal symphonic model for Glass's late symphonies. As it now stands at a point where the creative act itself has "*set up an expectation*" for Glass when he begins to compose a symphony. In other words, he is thinking symphonically: he knows what he wants to say through the orchestra and he now knew how to say it.

### ***Symphony No. 3***

*Symphony No. 3* was commissioned by Wuerth Foundation for the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra and premiered February 5, 1995 by the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, Kuenzelsau, Germany. Composed for the 19 string players of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, Philip Glass's *Symphony No. 3* was designed to treat every musician as a soloist. "*The work fell naturally into a four-movement form,*" Mr. Glass has written, "*and even given the nature of the ensemble and solo writing, [it] seems to have the structure of a true symphony.*"

Glass continues: "*The opening movement, a quiet, moderately paced piece, functions as prelude to movements two and three, which are the main body of the Symphony. The second movement mode of fast-moving compound meters explores the textures from unison to multiharmonic writing for the whole ensemble. It ends when it moves without transition to a new closing theme, mixing a melody and pizzicato writing. The third movement is in the form of a chaconne, a repeated harmony sequence. It begins with three celli and four violas, and with each repetition new voices are added until, the final [variation], all 19 players have been woven into the music. The fourth movement, a short finale, returns to the closing theme of the second movement, which quickly re-integrates the compound meters from earlier in that movement. A new closing theme is introduced to bring the Symphony to its conclusion.*"

From David Wright's excellent notes from the original recording, "*A string orchestra has its own sound that is both rhythmic and lyrical, a mixture of the bite of horsehair on strings, and plunk of pizzicato, and a singer's long cantabile phrases. In the Symphony's first movement, Philip Glass uses this attribute to show just how suspenseful C major can be. It has the character of a gripping movie score, thanks to its ventures into the dark, "flat" side of its harmony. In the second movement, slashing unison figures seem to recall the classic American symphony for strings, William Schuman's Symphony No. 5 of 1943. Mr. Glass also returns to his own earlier ideas in the third movement, with its deep string tone, syncopated rhythm, repeating chord progression, and vocal violin solo reminiscent of works such as the opera Akhnaten. The vigorous finale chugs to a 3+3+2 rhythm, punctuated by strange chromatic passages that yank the music into new harmonic territory.*"

*Symphony No.3* was composed just a year after *Symphony No.2* but could not be more dissimilar. Scored for a modest group of 19 string players, the piece has proven to be Philip Glass's most frequently performed symphony. Perhaps it was unknown even to Glass that he had effectively established his own mature symphonic style with his *Second Symphony*. *Symphony No.3* represented a total departure from large format symphony writing for Glass. Invited by Dennis Russell Davies to compose for the particular 19 players of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the piece was to be related in some way to *Metamorphosen* for 23 Solo Strings by Richard Strauss. In the end, the piece only relates to the Strauss piece in one important way. In the third movement chaconne, which Glass discusses above, Glass gradually introduces one voice at a time to the thickening orchestral texture. Strauss's most contrapuntal music (usually in opera) tends to portray extremes of human feelings – love, pain, and mental strain, occasionally portraying that which is out of control. For half a century, Philip Glass has practiced a personal form of classicism in which everything is in absolute control at all times. That's not to say that Glass is a classicist. The composer has his own rules, his own technique (style) which over the period of years or decades he variously bends the rules but rarely breaks them outright. Glass's musical language in this movement is about process. In this way, for those familiar with Glass's idiom, it's possible for the listener to follow the introduction of each new voice that gains a richness with each new cycle of the chaconne. This movement relates to the Strauss in its contrapuntal achievement only. The effect of these 19 lines of counterpoint in Glass is the height of order and control, closer in that way to the music of J.S. Bach than to the music of Richard Strauss. This process comes across and elaborate web of melody in which we can hear as many lines as our own abilities permit us to. This is music that is more than the sum of its 19 parts which, in the process of development, transcends chamber music into the realm of the symphonic.

We find another direct line to the tradition of classical music in the second movement by returning to Glass's days as a young boy sitting on the stairs while his father would sit and listen to music – music from Ben Glass's record store that "*wasn't selling well.*" Ben brought this music home to "*find out what was wrong with it.*" These were modern masterpieces by Schoenberg, Shostakovich, and Bartok and became imprinted in the young future composer. In the second movement of Glass's *Third Symphony*, we can hear echoes of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*. Channeled by Glass in one of the most

fiendishly difficult-to-perform movements in all his symphonic work, we can hear Bartok sitting above the music as a witness, much like Tolstoy, Tagore, and Martin Luther King sit as silent witnesses to the events of the Glass opera *Satyagraha*. *Symphony No.3* is perhaps the most European of Glass's symphonies with its spiritual and literal connection to the repertoire.

### ***Symphony No. 4***

*from the music of David Bowie and Brian Eno*

Philip Glass commented on the creation of his Fourth Symphony in 1996 in preparation for the recording of the work, which was to be used for Twyla Tharp's ballet "Heroes":

*"Heroes, like the Low Symphony of several years ago, is based on the work of Bowie and Eno. In a series of innovative recordings made in the late 70's, David and Brian combined influences from world music, experimental avant-garde, and rock and roll and thereby redefined the future of popular music.*

*Almost twenty years later, I have gone back to their original material, using it as a point of departure and inspiration, much as composers of the past have based their work on their contemporaries. Using themes from Heroes I have made a new composition which hopefully will reintroduce this music to today's listeners.*

*I mentioned the new work I was doing to Twyla Tharp, the American choreographer with whom I had worked on *In the Upper Room*, a dance work for her company. She suggested I think of Heroes as a ballet score for her new dance company. We suggested this to David, who immediately shared Twyla's enthusiasm for the idea. Accordingly, I set Heroes as a six-movement work, each movement based on a theme from Heroes, with an overall dramatic structure that would be suitable for dance. The result is a symphonic ballet - a transformation of the original themes combined with new material of my own and presented in a new dramatic form.*

*The continuing influence of these works has secured their stature as part of the new "classics" of our time. Just as composers of the past have turned to music of their time to fashion new works, the work of Bowie and Eno became an inspiration and point of departure of symphonies of my own."*

By the time Glass had written his *Fourth Symphony*, the symphonies of Philip Glass contained some of the composer's best music. It was music that stood apart from all his other work. These pieces had their own musical agenda. By this time, when one considers the complete catalogue of the composer, it's not easy to embrace the composer's assertion that he is simply a "theater composer." With the tentative step toward the form of the symphony with his first "Bowie-Eno" inspired orchestral work in 1992, Glass seemed fully confident with the huge undertaking when writing his essay in polytonality, *Symphony No. 2*, in 1994.

By that point that Glass had been making up for lost time. *Low Symphony* was a tentative step into the vast ocean of symphonic literature. *Symphony No. 2* was a great full dive into

that ocean. Rather than succumbing to the weight of historical baggage, by the time of Glass's *Third Symphony* in 1995, Glass had wholeheartedly embraced the idea of writing symphonies. As we have discussed, Glass's *Third Symphony* was very much a nod to tradition: not only with the nod to Richard Strauss and Bartok, but also as a celebration of the strong American practice of writing string symphonies. After not writing a symphony from ages zero to fifty-five, Glass composed four major symphonies in 1992, '94, '95, and '96.

Such "clusters" of activity within certain genres can be seen in Glass's work. Usually within such clusters there is a wide variety. At the end of what Glass considers his Minimalist period in 1976 with *Einstein on the Beach*, Glass received a commission from the Netherlands Opera to "write a real opera." Glass describes the premiere of that new opera, *Satyagraha*, as a complete let-down to the audience as there was a great expectation that he would create a fitting sequel, something very similar to *Einstein on the Beach*. Glass had no interest in repeating himself. Basic artistic need for variety exists in Glass's symphonic output as well.

Unlike Glass' first three symphonies, *Symphony No. 4 "Heroes"* or *Heroes Symphony* of 1996 was not premiered traditionally as a symphony. If we step back a couple decades into his career, we see that Glass the composer is attracted to the concept of the trilogy. The big statement of his early career was his 'Portrait Trilogy' (the operas *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhmaten*.) When opportunities started to open up for the composer in the early 1990's, Glass embarked on two new triptychs: that of a series of operas based on the work of Jean Cocteau and a set of symphonies based on the music from the David Bowie albums made in collaboration with Brian Eno. These three symphonic works take inspiration from the three albums *Low* (1977), *Heroes* (1977), and *Lodger* (1979). Glass embraced the source material very much in the tradition of classical composers using folk music sources of famous themes by past composers. In this case, for Glass it provided an attractive opportunity: to take what he considered wonderful melodies – and to combine them with his own music in realizing a bigger whole. In *Low Symphony*, this was manifest in three large-scale movements. In composing *Heroes Symphony*, Glass had already decided that this piece would also be his "Dance Symphony" set to choreography by Twyla Tharp, a gifted collaborator with whom he had already had a long relationship dating back to their hit ballet in *In the Upper Room* some ten years earlier.

The symphony is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, percussion, harp, piano, celesta strings. Unlike *Low Symphony* in which Glass committed to long-form writing, his Fourth Symphony is in six shorter movements: 1. *Heroes*, 2. *Abdulmajid*, 3. *Sense of Doubt*, 4. *Sons of the Silent Age*, 5. *Neuköln* and 6. *V2 Schneider*. The piece gives symphonic dimension to the Bowie/Eno works but in a much personalized way than in *Low Symphony* and often with much more subtle use of the source material. From *Low*, Glass took elaborate instrumental phrases and expanded, re-harmonized, and elaborated them in an organic symphonic process.

In *Heroes Symphony*, Glass again re-harmonizes the Bowie/Eno pieces, but this time he uses the material differently and in a much more condensed way. Rather than wholesale elements being appropriated, Glass seems to take smaller edits of original melodic phrases or sometimes just gestures as a point of departure. In *Heroes Symphony*, Glass's predilection tends to deal more with representing the material in his own language, including embedding more of his own rhythmic ideas as one can hear in the pulsing opening movement *Heroes*. In *Sense of Doubt*, Glass uses the main descending Bowie figure, but in the remaining seven minutes of the movement it's all Glass original material. In *Sons of a Silent Age* Glass takes the glorious main melody from the rock song and builds his own music around it showcasing it in a whole new light. In *V2 Schneider*, the symphony's rousing finale, Glass extracts the sense of harmonic cadence (not literal extraction, again re-harmonizing it). In other words, it's generally easier to identify the original Bowie/Eno material in *Low Symphony* than it is in *Heroes Symphony*, a sentiment that Bowie himself agreed with. In all, *Heroes* seems to be more of an *internalization* by the composer of the source material than in the *First Symphony*.

The Twyla Tharp Company toured the ballet *Heroes* in 1996 performing it 28 times that season and again 58 times in 1997. The where-and-when of the premiere of the piece as a concert work is presently unknown. The *Heroes Symphony* was recorded for Point Music in 1996. At that time, right before the recording at the Masonic Temple in Mid-Town Manhattan the American Composers Orchestra, Davies, Bowie, Glass and others all came together to hear a rehearsal before the team, as with *Low Symphony*, went into the studio for the sectional recording process. But the piece did not receive a premiere at that time.

The *Fourth Symphony* has had an interesting life since. As a symphonic work the piece has also been recorded by Marin Alsop and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. The Symphony has been performed as *Symphony No. 4 "Heroes"* many times in Germany and Austria (usually championed by conductor Dennis Russell Davies), Norway, Scotland, Russia, Holland, Italy, and the United States. Around the time of a performance of the work by the Wordless Music Orchestra at the Society for Ethical Culture in New York City in May 2011, a previous public New York performance could not be found. Essentially the New York public had to wait more than 15 years to hear Glass's *Fourth Symphony* performed live in concert. The whole process from the conception of the piece as another studio album, a recording used then for the dance performances, to overlooking a proper New York premiere suggests that the whole project was ad hoc. The conductor of the New York performances in 2011, Brad Lubman, was shocked to find out that the conductor's score itself was just a photocopy of the Glass manuscript – the piece had never been copied or engraved. Recently, both the *Low Symphony* and *Heroes Symphony* were recently performed in January 2016 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the baton of Evan Ziporyn, just weeks after the passing of David Bowie as a memorial to that great artist.

The new recording featured in this set is by the Basel Sinfonieorchester under the direction of its Music Director Dennis Russell Davies. As with the new recording of *Low Symphony*, this is a stunning achievement. In 2009, Davies conducted *Heroes Symphony* in the heart of the city of Linz Austria an audience of 6,000 listeners. Since 2009, upon starting his Music

Directorship with the magnificent Basel Sinfonieorchester, Davies thought back to these two Glass symphonies from the 1990's (without cuts that were made for the recording – the first movement is a full four minutes longer than the first recording) with an intention to present these symphonies as they were meant to be heard – unencumbered and able to breathe freely. The result that Davies draws from the orchestra is remarkable.

***Symphony No. 5***  
**Requiem, Bardo, Nirmanakaya**

*Texts compiled and edited by Philip Glass, James Parks Morton, and Kusumita P. Pedersen.*

A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PAST, THE PRESENT and THE FUTURE

*“The symphony was commissioned and conceived as a millennium celebration work for the Salzburg Festival. My plan has been for the symphony to represent a broad spectrum of many of the world's great "wisdom" traditions. Working together with the Very Reverend James Parks Morton of the Interfaith Center of New York and Professor Kusumita P. Pedersen of St. Francis College, we synthesized a vocal text that begins before the world's creation, passes through earthly life and paradise, and closes with a future dedication. We are looking at the moment of the millennium as a bridge between the past (represented by the "Requiem" and embodying the first nine movements up to the moment of Death) the present (the "Bardo" representing the "in between") and culminating in "Nirmanakaya" (rebirth as manifestation of enlightened activity). We have elected to present the original texts (Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and indigenous languages) in one language, English, to show the commonalities with which all these traditions resonate. For a work of this scale it seemed fitting to add chorus, children's choir and soloists to the usual symphonic ensemble, thereby giving it ample breadth and dramatic capability.*

*Besides being a compendium of reflection on the process of global transformation and evolution, it is hoped that the work will serve as a strong and positive celebration of the millennium year.”*

— Philip Glass

Philip Glass's Fifth Symphony is, to be sure, his biggest, most dramatic, and most ambitious symphonic work. The piece is cast in twelve movements and last almost 100 minutes. It's scored for large orchestra, choir, children's choir, and soloists. The piece attempts to consider the inverse and human experience from the moment of creation, through death and beyond using a wide range of religious texts and other sources. To compose a grand choral symphony designed to show people that we have more in common in our acquired wisdom (religions) than elements that separate us as people. Ambitious? Naïve? Misguided?

The *Fifth Symphony* premiered in the summer of 1999 at the Salzburg Festival and despite its grand scale, represents more of a compendium of Glass's own personal views on religion than an ersatz “*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*” Beethovenian proclamation. Such a thing truly would have been naïve and certainly at the turn of the Millennium many presenting organizations were in fact looking for universal and optimistic and large-scale artistic statements.

There have been many different themes that run through Glass's body of work. We have the theme of social transformation through non-violence in the opera *Satyagraha* and the more general theme of men who changed the world through the power of ideas in the Portrait Trilogy. We have the theme of artistic transformation in the composer's trilogy of Cocteau operas. Glass has composed many works about the environment from *Koyaanisqatsi* to his *Sixth Symphony*. *Symphony No.5* represents Glass's biggest statement on the subject of religion.

Glass has described himself as *Jewish-Taoist-Hindu-Toltec-Buddhist*. In fact, it's not even fair to say he has described himself that way. For Glass the more powerful statement he has on the subject of religion has been "*No one religion has a monopoly on good ideas.*" *Symphony No.5* is an earnest laying out of those good ideas on a range of subjects from creation of the universe through death and concepts of heaven.

To see this symphony as a collection of the generic aspects of religions – a pasteurized compendium of rough interreligious commonalities – would be to the greatest insight into Glass's own personal religious experience and religious aspirations.

For anyone close to the composer it's easy to see his entire creative life through the lense of the spiritual. The act of composition – whether it be for commercial or purely artistic ends – is itself a creative act, an act that does not necessarily come from the conscious mind and is a purely spiritual offering to the universe. In more light-hearted conversations Glass would say his father used to state simply that in regards to religion, "It's all bunk." This coming from a man who in the name of religion cut off communication to his son for years. The composer's experiences in India, Tibet, and later in Mexico in addition to his Jewish and his own artistic life paints the portrait of a deeply spiritual person. This is a person from whom a 100-minute symphony on the subject of religion could not possibly be a light affair.

Subject matter aside, *Symphony No.5* contains some of Glass's best music and it's often overlooked because of its intimidating packaging. There is not much in the way of pure symphonic writing contained in this huge work. This symphony could just as easily be staged as an opera, or at least a staged cantata in the tradition of Bach. Together with Glass's "*Passion of Ramakrishna*" (the first half of which premiered in 2006, recorded in 2010) which could also lend itself to staging, and his own setting of Psalm 126, we gain a small glimpse into the things which interest Glass about religion. Glass himself never preaches belief. The composer seems rather interested in the humble theories of all kinds that have been developed to address the question of existence. The entire realm of human experience, the things that draw us together, and that which separates and unites people is what interested the composer when he set about writing *Symphony No.5*. Glass's Fifth Symphony is his grand public statement on religion.

*Symphony No. 6 - Plutonian Ode*  
*Poem by Allen Ginsberg*

Philip Glass's Sixth Symphony, *Plutonian Ode*, is based on the epic poem by Glass's close friend Allen Ginsberg who passed away in 1997. This 50-minute grand symphony was commissioned by Carnegie Hall, New York, and Brucknerhaus of Linz Austria and is scored

for soprano and large orchestra. The piece premiered on February 3, 2002 at Carnegie Hall in New York City by American Composers Orchestra and soprano Lauren Flanigan conducted by Dennis Russell Davies in honor of Philip Glass's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. The European premiere was given at Brucknerhaus Linz by Dennis Russell Davies and the Bruckner Orchester Linz on September 15, 2002.

*"During the last ten years of Allen's life we had performed frequently together in poetry/music collaborations. Allen was a superb reader of his own work and I was often inspired to compose new piano music for these occasional collaborations. In the case of Hydrogen Jukebox, we developed an evening length "opera" which was designed by Jerome Sirlin and directed by Ann Carlson. We presented that work in over 30 cities as part of an international tour.*

*It had been our plan to make a new, major collaboration based on his epic poem Plutonian Ode (1978). Before he died in 1997, Allen had made several recordings for me of the poem in preparation for the new work. At that time I had in mind simply an extended piano work to accompany Allen in live performance. I put aside the project in 1997, feeling that I wouldn't want to go ahead without Allen.*

*A few years past and the commission of a new symphony from Carnegie Hall and the Brucknerhaus Linz reawakened my interest in the project. I felt, then, that Plutonian Ode was unfinished business between Allen and myself and this would be the opportunity to complete it. By then, the piano music I had originally imagined had grown to a full orchestra and Allen's resonant speaking voice to a lyric soprano.*

*The three movements of the symphony follow the three parts of the poem, and follow, also, the passage of the poem—the first movement a passionate outcry against nuclear contamination and pollution, the second a turn towards healing, and the final movement an epiphany arrived at through personal transformation."*

— Philip Glass

Glass has spoken often about his friend Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's importance on Philip Glass's artistic life cannot be overlooked. The two men were close friends. Even today Glass speaks frequently of Ginsberg and it's clear that the respect, admiration, and inspiration of Ginsberg the person and his work runs deep in Glass the artist. To consider the life, personality, and work of Allen Ginsberg is an overwhelmingly rich topic. Glass's own opportunities to collaborate with Ginsberg are so far limited to these two pieces. One project was an active collaboration and one project a posthumous remembrance.

*Hydrogen Jukebox* has proven to be resilient and popular piece of theater having been produced very often in recent years. The opera perfectly captures the gestalt of America in the 1970s. *Plutonian Ode* has also been done frequently including often by Davies in Europe and Australia with soprano Karen Robertson.



The *Plutonian Ode Symphony* is not outwardly a requiem for an artist. However it represents Glass honoring the artist and friend in his most sincere and personal way: by catapulting Ginsberg's words into the realm of the symphonic. Along with the string quartet, the symphony is widely regarded as the most *Serious* musical form for a composer. Glass had collaborated with Ginsberg in opera, and often played piano with Ginsberg reciting poetry (a practice he continues to this day with others who love Ginsberg's words), and in some way a new theatrical work using Ginsberg's work might have been something that Glass considered. The final decision to take *Plutonian Ode* out of the theater and into the concert hall is a fascinating one.

Furthermore, that Glass chose a soprano to parallel Ginsberg's voice is equally interesting. On the first recording of the *Symphony*, producer Don Christensen decided to include a second disc containing the entire symphony, including the soprano, but also including the original work tape that Glass worked from of Ginsberg reciting the poem on top of the symphony.

From the original recording:

*The symphony is cast in three huge movements and follow the three parts of the poem, and follow, also, the passage of the poem – the first movement a passionate outcry against nuclear contamination and pollution, the second a turn towards healing, and the final movement an epiphany arrived at through personal transformation.*

The personal transformation is that of the artist, Ginsberg himself, and the music appropriately captures the gamut of emotions of the artist. The piece requires a powerful soprano with a dramatic sensibility, diction, and the ability to navigate Glass's difficult tessitura.

The premiere of this powerful work took place at Carnegie Hall. As with the *Violin Concerto* and the recording of *Heroes Symphony*, with the American Composers Orchestra was the orchestra at the first performance. It was born only months after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The piece was brought back to Brooklyn in 2005 on the same program as the world premiere of *Symphony No.8* on the occasion of the Bruckner Orchester Linz's New York debut at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. At that time, with the distance of a few years, it could be seen to be the masterpiece that it is. Glass's later symphonic style had returned, albeit not in a purely instrumental way.

Symphony No. 7 "Toltec"

Composed by Philip Glass

*"The present recording, which is once again a work conducted by Dennis Russell Davies performed by the Bruckner Orchester Linz, represents my more recent thinking about this symphony. The revisions which now appear at the end of the symphony, and indeed the warmth and enthusiasm of the Bruckner Orchester Linz under Davies's leadership, has finally provided me with an opportunity to make a definitive recording of the work."*

-Philip Glass writing in advance of the first recording of the Toltec Symphony in 2009

Symphony No.7 "Toltec" premiered January 20, 2005 at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC (USA) by National Symphony Orchestra and Master Chorale of Washington conducted by Leonard Slatkin. Glass's Seventh Symphony composed in 2004 under a commission from the National Symphony Orchestra in honor of Leonard Slatkin's 60th-birthday season, with support from the John and June Hechinger Commissioning Fund for New Orchestral Works.

The work has the distinction of being the only Glass symphony not to be commissioned and premiered by Dennis Russell Davies though Davies did preside later over the European premiere and the creation of the current revised score. The work was composed in 2004 and was one of two symphonies that Glass premiered in 2005. The piece is in three movements with the second and third movement featuring extended use of chorus. The symphony has an extra-musical and personal connection for Glass which has to do with the composer's spiritual disciplines and studies that he has undertaken with Victor Sanchez for now over a decade. The following are his notes written in advance of the premiere of the piece:

*"The world "Toltec" in the title of the Symphony No. 7 refers to the tradition and beliefs which were the cultural and spiritual matrix of Mesoamerica and which began many centuries before the European invasion. Mesoamerica is now believed to have extended from central Mexico to the north as far as New Mexico and Texas in the United States, and to the south to include Guatemala and Nicaragua.*

*Though its roots began, according to recent research, some five thousand years ago among the Olmec, and achieved its peak in the times of Teotihuacan (500 BC to 500 AD), the traditional belief was that the Toltec culture reached its height in the city of Tula and dominated that part of the world from 700 AD to 1100 AD. The Post-Classic Mayan and Aztec periods that followed maintained the Toltec accomplishments in mathematics, precision in making calendars, building and architecture.*

*Equally important were the Toltec developments in social organization and personal spiritual development. Like many indigenous traditions, the Toltecs emphasized the relationship with the forces of the natural world (the sun, earth, water, fire and wind) in developing their own wisdom traditions. These kinds of practices can still be found among some of the indigenous peoples of Mexico today, e.g. the Wixarika from North Mexico.*

*This Symphony is inspired by the Wixarika sacred trinity, as indicated in the respective movement headings: The Corn, The Hikuri (The Sacred Root), and The Blue Deer.*

*The Corn represents a direct link between Mother Earth and the well-being of human beings. But it also represents the responsibility of the people to nurture the gifts of Mother Earth-the corn which will sustain them.*

*The Sacred Root is found in the high deserts of north and central Mexico, and is understood to be the doorway to the world of the Spirit.*

*The Blue Deer is considered the holder of the Book of Knowledge. Any man or woman who aspires to be a "Person of Knowledge" will, through arduous training and effort, have to encounter the Blue Deer. The Blue Deer might be seen as a literal blue deer or something more abstract—for example, a vision, a voice that one might hear, or a thought uninvited but present in the mind of the practitioner.*

*When I was invited to compose a work for Leonard Slatkin's birthday season, I discussed with him the possibility of a symphony based on the Toltec wisdom tradition. As a man who has single-mindedly devoted himself to becoming a Man of (Musical) Knowledge I thought he would be intrigued by the Toltec point of view. He accepted my suggestion with enthusiasm, and this is the result.*

*Finally, I would like to thank Victor Sanchez who, through his books, teaching and his fieldwork, has made a lifetime effort to preserve and clarify the Toltec tradition for people today. He has kindly and patiently "opened the door" to this tradition for me."*

- Philip Glass, November 2004

What Glass went looking for in Mexico in studying the Toltec tradition was the type of different world view that always attracted him in far off places like India or Tibet. After looking for it across the globe it was a fresh new revelation to find such an ancient history in his own backyard. Furthermore, such a distinct and different worldview that can be found in such traditions could not be further removed from the European-American concept of creation and existence. As with the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, Glass found the "container" of the symphony, and not the theater or opera house, to be the most appropriate venue to express his feelings about this tradition and world view. As he did by pulling popular song into his symphonies, he poetically responded to the historic and mythic traditions of indigenous Mexicans, the *Wirrarika*, and brought them into the ever flowing current of European art music on the grandest stage. The first movement of Symphony No.7 looks very much forward to the use of orchestration in Symphonies Nos. 8 & 9 and begins with a seductive gestures which as in the best Glass, takes that first gestures and builds it into a series of Brucknerian climaxes. The first movement contains a brand of "late" contrapuntal writing which came to full flower in his next two symphonies. The second movement builds on a rhythmic device that Glass first used in a piece called *Phaedra* which he wrote for the Dallas ballet two decades earlier. The movement takes the dynamic rhythmic feel of the first movement and uses it as a underpinning for a repeated chant by the chorus with a solo soprano emerging out above the combined forces. This is music not unlike the feeling originally generated at the end of Act 1 of Glass's opera *The Voyage* when Europeans, represented by Christopher Columbus, first come into contact with the indigenous people of the Americas. The chanting here in the second movement plays off of the orchestra and variously changes and builds into a maddening fury transporting the listener to Central America in the time of the great pyramids. The third movement strikes a more placid tone is comprised mostly of an orchestration of Glass's

“The Unutterable” from the film score *Powaqqatsi* and stands as an “arduous” trial, a scaling of a giant mountain in the search for knowledge, perhaps an invocation or vision of the literal or metaphysical Blue Deer.

After its 2004 premiere, the Toltec Symphony was not performed again until Dennis Russell Davies performed the European premiere of the work in Linz Austria on New Year's Day 2009. Again, Symphony No.7 was the only Glass symphony which Davies did not premiere outright. While one cannot discount the relationship the conductor and composer have had, now dating back more than three decades, Glass wrote this symphony for another great conductor Leonard Slatkin and received good treatment and rehearsal time with the National Symphony Orchestra back in 2004.

Glass attended the Linz performance and during rehearsals made two major changes. The first was to eliminate the singing by the chorus at the beginning of the third movement. The second move was to excise entirely the coda that he had originally added to the re-worked and expanded *Powaqqatsi* material. The new version of the third movement is now a stronger statement: modern, monolithic, and theatrical in a ritualistic way. It's true that the original version softened that effect.

So what was the original coda? It was a digression from the mammoth tension that is built up in that wall of sound. It begins with the first appearance of arpeggios in the entire symphony. Then in what I consider one of the more interesting things that Glass ever did, it channels the spirit of Richard Strauss replete with lush melodic strings and a mournful French horn melody. I suppose this was originally a reference that we are not, after all, *in* the ancient Meso-American Toltec society, but we are listening to a symphony for classical orchestra. To compose this music was interesting. To have removed it is even more interesting.

## Symphony No. 8

*“Symphony No. 8 represents a return, after a number of major works, to orchestral music where the subject of the work is the language of music itself, as in the tradition of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century symphony. To elucidate briefly:*

*Symphony No. 5 is an extended work for chorus, vocal soloists and orchestra with texts drawn from the traditional religious and wisdom traditions.*

*Symphony No. 6 is based on a major poem, “Plutonian Ode,” of Allen Ginsberg’s and was composed for Soprano and orchestra.*

*Symphony No. 7 – “A Toltec Symphony”, is based on the indigenous traditions of Mexico and includes extended passage for chorus.*

*Symphony No. 8 contains no references or allusions to non-musical materials at all. However, its formal structure is quite unusual and is worth a brief comment. The three movements are markedly different from each other in length, texture and internal musical procedures.*

*The first movement is the longest of the three, almost 20 minutes in length. It begins with a statement of eight different 'theme.' This series is then developed in whole or in part, recombined with various harmonies and melodic elements and culminates in a series of 'stretto'-like passages producing a highly contrapuntal effect.*

*The second movement, about 12 minutes long, is in the form of a passacaglia with a series of melodic variations. The harmonic basis of the passacaglia is 16 measures long, which allows for some extended, at times quite oblique, melodic embellishments.*

*The third movement, by comparison to the first two, is quite brief – a short 7 minutes. However, what it lacks in length it makes up in density. The theme with its accompanying harmony is heard twice then joined by a counter theme, also heard twice. An extended cadence serves as a coda to the third movement and the symphony itself.*

*I want to take this opportunity to thank Dennis Russell Davies for his invaluable help. There were countless questions and details relating to the actual notes I composed as well as addressed and resolved in his usual dedicated and tireless fashion.*

*Also, I would like to commend my long-time music director and associate Michael Riesman, who was responsible for the final editing and mixing of the work. This was an especially challenging assignment considering the novelty and complexity of the music.*

*Finally, I am very fortunate to have had the premiere and first recording of Symphony No. 8 with the Bruckner Orchestra Linz. This is an absolutely superb world-class ensemble. They have brought the highest standard and enthusiasm to my work. Many thanks to them."*

-Philip Glass, January 2006 in the composer's comment to the first recording of the Eighth Symphony

In the late-1990s Glass had started to alter his approach to certain commercial work. In the early 2000s Glass's name became much more well known to the general public through his work in film. By this time Glass had been operating for a number of years by actively subsidizing his own work with commercial work with a balance of 10% of his activity would be dedicated to commercial work. He summarized it concisely in an interview in 2003 when discussing his latest opera *Waiting for the Barbarians* (2005): "The films pay for the operas." This type of self-subsidy is very common in the history of music and art but it has proven an absorbing subject for those interested in Philip Glass. When he was young he supported himself and his art through a variety of odd jobs from driving cabs to plumbing. When later he supported himself only through music those odd jobs were replaced by writing music for commercial films and television commercials. Up through the late-1990s Glass's insistence on owning his own intellectual property had always remained a barrier between him and large budget commercial films. In the early 2000s something changed and an interesting thing happened: the Philip Glass "sound" went mainstream.

All of a sudden Philip Glass's distinctive voice began appearing in imitation everywhere. For a period of 5 years it seemed that every commercial contained the "Philip Glass Sound." Not only in commercials, you could hear his voice in the biggest movies every time a composer wanted to evoke various sentiments be they "modern," "dystopian," "futuristic." As film producers might ask for "something jazzy" from their film composers they might also now demand to have "something that sounds like Philip Glass" as an established part of the musical vernacular. Glass's signature sound was so ubiquitous that it might be believed that some young composers might not even know that they were skirting the line of plagiarism in their compositions. It was as if overnight a whole generation of composer-imitators appeared.

This changed things for Glass as an operating principle of his commercial work in that eventually word got out that you could hire the 'Best Philip Glass imitator in the business,' namely Philip Glass himself. This created a situation in Glass's career which to the outside world was an explosion of exposure and activity. It was not just an illusion, either. Glass maintained his schedule of writing every day and simply kept adding projects to his already full schedule. 2005 was the height of this period and simply put, the busiest period of Philip Glass's musical life.

In that year, Glass was composing no less than five film scores whereas it's already a full work load for a full time film composer to do no more than two in a year. Glass had just premiered his Seventh Symphony and he was preparing for his Eighth. There was also the small matter of a large opera called "Waiting for the Barbarians" based on the novel by J.M. Coetzee that had to do with an Empire invading a small territory, launching a pre-emptive war, torturing the natives during interrogation, and then summarily calling and arbitrary end to the war and leaving. The opera premiered on September 10th in Erfurt Germany during the most heated days of debate and discontent over the United States misguided invitation of Iraq. Such a piece would have been the work of a lifetime for most other composers. The piece received a 15-minute standing ovation at the premiere. For Glass, he had no time to rest on his laurels as not two months later, on November 2<sup>nd</sup> he had the premiere of his Eighth Symphony in New York with the Bruckner Orchester Linz at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Symphony No.8 stands apart from all Glass's other symphonies and indeed apart from most of all the rest of his music. In composing new pieces, Glass frequently works with various strategies to develop the architecture of a work. He knows at the outset how long pieces are going to be and he usually has a rough sense of how long it will take to write. As any working artist will tell you, deadlines are a necessary ingredient in producing new works of art. Glass frequently cites Leonard Bernstein's old adage, "*To achieve great things, two things are needed; a plan, and not quite enough time.*" Frequently Glass often plots out the rough timings of his pieces in the margins of his manuscripts (e.g. quartet note equals 60 beats per minute, four quarter notes per bar, every 15 bars equal one minute of music) to obtain a temporal idea of certain events in his pieces and to maintain proportion in his pieces. These

calculations are sometimes quite elaborate (it's perhaps not widely known that the composer has a pocket calculator to assist in the more elaborate formulas (this writer once helped the composer fish his dropped calculator out of a bush and under a deck). This type of mindfulness of structure and proportion comes to bear on the composition of Symphony No.8

At the outset, Glass had an idea that the work would be a three-movement work which is common for him as in Symphonies Nos. 1,2,6, and 7. In all those preceding symphonies, one can see an attempt to proportion the movements in relation to one another. Symphony No.8 is unique in that it seems the formal and structured process which is normal in Glass's writing got away from the composer. In a discussion with the composer on the topic, when asked about the content and length of the movements of this symphony - the first movement highly orchestrated and 19 minutes in length, the second movement a 12 minute passacaglia of the most intense emotion in the entirety of Glass's canon, and a 6 minute dense movement just didn't in any way seem typical of Glass. Glass accepted my theory that the organic process of composing the first movement took over much of the time that he had allotted to compose the entire piece. The composition of the second movement monopolized most of the rest of his time. So there was Glass with an unfinished symphony and no more time. As always up against the deadline of the premiere of the work Glass composed the third movement which many consider to be what was truly novel in this symphony.

As described by New Yorker critic Alex Ross: *"Against all odds, this work succeeds in adding something certifiably new to the overstuffed annals of the classical symphony. There are three sections: a twenty-minute movement in moderate tempo, a twelve-minute passacaglia slow movement, and a final movement that is slightly slower than the second and about half as long. The musical material is cut from familiar fabric, but it's striking that the composer forgoes the expected bustling conclusion and instead delves into a mood of deepening twilight and unending night."*

Glass accepted my theory about the pressure of time when he was composing but he made an important point. He had in fact had all the time he needed to make the third movement of the Eighth Symphony as long as it needed to be. The material dictated the length of the work. Despite his efforts to make the movement longer, he simply could not find a way. The result is the most organically interesting symphony Glass has written.

The first movement harkens back to Glass's discovery of Indian rhythmic cycles. After a powerful opening the listener is presented two themes before a cacophonous stretto tutti appears. This first climax is comprised of all the exhilarating elements in Glass's music used to their highest degree. These stretto passages reappear in different forms and orchestration later and essentially serve as yard posts for the whole movement. We then receive two more themes, another stretto passage and then two more themes. One after another each theme presents itself and entangles itself with previously heard themes. The last third of the movement Glass presents all the themes one after another in elaborate counterpoint. Like the third movement

of the Third Symphony, it's contrapuntally one of the most exciting moments in his music though this time it's enriched with more varied harmonies and a broader orchestration. Indian rhythmic influence is certainly present and it's certainly a difficult piece for musicians to count, Glass once divulged in an interview that the model that he had in mind was a Rossini overture in which all the principal melodies of an opera are laid out in the overture.

If it's true what Glass has said that the composing of music for him is like looking for an underground river tap, then the second movement of Symphony No.8 is the deepest the composer ever had to dig emotionally to find the music he was looking for. Ostensibly the piece is a straight passacaglia with melodic variations that take place over the repeated pattern much like Bach famous Passacaglia in C minor. The distinction in this piece rests in the chosen orchestration as well as the harmonic richness. A close listener can hear the chord progression which appears sporadically in Glass, first appearing in his piano Etude No.8 (1994), then later in The Truman Show (1998), Tirol Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (2000) and The Hours (2002) and elsewhere.

These chords became consciously or unconsciously part of Philip Glass's musical DNA for over a decade. Like many other composers of the past, certain compositional ideas get refined from pieces to piece, year to year. By the time we hear these chords in the second movement, they have never had such emotional and musical weight to them before. Even more than his Second Symphony, this is the most overtly Russian sounding piece of music. Shostakovich's specter must be acknowledged.

Rather than a third movement scherzo leading to a rondo finale, the third movement will be our last. The symphony follows the dramatic ark from dark, to darker, to darkest. The third movement is the dark that envelops us. When viewed as a whole, each movement in this symphony has its own musical character, each distinct from the other, yet all belonging spiritually to one powerful artistic statement. The piece is absolutely unique in the body of these symphonies.

## **Symphony No. 9**

After 20 years of a collaborative relationship of commissioning this body of work and bring each piece to life, Dennis Russell Davies reflects on his work with Philip Glass before the U.S. premiere of Symphony No.9.

*"In 1992 I conducted the first performance of the "Low" Symphony by Philip Glass. We didn't refer to it as the first symphony because we couldn't anticipate there being others to follow. We should have known better.*

*Twenty years later, next to countless important operas and varied chamber works, Philip must be acknowledged as a major American Symphonist – perhaps the most important,*



*certainly the most varied. Except for Gustav Mahler and Dmitri Shostakovich, no other symphonic composer since Beethoven has infused the form of the symphony with such unexpected variety and flexibility.*

*Numbers 1 and 4 (Low and Heroes) developed melodies by David Bowie and Brian Eno. Numbers 5 and 7 use large choruses and soloists and are devoted to spiritual texts from diverse cultures. Number 6, a setting of Allen Ginsberg's "Plutonian Ode," is a demanding three-movement cantata for soprano and large orchestra. Number 3 is a string piece with Strauss' "Metamorphosen" as a model. 2, 8, and 9 are purely instrumental, profound in character, eloquent and complex in their musical expression.*

*In January 2012, I conducted and recorded the premier of number 9 with the Bruckner Orchester Linz, "Low" with the Sinfonieorchester Basel, and had the opportunity to read the first draft of number 10 to be premiered by the Orchestre Français des Jeunes in August 2012. Separated by twenty years. All three works speak in the same language but tell widely different musical stories. Philip Glass had become a master of the modern symphony for orchestra.*

-Dennis Russell Davies, February 2012

### ***Philip Glass discusses his symphonies***

Philip Glass: I began to write symphonies really quite late, when I was in my mid-fifties, really late to being a whole body of work in one way. But I had been writing for large orchestral forces for a while as they would appear in operas. So I had a lot of experiences doing that. The advantage of writing for opera orchestras is that you get a lot of time with them. It's very common to spend a week on a score with an opera orchestra. But for the most part with symphony orchestras, you can measure rehearsal times in hours if not minutes.

Richard Guérin: Yes, I think you get two rehearsals and perhaps one performance.

PG: That's right. So basically if you've spent your life writing for symphonic ensembles, if you've been writing symphonies, you've probably not had lots of chances to work with orchestras.

I asked Dennis Russell Davies why was he commissioning all these symphonies from me. He began as recently as 20 years ago and now there are ten of them. He said he wanted to make sure I wasn't one of those opera composers who never wrote a symphony. The irony of that is that he was one of those conductors who does a lot of operas. And I had learned a lot about operas through working with him.

When I was at Julliard there was no formal orchestration class. So if you wanted to study orchestration what you did was go to the orchestra rehearsals. I audited the conducting classes. Jean Morel was teaching conducting and Dennis came into that class just as I was leaving. The point is that we both had the same teacher. He was teaching conducting and I

was auditioning the class and learning orchestration.

You have to remember that there were very few composers in the school. In any one year there would never be more than eight or maybe six compositional students in a school of maybe three or four hundred.

I was writing orchestral music there and I was writing concertos also. But I had no specific plans really. In fact, I didn't get around to writing orchestral music until I had been away from Julliard for almost thirty years.

When you are writing symphonic pieces which are numbered symphonies, they have no program attached to them unless you add one in. Some of the symphonies, for example, my Sixth Symphony is the "Plutonian Ode" symphony (using the epic poem by Allen Ginsberg) that had a text to it. Symphony No. 5 has lots of texts to it. Even Symphony No. 7 "Toltec" doesn't exactly have a text but it had vocal music in it.

Those pieces have a kind of narrative base in a way. But usually when writing a numbered symphony, the only program is the language of music and the lineage of symphonic writing.

Symphonies don't have a narrative base. But with concertos they do. When you have a soloist, you have a narrator. There's huge difference between concertos and symphonies. It took me a long time to get the hang of it because I had been writing a lot of operas and a lot of instrumental music before that. I didn't really write a symphony until I was fifty five. I had also been writing string quartets, but basically the fact that when people said, "If you're not a Minimalist then what are you?" and I would say "It's very simple, I'm a theater composer." And that statement had the virtue of being actually what I do: Operas, ballets, film score, and theater pieces. That's what it is. Except for the Philip Glass Ensemble, which is instrumental. But almost all the concert music is theater music. That's actually what I do. I would say three quarters of the music is attached to the theater, or text, image, or movement.

I only came to write symphonies, which use only music as the basis, it was really Symphony No. 2, which was the first real symphonic piece. Then Symphony No. 3, and then not again until No. 7 and 8, and then 9. Even when I began writing numbered symphonies, they weren't all purely symphonic pieces. No. 1, 4, 5, and 6 all have a narrative base of some kind or another.

I have no problem writing symphonies without any text at all. But of course I will begin again to write with text right away because I did 9 without a text and 10 without a text. I think the texts will begin to appear again.

With Symphony No. 9, it's about the tradition of symphonic writing and it's about the tradition of a musical language which is a tonal language. When you start to write numbered symphonies you've got to be thinking of Beethoven, Brahms, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Mahler, and Bruckner. Basically when you start putting numbers on symphonies you are inviting people to look at it as part of a lineage. If you didn't want to do that you

wouldn't number them. Right? It's inescapable.

RG: And when approaching a Ninth Symphony?

PG: I decided to embrace the challenge. I'm not going to run away from the issue. I'm going to write a piece that had length, depth, and is concerned almost entirely with the language of the symphonic orchestra which of course Beethoven didn't do in his Ninth. His is a narrative symphony, who else could you look at it?

Ten is very connected to Nine because it's not Nine. Ten is the Non-Nine Symphony. I did it the other way. For No. 9 I said, "Ok, bring it on, I'll do it." Of course this is all very risky. This symphony was composed more than a year ago. We'd already had the date for Carnegie Hall booked. It won't be a light trivial piece. I mean, you can like it or not like it, but it's certainly an ambitious piece.

RG: Tell me about the Ninth.

PG: Well the piece actually turns out to have a very peculiar form. There are three movements and each basically has an A-B-A form. (A-B-A; A-B-A; A-B-A). I said, "Oh, I've actually used the same structure for all three movements." However, in the middle of the second movement, before we get back to the A section again, there's a kind of long diversion which could be interpreted as a slow movement. But then it leads you back actually to the A section. A then B. I got very far away from B and end up at A. And because of that, the return to A becomes almost unexpected and very rewarding. You may have well have forgotten where we came from. I'm talking about people hearing it for the first time.

RG: The whole piece starts in D minor.

PG: Yeah, I guess it does.

RG: That can't be an accident as there are a couple famous Ninth Symphonies which start the same way.

PG: I wasn't really thinking about it but then again are there real accidents? I don't know. That would be a strange accident if it was. And yet I don't remember thinking that. What I was thinking of all the symphonies we've talked about, is that this piece is probably closer to the Mahler Ninth in the sense that it's a long orchestral piece, which begins very quietly, and ends very quietly.

RG: The quietest ending in all of music.

PG: That's probably true. Somewhere the Mahler Ninth was in my mind. It certainly doesn't sound like a Bruckner symphony. One of the things that I've noticed, and you've noticed, and the people of Austria have noticed is that there's a compatibility with the Bruckner Orchester Linz and my music. And I believe it's because they play so much Bruckner that when they come to play my music I sound easy. The Bruckner symphonies require a lot of stamina and a lot of attention.

As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, I had two or three friends and we spent quite a lot of time listening to Bruckner and Mahler and comparing the performances by people like Bruno Walter, Horenstein, and the guy who did the slowest of them all...

RG: Furtwängler?

PG: Yes! I said in this book that I'm writing that his tempos plunge way below the normal heartbeat of a human being. In fact, when we began working on this symphony, and we got to the second movement, I said to Dennis that the movement should be slow and spacious. He was still taking it too fast and I said, "think of Furtwängler playing a slow movement of Bruckner or Mahler." I said that that's what I'm thinking about. And then he played it perfectly!

The B sections of the first two movements are almost dance pieces by themselves. They are not terribly contrapuntal. They tend to be very rhythmic. What happens in the third movement is that it becomes extremely contrapuntal and layered in terms of thematic material. As you might notice, the opening theme in the winds at the beginning of the symphony, the first real melody you hear in the woodwinds, that become the trumpet melody of the whole last movement.

If you want to look at it that way, Symphony No. 9 begins with a slow introduction in which a melody is mentioned but never discussed. And then it goes on to a real *allegro con brio*. That melody doesn't come back until the third movement, after the introductory material and the brass start up for the first time. The trumpet comes in and that melody is what the trumpet is playing.

So if you want, the big picture is: I'm going to write a Ninth Symphony and by the way, here is an interesting theme, but you can forget it for now. And almost 45 minutes later, "hey, remember that theme you forgot, well here it is again." That theme comes back and you may have forgotten it. But once it comes back it never leaves. There are a lot of layers to the piece that begin to be introduced by then. By the time we get to the end of the movement there are three or four different rhythms and counterpoints going on and somehow the trumpet is still playing that tune. But now it's assisted by the E-flat clarinet playing an octave higher. It's a very interesting color and orchestration because of the E-flat clarinet we can hear the trumpet better. Without it I think the trumpet would have gotten lost.

RG: I haven't seen the score but I think the first movement starts in D minor. The second in F?

PG: A...I think it's A. The reason I say that is because in this kind of tonal music, there's always ambiguity in the tonal center. People say "well, that's just tonal music." But it's actually not quite like that. You might have to poke around a while before you find out what the root of the chord is. And that's because we're talking about the kind of pan-tonality where you are shifting constantly from key to key.

RG: You had told me that you were thinking of the third movement in terms of its root tonality of E major/minor.

PG: I'd have to go back and look at it. The fact of the matter is that when I'm writing music I'm not thinking of keys or roots. I'm thinking about sounds. And then when I look at it later I can analyze it. The ideas are coming from the world of sound not from the world of classical harmony. But when we talk about keys and key relationships, it's more fluid than that. If anything sometimes the key of the piece is only obliquely indicated. It may take a while if you sit down and look at it and figure out what it is. Twenty-first century composers now are thinking about tonality in a much more ambiguous way. The think about 12-ton music is that it's not ambiguous. It completely addresses the issue of tonality by avoiding it.

RG: Well, so now we look at your symphonic work within your total body of work and we can say that it's formidable.

PG: Well, it's large enough to take seriously, but as you and I know few people bother to take it seriously. Some people think I write film music. Some people think I'm a dance composer. Some people think I'm not a composer at all! (laughs). So what are you going to do?

RG: A word about Dennis Russell Davies?

PG: He's commissioned 8 of the 9 symphonies. And though he didn't commission the Toltec Symphony (No. 7) Dennis did the European premiere and recorded it. Leonard Slatkin commissioned and premiered it but I don't know that he's played it since then. I thought I had missed the boat with it. Dennis picked it up three or four years later and rediscovered it. And it was later played at The Proms and it was recorded.

We can say that Dennis has commissioned the whole body of work. I can't say he commissioned the Seventh but he championed the Seventh. Besides that, because of the length of time I've spent in Austria, the Bruckner Orchester Linz has played most of them. But don't forget the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra also played them. But the only other orchestra the played them with any consistency is the American Composers Orchestra. They did No. 6 and No. 4 The Brooklyn Philharmonic did No. 2. But a lot of it ended up in Austria.

Basically, if it hadn't been for Dennis, to be truthful, none of them would have been written at all.

*From a conversation with Richard Guérin January 24, 2012 on the eve of the US premiere of Glass Symphony No. 9 at Carnegie Hall.*

## **Symphony No.10 (2012)**

The genesis of Symphony No.10 is unlike any of the other symphonies by Philip Glass. In one way, this 35-minute work premiered September 14, 2008 as a work called "*Los Paisajes del Rio*," written for the 2008 Expo Zaragoza Spain as the closing ceremony fireworks show and performed by the Philip Glass Ensemble in what remains the last piece written for Glass's own group which started 40 years earlier. In 2011, Glass orchestrated his *fireworks* piece for two principal reasons: firstly, the one-off performance in Zaragoza, while it was a fun and festive environment in which over 200,000 people gathered along the river, the piece was practically thereafter doomed to never be played again. "*Paisajes*" was not a good fit into the already extensive touring repertoire of the Philip Glass Ensemble and its instrumentation of keyboards, woodwinds and voice is a very uncommon instrumentation for other groups to pick up the work. Glass perceived that there was a real need to find other means to get this piece to the general public.

So Glass set about orchestrating the work for full symphony orchestra. This process had a precedent. In the case of Glass's opera *La Belle et la Bête*, he composed the opera first for the PGE instrumentation then prepared an orchestral version for traditional operatic forces (a different experience from the PGE live-to-film version).

Glass stated, "*The reason composers re-use pieces is not because they run out of ideas. The reason is because you have a good piece buried in a piece of music that no one is ever going to play. How can I get this pieces that people will be able to hear it? So you have to put it into a new format. I'd say that this music was saved from sure oblivion by putting it into this symphony.*"

Unlike most of the Glass symphonies, Symphony No.10, the piece was not commissioned in the traditional manner. The work had stayed in Glass's consciousness as something he hoped to find an occasion for. In discussing the process Glass stated, "*When I go from the ensemble to the orchestra everything changes. The original material wasn't adequately expressed in the ensemble alone. I needed to have more instruments. It was underscored. When I thought of it in a symphonic sense I said, now that material can have a proper setting.*"

Something of a trial for the viability of his idea of adapting this music to big orchestra happened in summer 2011 when Glass orchestrated what was to become the last movement of the Tenth Symphony as a gift to the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California that was celebrating its music director Marin Alsop's 20<sup>th</sup> season at the festival. The movement was premiered under the name "*Black & White Scherzo*" on August 5, 2011 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium performed by the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

The voyage to completion of this symphony was underway. The piece had begun the transformation from a "one-off" occasion piece, drowned out by fireworks, and the cacophony of 200,00 drunk revelers, to Glass's hope of salvaging the music, to the proven viability of its final movement confirmed by the enthusiastic audience in Santa Cruz.. "*Still*", Glass said, "*No one had asked for Symphony No.10.*" Soon thereafter, that changed.

Dennis Russell Davies, who perhaps remains not only the catalyst and champion for this

entire body of symphonic work, he who has commissioned nine of the ten symphonies, found a perfect outlet for this piece. Davies had begun leading the Orchestre Français des Jeunes (The French Youth Orchestra) and after discussing it with Glass came to conclusion that this was the ensemble with which Symphony No.10 should be created. Glass had a piece and Davies had an orchestra. The OFJ commissioned the work and it premiered in France, now titled Symphony No.10, on August, 9th, 2012 - Grand Théâtre de Provence, Aix-en-Provence, with performances soon following in Paris at the Salle Pleyel, the London Proms with the Aurora Orchestra under Nicholas Collon, and the US premiere at the Cabrillo Festival in California under Brad Lubman.

I asked about how Glass feels about where Symphony No.10 fits into his catalogue of symphonies, Glass responds "*The most important thing about Symphony No.10 is that it comes after Symphony No.9.*" Glass's "middle symphonies" (5,6, and 7) contain text and/or extra musical material. They have voices and are to varying degrees "theatrical." However, in the first two movements of Glass's Symphony No.7 "Toltec" we see the appearance of the purely instrumental kind of writing for the orchestra that came to its most elevated level of discourse in the first two movements of Symphony No.8 (also from 2005). It would be then a number of years before Glass again considered the form of the symphony. By the time Glass arrived at No.9 (the cursed Ninth!), he was deeply into this purely orchestral symphonic language.

When approaching the difficult task of composing a Ninth Symphony, Glass channeled his inner-Bruckner, a composer who famously has a Symphony No.0 (as well as Symphony No.00). By the time that the commission for Symphony No.9 arrived, Symphony No.10 had effectively already been composed (as *Los Paisajes del Rio.*) Glass stated simply, "*No.10 was done before No.9.*" (There is precedent in the catalogue of Dvorak, whose famous "New World" symphony has variously been known by different numbers; in Schubert his "Unfinished" Symphony is widely known as No.8 but elsewhere as No.9.)

For Glass, Symphony No.10 provided a contrast to Symphony No.9. Glass's Ninth is made up of three huge movements that are "big-and-serious." Symphony No.9 contains ideas that require long-form to present. Symphony No.10 is comprised of five shorter movements that seem like five short sharp bursts of energy, or as Glass told me in an interview in 2012, "*Symphony No.10 is the "Not-Nine" symphony.*"

Just before the period of its creation in 2011, Glass described the piece to me as being something of a "*Short Symphony*" in multiple shorter movements. The piece would be on the shorter side from 25-35 minutes (presumably because he could not yet know how many movements of "*Paisajes*" might possess symphonic potential. In general, the work's identity certainly remains festive, and in its non-traditional five-movement layout the Tenth might remind listeners more of Glass's six-movement "Dance Symphony", Symphony No.4 "Heroes" more than any of his other symphonies.

All this made me curious about Glass's own feelings about his large catalogue of symphonies, which represents years of his compositional life. In a conversation with the composer in spring 2015, Glass said laughing, "*I was forced to write symphonies by Dennis*

Russell Davies.”

“Against your will?” I asked.

“Not completely. But it’s not what I would have done. The form has taken on a life of its own for me. It’s now easy for me to go on to No.11. I know exactly what to do because that first series of ten symphonies, at least for me, has set up an expectation. I’ll probably start Symphony No.11 next summer.

What place have the symphonies taken in your own body of work?”

“There’s a freedom from story, from narrative. I’ve contradicted that too. I’m not even sure I like the freedom. What I have liked about theater is how it is interconnected with the other art forms. Usually I have collaborators: choreographer, director, lighting person, librettist. With any kind of theater piece you have a lot of people involved. With a symphony there’s nobody there but you.”

“You don’t enjoy that freedom?”

“Not particularly. I don’t get (to have) the excitement and inspiration of working with other people. They’re simply not there. So for me it’s a harder job to do.”

Glass’s preference for collaboration and theater work is a well-documented one. However, most people who have observed Glass from close or afar recognize his overwhelmingly unique and individual musical voice. That, one would think, is a matter of musical language. That language was developed through a number of early pieces that were about nothing else but the language of music itself.

Glass’s own personal language developed over a period in the late-1960s and early 1970s in pieces like “*Music in 12 Parts*” and “*Another Look at Harmony, Parts I-IV*.” So why the reluctance to work in realm of the language in music in his symphonies? My own feeling is that for Glass, the act of creativity – the composing the music – remains its own separate entity in the process of bringing pieces into the world. It’s not a part of the world that the listener nor the collaborator is truly a part of. Since those early pieces, collaboration has been an essential part of Glass’s working process since that time when he developed his mature voice in those early pieces. For him, it’s been the principle means of finding uncharted musical territory by placing himself in situations which call for new and different kinds of music.

At this point in our conversation, Glass began discussing the incredible power of music as exemplified in the theater, as he is currently working a major revision to his 2007 civil rights opera *Appomattox* that includes the composition of lots of new music.

“The language of music is a tremendous technical tool. It’s like a huge bunch of bulldozers, anything that you can imagine that can move things around. Technology is about doing. Your hand is technology. When we talk about technique in music. It’s how you move music around.



*Technique is about doing. "*

As I continued to try to drive the conversation toward the symphonies, Glass continued to resist. He talked again about the power of music in terms of theater, speaking about *Appomattox* and the vulgar language contained in the libretto. Glass himself, the son of a schoolteacher and librarian, has a personal distaste for bad language. What was surprising him recently was music that had the power to transform this language of the gutter into something poetic. *"When you have a powerful technique, you can take a vulgar language, like some of the language in Appomattox, and make it do anything."*

Still eager to talk about "absolute music," I pressed him but could feel his resistance. *"Your eyes don't seem to light up when talking about symphonies the way they do about opera."*

Glass simply responded, *"No. (they don't). If I may suggest, the error of your question is that you think that I'm somehow in complete alignment with these works just because I compose them. That there's some powerful intention involved. That may not be true. I write pieces to get them done. Then I look at them and see what they are. On the other hand, once they are done it's a different matter. You have to look at them differently as they are in the real world. So I'm as anxious as anyone would be to have the symphonies played. Even though, in a certain way, I didn't care about them that much when I wrote them. But caring about them and writing them are two different things."*

It's at this point that an interesting thing happened: when we began to drop the conversation about *'the language of music'* and began to talk about the symphonies themselves, Glass's eyes began to light up again. The important thing to understand is that the process of creating these works and how they ultimately exist in the world are two separate things for Glass. I mentioned that his *Symphony No.3* would be done that weekend in Connecticut, that his *Symphonies Nos.1 and 4* would be done that month at the new *Philharmonie* in Paris, and I had a few weeks before heard *Symphony No.2* done in Rhode Island. Glass himself has not heard his *Second Symphony* since its premiere in 1994.

*"It's interesting. Symphony No.2 is one of the best symphonies and it came very early in the series. It's one of my favorites. It's just a powerful piece of music that I wrote as a Second Symphony. You would think it would have come up as one of the later numbers but it didn't. But behind that Symphony there were probably ten or fifteen operas. I had spent lots of time listening to the operas being done. And with operas you often have six or seven days, not hours, with the orchestra. By the time you get to the premiere, you have heard every angle of the music. By the time I wrote Symphony No.2, I had a huge background in symphonic writing. "*

In the end, even in writing purely instrumental symphonies Glass still finds collaborators nearby whether it's the process he goes through with Dennis Russell Davies before a premiere of a new work, or a supportive friend and collaborator like Harvey Lichtenstein. *"I remember, the Second Symphony was written for the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I remember because Harvey Lichtenstein commissioned it. He didn't know what it was going to sound like. He was sitting across the aisle from me. Afterwards he was so excited he came*

*over and began hugging me. I think he couldn't believe that that's what it was!"*

#### *CODA*

So we return to the original questions: why write a symphony in the modern age? What relevance can it provide? what place does it take in the body of work as a whole which includes now over two dozen operas, eight string quartets, 14 concerti, two books of piano etudes, and much more. Glass is the one who categorizes himself as a theater composer and it's mostly true that that's what he enjoys doing the most. In our age there is no more imposing form for composers than the symphony and the string quartet. For Mozart and Haydn the symphony was not intimidating in the way composers view it today. The symphony was simply one of many forms in which to write. Haydn composed (107) symphonies and Mozart 41 in his short 35 year lifetime. The great transformer of the symphony was undoubtedly Beethoven.

The same question remains about Beethoven. Of course he is simply a great composer. If he had left behind his (32) piano sonatas and nothing more we would have viewed him as one of the great composers of all time. That Beethoven contributed to the great legacy of humankind with another body of equally as inspired and accomplished set of 16 string quartets prevents us from seeing him as nothing more than a "great symphonist." During his lifetime, none of Beethoven's sonatas, trios, or quartets were played publically, outside the confines of the parlors of the well-to-do. His symphonies and concertos – the orchestral music – was his public body of work. For Philip Glass, one could easily say that all of his music is for public consumption. However, for a successful film like *The Hours*, Glass's music will be heard by literally millions of people. In the case of one of his symphonies, with the exception of the Third Symphony, most are rarely performed, and without recording the potential audience for these pieces is relatively small. In this sense, it's fair to say that these pieces serve the opposite function in the real world for Philip Glass and they are in fact some of his most private pieces.

#### **Dennis Russell Davies discusses his collaboration with Philip Glass**

Do you remember where you first met Philip?

I met him actually through my wife at that time who was a film maker, Molly Davies. We were spending a year in Vermont. I took a sabbatical and we were in Vermont. This was 1978 and we had three kids that we had just put in school up there and I took a year off from concerts. While we were up there she said to me that she was recently in New York and there was a composer that I really ought to meet. He's the composer of "Einstein on the Beach" and this is someone you would really be interested in.

Had you heard "Einstein on the Beach" at this time?

No. I didn't. I was very involved in other kinds of new music. I was a close friend of Berio's, a close friend of Boulez and Bruno Maderna. I was getting to know Lou Harrison. The idea

of what Minimal music was known as or came to be known as, tonal music, was something I only knew on the periphery. I wasn't really involved in it. At the same time, I had worked at the Dutch Opera in Holland. The indendant there, Hans de Roo told me that he had commissioned Philip Glass to write a new opera called *Satyagraha* with the immortalized line after they'd met, after "Einstein on the Beach," when de Roo said to Philip, "How would you like to write a *Real opera*?"

Of course Philip really wanted to write a real opera and that's what *Satyagraha* became. They wanted me to do the premiere but I had just been engaged at the Stuttgart Opera as the new Music Director there. I was in my opening season there at the same time. I couldn't do the premiere. So we invited Philip up to Vermont and he brought the score to *Satyagraha*. He visited us up there where we were living near Stowe. I'll never forget looking at the score and playing the beginning where Gandhi starts off by himself, just this accompaniment murmuring around in G minor in the cellos. I thought "this is another kind of music. That's really interesting." I played through it and it was beautiful and I thought this is really good.

At the Stuttgart Opera the chief dramaturg there, Klaus-Peter Kehr, who is now the intendent at Mannheim, and I told him that I had just met Philip Glass and he said "Wonderful! If you want to do *Satyagraha* in Stuttgart we will put it right on." So I said to Philip that I can't do the premiere in Rotterdam but I can offer you a new production at the Stuttgart opera. How many composers who before they've had the premiere of one opera are told that there is going to be a second production!? That's what happened. So in my second season, 1981, we did our own production.

It's said that there were many who were disappointed at the premiere of *Satyagraha* - that they were hoping for something more like "Einstein on the Beach."

That may be. That always want the same thing. The people who were around Philip at that time were disturbed by the new production in Stuttgart.

My first impression was that this was a different kind of music. And a different kind of theatrical experience. And also the fact that Klaus-Peter was extremely interested in it. Achim Freyer became the producer of it and did all three of the Portrait Trilogy. He commissioned *Akhnaten* and did his own "Einstein on the Beach." They were extremely enthusiastic. Before they'd seen a note.

At this point in your story, it doesn't seem like there was a lot of resistance to the music...

Well there was! Especially from the music establish establishment or the orchestras. I know that in Holland the orchestra who did the premiere, it was a real tough go. I was glad that in Stuttgart I was doing it in a situation where I was the boss. I said "we're doing this." And the orchestra musicians could complain but there was a limit to it. I remember when we did *Satyagraha* there, the singers loved working with Achim Freyer and they loved doing his productions. And there was a lot of interest in it. But there were hard aspects to it. The chorus parts in *Satyagraha* are difficult, and you have to memorize this Sanskrit text. You

have to just physically do a lot of hard work. And for the musicians, it was doing a lot of hard work in ways that if you made mistakes, it was obvious and glaring. If you make a mistake when you are playing *Elektra* or *Salome* of Richard Strauss, chances are no one will know the difference. But in this music, if you make a mistake: if you play out of tune or play out of rhythm, or make a wrong entrance, it's obvious. I used to quote what people would say about Mozart: Mozart's music is too easy for the amateur and too difficult for the professional.

And it's the same with Philip's music. You give an amateur pianist the Glass *Piano Etudes* they'd probably say "oh this isn't so hard." And then you give a really good professional pianist the same pieces and he'd say "Oh I don't need to practice that." And then suddenly he'll say "Oh dear! I didn't realize that this is so difficult!" It was the same thing back then. I remember with the orchestra, I'm glad I was boss because I was doing it, I said "We're doing this." I established it. We worked hard at it. The musicians struggled with it to an extent. And then at the premiere when it came time for the orchestras bow, and the audience erupted in these cheers, I could see the musicians looking at each other saying "What is going on here?!" They didn't understand the music and didn't understand the effect it had.

It was a repertory opera house and every week they'd play for or five different operas. And suddenly, the musicians saw that if every 5 or 6 days when *Satyagraha* came along that it was relaxing to do that kind of music and continue to play nothing but virtuosic chromatic music all the time. They learned to build it into their repertory activities and I've had good luck doing that with the professional orchestras where I've been boss. And they've come to accept Philip's music. Many have come to enjoy it, to love it.

I was contacted recently by a woman recently by a woman in Basel Switzerland. When I heard her name I realized that she was the teenage daughter of a cellist in the Stuttgart opera. He told me that his daughter was a teenager who was really struggling. There were some drug issues and she was dropping out of school. She saw *Satyagraha* and it changed her life. And the cellist is personally forever grateful to Philip Glass because she went to every performance. She began drawing and becoming an artist. This music made a difference to a lot of young people and to a lot of people's lives. This is what happens.

Why do you think that is?

I think there's an immediacy to the music. I think there's a directness of the musical language. It plays on memories that we have of folk music, popular music of our younger years. There's common themes and rhythmic ideas that have to do with all of the elements of non-concert/classical music. At the same time he's not doing that purposefully. He's doing something else. He's coming at it from a different place, from the standpoint of having a tonal structure and having a rhythmic structure which is based on a kind of world-asian music.

In 1987 you commissioned the Violin Concerto (No.1). When we look at the birth of pieces from a historical standpoint we see things differently. For example, it's a big deal that

Brahms waited so long to write his first symphony. In the case of Philip starting to enter the world of concert music for orchestra, he wrote his first concert work for orchestra when he was 50. 1987 was the year he composed *The Light for Cleveland* and got hissed at by the orchestra.

That's right.

He composed the Violin Concerto in 1987. Was it you that lined up that commission as well?

Well it was. But Paul Zukovsky was instrumental in wanting to have. It was with the American Composers Orchestra. The piece has been through a lot of restoring and editing. When you had an orchestra in a pit that takes care of a lot of balance issues. When you have a violin standing in front of a symphony orchestra, there were a lot of things that just didn't really work back then.

I know Philip credits you as being one of the only people who uses his tempo marking in the second movement.

The last time I did it with Gidon Kremer (at the BBC Proms) he almost panicked when he saw the tempo. Now I'm getting old enough that I just insist. I did it with a young German violinist recently and it was the same thing.

Philip has heard it so many times. In addition to his many years now of writing concert works and operas, I think he got much better at orchestration.

He did. What I did with the Violin Concerto I did a lot of pruning. I did it with Renaud Capuçon and now we've really got it down. There should be a recording of it soon. I hope we can get it done.

By 1987 you are 5 years into a relationship with his music when in 1992 Philip wrote his First Symphony. How did the *Low* Symphony come about?

We premiered it at Brooklyn Academy of Music. The idea that he was going to do "*Low*" (from David Bowie and Brian Eno's album) was already there. There was this project to do a piece based on David Bowie's music and then it became a symphony.

I think *Low* was a studio album concept and was recorded sectionally, as one would do in creating a pop record.

That's right. There were reasons for doing it that way that were economic. It's very interesting because now I've re-recorded it recently after having done it in the old days with a click-track in the studio. It was amazing to perform it live. It's a really fine piece. It's one of his best pieces.

When I heard your new recording it was a revelation. Divorced from the click-track all of a

sudden the piece could breathe. I recently heard the Second Symphony and it had not been performed on the East Coast since you conducted the piece when it was somewhat new at Tanglewood with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When I heard and saw it live, my main observation beyond the power of the music itself was that it was almost a better piece live than on recording. The piece functioned in a way where you could see the sections of the orchestra working with each other.

Philip feels that the Second Symphony feels like a late symphony even though it came early on. With Symphony No.3 from 1995, he again moves in a different direction. That commission was somehow related to Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen* in some way?

I told Philip to take a look at the *Metamorphosen* because there's this moment when everything is unison. I wanted him to treat this string orchestra of 19 musicians (of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra) to start from the standpoint of one instrument, one voice unison - everyone playing the same. And then at some point they'd have 19 voices. It's what he did.

The second movement seems to be straight out of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste*. Again, these influences from contemporary rock back to symphonic tradition of Bartok and Strauss, are not common.

No, it's true.

A lot of composers don't want to put their hat in the ring with the great composers of the past nor do they view their own body of work as having anything to do with the bigger musical world of the present day. Jump ahead of Symphony No.9 in the beginning you hear what could be heard as a quotation from Mahler's Symphony No.1. Philip's Symphony makes those connections, whether it's to Bartok, Strauss, or Mahler, as a way of acknowledging tradition in that way.

A separate tradition is that of Symphonies after Mahler. Mahler being the first to incorporate a song straight into a symphony. Then you have Shostakovich who used all sorts of different elements in his symphonies. In that line, to me the Glass Symphonies Nos. 5, 6, and 7 are somewhat programmatic. It's clearly Philip's natural tendency. Probably the least performed Glass Symphony is his Fifth. Symphony No.5 is big and very expensive for live performance. I think it's not often considered because of its scale. But I feel there's a lot of good music in it.

It's great. I love it. Hopefully I'll be able to do it again soon.

Despite your reputation as such in the United States, most of what you do is actually not new music.

That's geographically ordained. Most of what I've done here in New York is new music so to the people in New York that's what I do. But where I've lived and worked - being music director of an opera and having done the broad repertory because that's what you do in

those kind of jobs. People know that there but the fact is that if one does any new music at all it's unusual. Most of my colleagues just don't do it.

So what are the reasons that you do it?

I like it! I like doing it and I love composers. It's a challenge. And it brings me the variety in my work that I need.