

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 28 April 2025
7.30pm

30th Anniversary of Apartment House

Apartment House

Emma Williams flute
Gavin Morrison flute
Mira Benjamin violin
Gordon Mackay violin
Bridget Carey viola

Anton Lukoszevieve cello
Eliza McCarthy keyboard
Mark Knoop keyboard
Kerry Yong keyboard

Philip Glass (b.1937)

Music in Similar Motion (1969)

Music in Contrary Motion (1969)

Interval

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Socrate (1917-8) arranged by John Cage arranged by Apartment House
No. 1 Portrait of Socrates (The Symposium)
No. 2 On the banks of the 'Ilissus' (Phaedrus)
No. 3 The death of Socrates (Phaedon)

Philip Glass

Music in Eight Parts (1970) *European première*



UNDER 35S

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'Minimalism wasn't a real idea, it ended before it started.' - Sol LeWitt

For this concert to mark our 30th year I wanted to focus on two composers that have always fascinated me, but remained somewhat in the wings. Our programmes over the past 30 years, and over 60 albums, have been perhaps resolutely eclectic, reflecting our post-modern times, so it is maybe with some relief that this concert focuses simply on music by two seminal and singular figures.

Erik Satie was the most influential composer of the 20th Century. Music history will point to Schoenberg and Stravinsky, of course, but the modular ostinati, seductive harmonies and reductive forms of Satie's music have seeped deeply into the consciousness of many different areas of music today, such as pop music, film music, experimental music and contemporary classical music.

Philip Glass is a prime example of one receiver of Satie's aesthetic legacy. One can take any riff or ostinato from a Satie piano work, extend it, repeat it, extend it, repeat it, etc. and we are heading in a similar direction. Satie was not the only influence on the young Glass in the late 1960s. In the vibrant downtown art scene of New York City Glass hung out with artists such as Richard Serra, and notably, Sol LeWitt. LeWitt's supremely logical and reductionist minimal art, with works such as *Four Varieties of Line Direction* (1969), mirror closely the processes at work in Glass's own compositions at that time and his use of repetitive structures. Another key influence was that of Ravi Shankar whom Glass assisted in 1966, whilst studying in Paris, notating his music for the film *Chappaqua* (1967). 'There is no root movement or harmonic movement in the Indian music. There's a lot of ornamentation, and the rhythmic structure becomes the overall structure of the piece. That doesn't happen in our Western music. At least it didn't then.'

Music in Similar Motion (1969), written for the Philip Glass Ensemble, is a prime example of a composition utilising additive rhythmic cells. The work is distinguished by what happens to a basic rhythmic cell and its extension through time, 'in western music we divide time, as you slice a loaf of bread. Indian music takes small units, or "beats" and strings them together to make up larger time values.' The music is fast and exhilarating and in the downtown musical culture of the late 1960s in NYC typified by the likes of John Cage, Morton Feldman and Alvin Lucier, the Philip Glass Ensemble performances must have felt like a breath of fresh air.

Music in Contrary Motion (1969) was originally composed as an organ solo and over time has metamorphosed into an open ensemble work. The

work has an open form and could theoretically last for hours, but perhaps not in tonight's concert.

Erik Satie's *Socrate*, an encapsulated life of Socrates the Greek philosopher, began life as a commission by Princess Edmond de Polignac in 1916. Originally for four female voices and piano (or small orchestra), the work gravitated towards a version for solo voice and piano, which is how it is mainly known today. The composer John Cage was fascinated with the music of Satie, so much that in the early 1950s he organised a 25-concert Satie festival at Black Mountain College in the USA. Earlier, in 1945, Cage made a version of *Socrate* for two pianos for Merce Cunningham's ballet *Idyllic Song*. It is this version that is the springboard for this evening's new version for our ensemble. The main body of the Cage version is played by two keyboards and is shadowed and caressed by the other instruments, creating a kind of velvet, sonic machine. *Socrate* was originally described as a 'sonic drama in three parts', but the music is for the most part quite undramatic. Satie delineates the recitativo melodic lines sparingly, whilst utilising various ostinati and a general harmonic stasis. Satie wanted the work to sound 'white' and its lucid lines and fragile transparency certainly pertain to this atmosphere.

In the early 1970s, Philip Glass needed money, so he sold some of his autograph manuscripts, notably his *Music in Eight Parts*, which his ensemble had performed several times in the USA in 1970. Zoom forwards to 2017 and this manuscript turned up at auction at Christie's. Glass subsequently bought it back and his publishing company reconstructed the work from the original manuscript, creating a new version for his ensemble, with a new instrumentation, adding a voice part and with faster tempi. They also produced the original instrumental version, which you will be hearing this evening, with our one slight instrumental change. The original two saxophone parts are now being played by two alto flutes, and in addition the ensemble also refers to the original slower tempo.

Music in Eight Parts is also in the manner of Satie, a kind of 'white' music, with simple additive rhythms and their expansion over time. The instruments begin in unison and gradually expand harmonically, with a slowly increasing density of texture and a six-part harmony. As in the previous Glass works in this programme, each bar is repeated freely until cued by a player onto the next bar. *Music in Eight Parts* is very much a precursor to what followed in Glass's compositional work with *Music with Changing Parts* (1970) and the massive *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971-74), leading on to the opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1975).

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