

# 21ST CENTURY MUSIC

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# Steve Reich: Early Phase

MARK ALBURGER

Obviously music should put all within listening range into a state of ecstasy. . . is this beautiful, is this sending chills up and down my spine, or isn't it? [Reich, *Writings About Music*, 44, 47].

I don't want my audiences just to listen. I want them to love it! [Steve Reich in Page, "Framing," 117].

Stephen Michael Reich was born on October 3, 1936, in New York City, to parents of German Jewish decent, who divorced when he was a year old. He split his childhood between his mother's Manhattan East Side apartment and his father's Los Angeles equivalent -- "commuting" back and forth on the railroads during the years of World War II, an activity later commemorated in *Different Trains*. Reich's mother sang professionally; she appeared in the annual *New Faces* shows and wrote lyrics for the popular song, "Love Is a Simple Thing."

I discovered that my own musical heritage is really the French tradition in classical music. This to me is characteristically American. French Impressionism for example, has worked its way deeply into our music: Hollywood, Gershwin, Copland, Charlie Parker [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 38].

Reich took piano lessons at seven and percussion at fourteen, studying with Roland Kohloff, principal timpanist of the New York Philharmonic. During this time, he discovered the music of Bach, Stravinsky (particularly *The Rite of Spring*), and Bartók -- and to this day cites the latter as the source of inspiration for his habitual use of arch form and canons.

I always felt that any composer who had never heard of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane was a sort of cultural ostrich and would suffer the consequences [Steve Reich in Page, "Steve Reich," 6].

I grew up listening to Ella Fitzgerald. I think she was a model voice for me [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 6].

Reich also became attune to post-bop and led jazz combos, with bop drummer Kenny Clarke as his model. Of course, all of these musical enthusiasms reflected the times

There is a community of taste there. I guess it was really around the 50's. The Swingle Singers began, and the Bach revival began. I went to Cornell; I listened to Stravinsky, Perotin. This was a certain kind of taste that was developing. Glenn Gould was a part of that, too. . . .

[W]hen I went to Cornell, William Austin was there. He was a 20th-century musicologist, great pianist, great organist, and he also taught the music history course. He taught music history and really clarified this whole thing for me way back then. He started with Gregorian Chant, he went up to Bach and he stopped, and he went right into Debussy, Ravel, Duke Ellington, Stravinsky, Bartók, Schoenberg, and the present. Then he stopped. That was the first half of the course. And then the second half of the course started with Haydn and went to Wagner. . . .

I definitely preferred the first half [of the course]! It really clarified matters. This was something that Austin understood. . . .

Stravinsky was saying "Back to Bach" and Bartók was writing counterpoint [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 38].

The brash young bopper was somewhat of a prodigy in his precocious departure to Cornell in 1953 at age sixteen. Reich was encouraged to compose by William Austin, who introduced him to African and Balinese music. He made his off hours profitable as well -- musically and financially -- by playing drums in jazz groups at fraternity parties and the Black Elks dances in Ithaca. None of his musical activities prevented him from taking a bachelor's degree in 1957 with honors in philosophy, writing his senior thesis on Ludwig Wittgenstein (a philosopher to whom Reich would return almost 40 years later in *Proverb*).

My first composition teacher was Hall Overton. Hall was a jazz musician. He used to teach privately at his loft. He had a loft on the Flower Market just above Sixth Avenue, just above Eugene Smith, the famous photographer. He was just an amazing guy. I studied with Hall in '57-58 and then I went to Juilliard, but I always stayed in touch with him because I admired him and owed him a lot. He taught me to analyze the *Mikrokosmos* amongst many other things. At a certain point, Hall was asked (I guess because he was very close to Persichetti) to come up to Juilliard [laughs]. Hall put on his suit and came to Juilliard. And I remember when I saw him again, it looked like his shoulders had fallen about six inches on both sides. He was stooped over. 'Course eventually he passed away in illness. If you look back at the history of American (or even non-American) music: Charles Ives was in insurance, George Gershwin was a pianist, Aaron Copland was a conductor. If there's any way you can be involved in the practical realities of music, do it. . . .

[I was writing] student works. Basically when I was at Juilliard what I was doing was small imitations of Bartók Quartets 3, 4, and 5 (I learned the arch form from Bartók) and early Webern (like the string quartet pieces). I remember going into Vincent Persichetti, who was a great teacher, and saying, "Mr. Persichetti, I'm writing music I know is harmonic, but I can't put in the numbers. Could you help me?" And he could. He was wonderful. He said, "Well, you can't put in the numbers, but you can put in several possible numbers!" He was wonderful [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 17, 12].

Reich studied in New York from 1957 to 1958 with jazz composer Hall Overton, and from 1958 to 1961 with Vincent Persichetti and William Bergsma at Juilliard. He credits Overton and Persichetti with being his finest teachers. While Juilliard may have taught him (among many other things) to be suspicious of the academy, the institution certainly provided valuable peers.

[Philip Glass and I] were not that friendly at Juilliard.  
...

Arthur [Murphy] was my closest friend. Incredible musician -- he's a whole story unto himself [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 14].

During this time, the composer-percussionist met Philip Glass, and Arthur Murphy, "who had the best ear at Juilliard" and who would later be a member of Steve Reich and Musicians. The native New Yorker became interested in the poetry of Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and William Carlos Williams but found difficulty setting their texts. While West Coast crony Terry Riley would set the former poet within the decade, more than 20 years would pass before Reich himself would take up the latter in *The Desert Music*.

A laconically-appelated *Music for String Orchestra* (New York, May 1961) was Reich's final piece at Juilliard, a serial work with tonal tendencies -- significantly, no inversions, retrogrades or transpositions... merely repetition. It also became his valedictory piece for East Coast residency, as the next few years would find the composer in Northern California for the crucial turning point in his career.

[Milhaud was] a kind man, a nice man [who taught me] less than zero [Steve Reich in Edward Strickland, *Minimalism*, 182].

[I studied with] Milhaud. This was 1962 and '63. He was very old. He was very sick. The impression I had was that he was lonely, and he wanted company, and that was certainly understandable. He was really mostly reminiscing, and he was mostly reminiscing about Satie. You got the feeling he almost wished he had been Satie. He talked about *Furniture Music* as being one of the great moments of his life. Very moving, in a way.

I think once we went through *Boris Godunov* and he said how Rimsky had mucked it up. O.K., you know... He was very old. People who studied with Milhaud three or four or five years earlier were [getting something else] [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 12].

Reich left New York to pursue a master's degree at Mills College, where he studied with Darius Milhaud and Luciano Berio. It was the latter who at least encouraged the young composer's tonal tendencies.

When I was writing twelve-tone music, interestingly, the only way I could deal with it was not to transpose the row or invert the row or retrograde the row but to repeat the row over and over again, so I could sneak some harmony in there. At Mills, Berio would say to me. "If you want to write tonal music, go write tonal music." The experience of writing twelve-tone music was an important and valuable one for me in that it showed me what I had to do -- which as to stop writing it [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 39].

[A]t that point, serial music was dominating the concert world. You had to have an opinion, you had to have knowledge, you had to take a stand. And I'm glad that I studied it, but it wasn't me. Nevertheless, it was good to be right there at ground zero with Luciano Berio. . . .

I had my way of dealing with the 12-tone row, which is: don't invert it, don't retrograde it, don't transpose it -- repeat it! And you'll sneak some harmony in the back door. And he saw that, and he said: "If you want to be tonal, be tonal." And I said, "That's what I'm trying to do." But also, to be fair, these were the days when Berio had just done *Homaggio a Joyce* and he was playing it for us with excitement, and was doing *Visage* with Cathy Berberian. Hearing that was a big encouragement to work with speech, as opposed to all the sine-wave generators. Berio is going to do a concert next fall at Carnegie Recital Hall in that series that Ellen Taaffe Zwilich put together that I was on last year. And he's asked me to put a piece of mine in his program, so we've had reconciliation. He's a great composer and I have enormous respect for him. We are very far apart, but we've reached a rapprochement, which is good [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 14].

Berio's renegade heard John Coltrane at least 50 times over the course of this San Francisco Bay Area stint.

[A]t night I went to hear John Coltrane, who picks up his saxophone and PLAYS and the music comes OUT. It was almost a moral dilemma. It would've been almost immoral not to follow in Coltrane's direction because of the musical honesty and authenticity involved. I became really wrapped up in Coltrane during his period of modal jazz

. . . Particularly "My Favorite Things" and "Africa / Brass." A lot of music is made over one or two harmonies. "Africa / Brass" has a whole side in F. "What's the change, man?" "F." "I mean, what's the change?" "F!" [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 38-39].

Student Reich supported his studies with a graduate assistantship, as well as by teaching rock'n'roll to Hunter's Point ghetto children.

. . . teaching [black kids] their own music . . . kind of a funny position to be in [Steve Reich in Strickland, *Minimalism*, 185].

At this time, he began working with a monaural Wollensak tape recorder and made his first forays into ethnomusicology. These were possible thanks to a trip taken with Berio and Reich's own enthusiasms for African-American music. The younger composer tracked down A.M. Jones's *Studies in African Music*, on recommendation from instructor Gunther Schuller during a composition seminar at Santa Barbara in 1963. The book showed that much African music consists of repeating patterns in 12/8 meter, most often with staggered downbeats.

I can't imagine, I CAN'T IMAGINE getting into African Music if I hadn't heard jazz [Steve Reich in Suzuki, 273].

My first discovery of non-Western music was at the time when I was working with tape loops for the first time in 1962-63 with a Wollensak. . . .

I had one in New York (in 1964 I later got one from Terry [Riley], the famous Concertone recorder). I was with Berio in the spring of '62. We went down to Ojai. They were having these conferences with the people of the day, and the people of the day were Gunther Schuller and Milton Babbitt and Lukas Foss. And Schuller was writing his *History of Early Jazz* at that time and he said, "By the way, I have discovered the first book of accurate scores of West African drumming." I said, "Mr. Schuller, what is the name of that book?" *Studies in African Music*. I went back up to the Berkeley library and took it out. I ordered it from Oxford University Press, which was a big commitment in those days. Basically what I saw was repeating patterns in 12/8 or subdivisions of 12/8 superimposed so that their downbeats do not coincide. This was before I met Terry. I had the ingredients: African music, Coltrane, tape loops, and Jr. Walker [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 16].

[A.M. Jones's] transcriptions made an enormous impression on me at the time -- along with Coltrane and Terry Riley -- particularly the superimposition without coinciding downbeats of regular repeating patterns of varied lengths in what he notated as 12/8. I'd heard African music, but how it was put together I'd had no idea. So it was a very potent piece of information, especially for someone fooling around with tape loops, which I began to envision as little mechanized Africans [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 38].

Seeing it in notation definitely was a much greater influence than hearing it [Steve Reich in Suzuki, 226].

Reich then formed a jazz- and Stockhausen- influenced improvisation group which included saxophonist Jon Gibson (who would also work with Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and La Monte Young), trumpeter Phil Lesh (who would become the Grateful Dead's bassist) keyboardist Tom Constanten (who would also join the Dead briefly, after Pigpen's death), violinist George Rey (who would become known as a philosopher), and cellist Gwen Watson. This group became associated with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, where Reich produced the incidental music for a production of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1963), in collaboration with artist William Wiley and others. The piece is scored for clarinet, strummed violin, and kazoo -- the latter played through a PG&E traffic cone megaphone.

Jon Gibson became a member of Steve Reich and Musicians, left the group upon the great split between the composer and Phillip Glass, and has recorded Reich's music in the recent past. Reich also maintains a connection to Lesh to the present day.

[T]hat wonderful festival that Michael [Tilson Thomas] put on [in 1996], where Phil [Lesh] and I saw each other. When they played the Ives [*Holidays Symphony*], Lesh and I were crying on each other's shoulders [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 16].

Reich's master's thesis was *Four Pieces for Trumpet, Alto Saxophone, Piano, Bass, and Drums* (1963) -- significantly a third-stream dodecaphonic composition for jazz combo, featuring Jon Gibson as altoman. The work proved the futility of 12-tone writing for its composer.

. . . weird licks. . . [*Pitch Charts* is] a really low-level piece I would choose to forget [Steve Reich in Strickland, *Minimalism*, 184].

After graduating from Mills in June of 1963, Reich pursued cab-driving rather than college teaching and wrote *Pitch Charts* (November 1963), a graphically-notated piece for his improvisation group, which shows open form, modular construction, repetition, unfolding, and the inspiration of jazz.

The *Pitch Charts* were . . . out of a Berio piece, *Tempi Concertati*, that had little boxes and the players improvise on them. I said, "I'm just taking the boxes!" [laughs] And box one for me was C and D-flat and you would slowly build up to a row. And the idea was, any player can play any note in any octave in the box, and when any player moves to the next box, you join them, until you finally got all twelve notes. Well, this was not too fruitful, but what happened was that I began to hear the same notes on top of themselves and then the multiple pianos and then tape loops and Jones's book on African music, and John Coltrane and Jr. Walker, and then Terry came along. A lot of things in the air then [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 16].

*Pitch Charts* was given with Tom Constanten and Phil Lesh at the San Francisco Mime Troupe in early fall of 1964, the night Terry Riley walked out.

The thing I heard was improvisation, but very banging around and noisy. It wasn't anything like what he did after he met me [Terry Riley in Strickland, *American Composers*, 114].

To get to the authenticity of American speech, which had impressed me so much in the work of William Carlos Williams, I thought, why not use tape? That doesn't lie. So I began to fool around with recorded speech. Not oscillators, not weird sounds. Speech. To me the most important pieces of that period of electronic tape music, which is largely over now, were *Gesang der Jünglinge* by Stockhausen, Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting in a Room*, and, if you like them, my tape pieces [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 40].

Reich's first tape piece was *The Plastic Haircut* (January 1963), a live/animated film by Robert Nelson, in collaboration with R.G. Davis, Robert Hudson, and William T. Wiley. The composition utilizes a sportscaster's found text (an old LP *The Greatest Moments in Sports*) subjected to tape splicing and loops. The gradual progression from the comprehensible to the unintelligible foreshadows *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*.

I'd record a bit, stop the tape, move the needle, and then start taping again, so there was hardly any splicing. [The recording] turned into noise through over-dubbing with loops, rather like a surrealist rondo [Steve Reich in Nyman, "Steve Reich"].

*Music for Piano and Tape, or Three or More Pianos* . . . was 1964 and it was basically the result of hearing Stockhausen imitate Morty Feldman. There's a piece of Stockhausen called *Refrain*. I heard *Refrain* and thought, "Wow, that's really beautiful." Sort of avant-garde George Shearing! [laughs] So I wrote a piece that had nine chords in a cycle -- sort of jazz changes. And the chords were between Morty Feldman and Bill Evans. I played it in the Mime Troop as part of one of these events with Phil Lesh. I had myself recorded on two tracks and I would play live piano against it (in those days "three pianos" was a fantasy, so it was strictly for tape). That piece had timbre over timbre and note over note. But it didn't have the rhythmic patterns, and that came later from Terry [Riley] [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 16].

*Music for Three Pianos or Piano and Tape* (February, 1964), while having the titular ring of later works, shows many of the tendencies of *Pitch Charts*, but was additionally influenced in harmonic content by Stockhausen's *Refrain*, and the work of Morton Feldman and jazz pianist Bill Evans. *Three Pianos* was definitely *Piano and Tape* when heard at the San Francisco Tape Music Center on January 27, 1965, with other Reichian tape works. The cyclical chordal organization of this *Music* would ultimately return in others, including *Music for Eighteen Musicians* and *The Desert Music*.

[Wool Street in Bernal Heights was] a wacko blue-collar area with seedy undertones [Strickland, *Minimalism*, 186].

Reich acquired a Sony 770 tape recorder sometime in 1964, then state-of-the-art, and a Uher portable model -- both on installment and co-signed with Phil Lesh, who was then working at the post office. *Livelihood* (November 1964) is a musique concrete collage based on the sounds of passengers and the streets of San Francisco, recorded in Reich's bugged cab -- a three-minute assemblage of the door-slams and daily crises of his fares.

*Livelihood* was heard at the San Francisco Tape Music Center on January 27, 1965, along with *Music for Three or More Pianos, or Piano and Tape* and *It's Gonna Rain* (1965).

I thought [*Livelihood*] was destroyed, but Larry Polansky tells me it's still lurking somewhere in the basement at Mills. If you want a copy, you can probably get a copy. It has its moments. It's only three minutes long! [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation"].

The premiere of Terry Riley's *In C*, in which Reich and saxophonist Jon Gibson participated, was held on November 1, 1964, at the San Francisco Tape Music Center.

Definitely impressed him. In *C* was [Steve's] big entrance into this whole world, just like it was for me when I met La Monte [Terry Riley in Strickland, *American Composers*, 114].

I was working on many tape pieces in 1964 as well as doing *In C*. These pieces all were exploring the use of simultaneous repetition of the same patterns. Using two tape recorders I would sometimes make loops of identical information and let them run together in all kinds of relationships. Steve, who was often in my studio in these days used this as the basis for his phase pieces which came later. . . . I think it would be correct to say that although phasing most definitely occurs in my work first, he accurately labeled it and used it as a strict musical process [Terry Riley in Suzuki, "Minimal Music," 449].

*Oh Dem Watermelons* (1965) is a five-part canon, based on the ending of Steven Foster's "Massa's in De Cold Cold Ground." It is scored for three voices and piano, and was used in a quick-cut film of the same title by Robert Nelson. The film was presented as an illustration of racial stereotypes and included images of watermelons, Superman, and a naked woman.

*It's Gonna Rain*, right. He was driving a cab then. He played me the fragments, and then he started making a piece out of it. The first thing he tried before he heard what I was doing was sort of a collage piece. It's funny that if you listen to Brother Walter and hear, "It's gonna RAIN! It's gonna RAIN!" it's like the first two notes of "In C." It's C and E. I don't know if it's C and E but it's major thirds.

Not only that, but I'd made pieces with words and tape loops before that. And when you play two tape loops on the same machine they don't play at the same speed. What Steve did, because he's very methodical and clean in his work, was to make the phasing work very gradually and to make a process out of it. I made the tapes go backwards, forwards...it was fun, very funky. So I think his contribution was to clean all these things up and make kind of a method out of it, but what's important here is my invention of the form built solely out of repeating modules. When two identical modules are played simultaneously by either tape machines or live performers, imperfections in speed or pitch result in "phasing." I introduced the process into music composition; Steve correctly labeled it [Terry Riley in Strickland, *American Composers*, 114].

Reich's first mature work, most important voice/tape piece, and stylistic foundation was *It's Gonna Rain* (January 1965), originally entitled *It's Gonna Rain or Meet Brother Walter in Union Square after Listening to Terry Riley* and completed not three months after the premiere of *In C*.

In *C* took these various strands -- tape loops, African music, John Coltrane -- and tied them all together. Undoubtedly this was the trigger for *It's Gonna Rain*, which was done in January '65. I started it earlier, while we were rehearsing *In C*, when a filmmaker friend said, "Come on, you've got to come down to Union Square and hear this preacher!" [Steve Reich in Strickland, *American Composers*, 41].

*It's Gonna Rain* was created from an African-American street preacher's sermon, recorded in San Francisco's Union Square along with the ambient sounds of pigeons and traffic.

Later at home I started playing with tape loops of his voice and, by accident, discovered the process of letting two identical loops go gradually out of phase with each other [Steve Reich, notes to *Steve Reich: Early Works*].

The out-of-phase patterns result from the slight difference in tape speed manifested by different machines, and also the direct manipulation of one machine, against a constant other, by slightly slowing the movement of one reel via judicious use of a thumb.

In the first part of the piece the two loops are lined up in unison, gradually move completely out of phase with each other, and then slowly move back to unison [Steve Reich, notes to *Steve Reich: Early Works*].

Billed by its composer as the first "phase piece" in music history, the first section is reputed to be generated entirely by the differences between two tape players playing identical loops at slightly different speeds. Amazingly enough, it comes off sounding like intuitive manipulations of the title phrase, spoken rather "It's gon' rain," to the approximate pitches E D F#, the latter two forming the major third noted by Terry Riley. The "rain" -- highest, most accented and intense pitch -- is heard as an entity distinct from the descending "It's gon." These two units sound in a variety of configurations, eventually crossing and clashing in doubled and cut-shot words.

The replicated phonemes are the result of close contrapuntal phase overlay...closer counterpoint, perhaps, than ever heretofore had been heard. Background street noise in repetition results in a rhythmic, percussive underlay -- a street rap accompaniment before its time.

Steve Reich. *It's Gonna Rain*. Section One. Approximate Text Relations, Each Phrase Repeated Many Times.

It's gon rain  
It's gon  
It's gon r  
It's gon rain  
rain  
It's gon r  
It's gon  
It's gon r  
It's gon rain  
It's g rain  
It's rain  
rain  
It's gon rain  
It's gon r  
It's gon  
It's gon rain  
It's gon rain rain  
It's It's gon gon rain rain

In the second part, two much longer loops gradually begin to go out of phase with each other. This two-voice relationship is then doubled to four with two voices going out of phase with the other two. Finally the process moves to eight voices and the effect is a kind of controlled chaos, which may be appropriate to the subject matter -- the end of the world [Steve Reich, notes to *Steve Reich: Early Works*].

The second section is one of assembled splices, allowed to run its tape-phase course as outlined above with no further manipulation. Reich's old collage and new phasing techniques meet here. The text splices ten short vocal phrases together to form a jumbled parody sermon...

Had to see 'im Couldn't open the door Lord Lord  
They cried Could ya just open the door Couldn't open  
the door Well sure enough Alleluia Glory to God  
God

...which is then summarily obliterated into noise via the use of multiple phase overlaps -- where the audible difference between the two tape machines is recorded, and then two tapes of the resultant music are set up as the new loop to be re-recorded, and so on

Union Square ambient sound seems to form an upward pitch sweep which intensifies the nightmarish atmosphere. Reich's phasing is ontology in motion -- God sets up the clockwork of the universe, and then leaves -- the metronomes are left to do their own thing. Section 2 is atypical of Reich's later phasing pieces only in the relatively extensive length of the loop. Multiple resulting voices sweep over vast glissandi of cacophony, no longer heard as discrete words.

From here, Reich was able to formulate an aesthetic credo of "Music as a Gradual Process."

I do not mean the process of composition, but rather pieces of music that are, literally, processes.

. . . I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music.

To facilitate close detailed listening, a musical process should happen extremely gradually.

. . . once the process is set up and loaded, it runs by itself. . . .

. . . By running this material through this process, I completely control all that results, but also . . . accept all that results without changes.

John Cage has used processes and has certainly accepted their results, but the processes he used were compositional ones that could not be heard when the piece was performed. . . .

What I'm interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing. . . .

James Tenney said in conversation, "then the composer isn't privy to anything." . . .

By "gradual" I mean extremely gradual; a process happening so slowly . . . that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch. . . [Reich, *Writings About Music*].

*It's Gonna Rain* was premiered on January 27, 1965, at the San Francisco Tape Music Center, heard along with *Music for Three or More Pianos, or Piano and Tape* and *Livelihood*. Incredibly enough, the second, more thoroughgoing and frightening process-music section of *Rain* was not played at this first public hearing.

Every . . . piece of mine has some aesthetic decision in it. . . . Even in *It's Gonna Rain* where you have the "pure" process, yes there's a pure process, but how long does it take? That's an aesthetic decision [Steve Reich in Nyman, "Steve Reich," 301].

*It's Gonna Rain* was issued by Columbia Masterworks *Steve Reich: Live/Electric Music* (1969), with *Violin Phase*, and so had less impact than the later-composed *Come Out*, which had been distributed two years earlier on Odyssey's anthology *New Sounds in Electronic Music* (1967), and also featured music by Pauline Oliveros. *Rain* has been reissued as part of *Steve Reich: Early Works* (Elektra Nonesuch, 1987, with *Come Out*, *Piano Phase*, and *Clapping Music*) and the vast ten-CD retrospective *Steve Reich: Works, 1965-1995* (Nonesuch, 1997). It is clearly the earliest work in the Reichian canon.

In *It's Gonna Rain* the post-aleatory process is as important as the product -- the process IS the product. Chance elements are those of the performance/production situation, and the initial uncertainty of the result. The piece deals with the notion of differing steady pulses, reduced -- almost absent -- pitch relationships, and the technologies of amplification and recording. Reich remains keenly aware of the significance of each of his pieces in each stage of his artistic development and their place in MUSIC HISTORY.

*It's Gonna Rain* is the first piece ever to use the process of gradually shifting phase relations between two or more identical repeating patterns [Steve Reich, notes to *Steve Reich: Early Works*].

At the same time *It's Gonna Rain* shows itself as an early example of Reich's politically engagements which would be made more manifest later in his career. This work is not just about Noah and The Phasing, but is at once a statement of contemporary angst.

I never would have thought [of myself as politically engaged at that time]. . . . But remember, *It's Gonna Rain* is 1965 and I was living in San Francisco in 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Everyone thought it might be the end of the world. That was Topic Number One. . . . [*It's Gonna Rain* was recorded right in front of the Saint Francis Hotel. . . . In some ways [an appropriate place for a message of destruction] [Steve Reich in Alburger, "A Conversation," 11].

After a stint working at the post office, Steve Reich returned to New York in September 1965. He did not work with La Monte Young and Terry Riley (who had returned to New York about a month after Reich), due to artistic differences.

There was definitely strain. Terry felt that I was ripping him off, just the way I felt later that Phil [Glass] was ripping me off. We saw each other, but it was not comfortable [Steve Reich in Strickland, *Minimalism*, 194].

I'm not a conceptual artist because the concept does not necessarily precede the work [Steve Reich in Nyman, "Steve Reich," 300].

[*Come Out* was a] refinement [of the] down-and-dirty [*It's Gonna Rain*] [Steve Reich in Strickland, *Minimalism*, 190].

*Come Out* (1966) -- a second, purer, and more severe voice-tape phase -- was created as a benefit for the retrial of the Harlem Six. The voice is that of Daniel Hamm, one of the six who had been convicted of murdering a female Jewish candy-store owner during the Harlem Riots of 1964. Reich was approached by Truman Nelson, who asked him to edit ten hours of tape for a benefit.

I said, well, it's not something I do, but let me listen to it. So, out of all this tape this one phrase leapt out [in sing-song] "Come out, to show them," and I said, "That's the one" [Steve Reich in an interview on KPFA Berkeley].

The Six had been beaten by the police in Harlem's 28th precinct station after their arrest, and only those visibly bleeding were about to be taken to the hospital.

I had to, like, open the bruise up, and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them.

After the opening eight-second statement, the phrase "come out to show them" is subject to a twelve and three-quarter minute phase -- eight tracks of the recording diverging more and more into chaos.

*Come Out* is composed of a single loop recorded on both channels. First the loop is in unison with itself. As it begins to go out of phase a slowly increasing reverberation is heard. This gradually passes into a canon or round for two voices, then four voices and finally eight [Steve Reich, notes to *Steve Reich: Early Works*].

The process was generated on two tape recorders out of phase with one another. This resultant tape, duplicated and phased with itself, was again recorded for a total of four voices. The four-voice tape underwent the same process, resulting in the eight-track work.

The premiere of *Come Out* took place at Town Hall in April 1966 as the hat was passed. It achieved its political goal: Hamm and four others were acquitted. Hamm went on to Columbia University instead of jail.

The tape was also heard in concert with *Four Organs*, *Pendulum Music*, *Phase Patterns*, and *Reed Phase* at the Walker Arts Center in May of 1970.

*Come Out* became very well known due to its wide distribution on the *Odyssey* album (Columbia Masterworks) *New Sounds in Electronic Music* (December 1967), which also featured music by Pauline Oliveros. The release pre-dated that of *In C* by one year and has been reissued as part of *Steve Reich: Early Works* (Elektra Nonesuch, 1987), with *It's Gonna Rain*, *Piano Phase*, and *Clapping Music*. *Come Out* has also been reissued as part of the ten-CD retrospective *Steve Reich: Works, 1965-1995* (Nonesuch, 1997).

While these tape-phases of black charismatics show Reich's interest in cultural-socio-political concerns, the voices are handled as material qua material, disembodied texts to be manipulated, in almost as impersonal a fashion as a swinging microphone.

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# Concert Reviews

## Standing Ovation Room

### MARK ALBURGER

Alasdair Neale conducts the Marin Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10* and Alexander Aroutounian's *Trumpet Concerto*. February 8, Marin Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

It's getting more difficult to park and more difficult to find a seat at the Veterans Auditorium for the Marin Symphony, and this is a very good thing. Indeed, it's almost becoming SORO -- "Standing Ovation Room Only" -- as yet again Music Director Alasdair Neale and company brought the audience to its feet twice on February 8.

Neale gave us a reading of Dmitri Shostakovich's great *Symphony No. 10* that was engaging, well-nigh gripping at every turn. And this is no small feat, because this is no small work. Shostakovich makes great demands on the listener. He requires us to follow his exceedingly well-wrought lines of argument from moody exposition to giddy, ironic-sardonic conclusion. This is music of Siberian sweep and Revolutionary rapture -- or is it Counter-revolutionary commotion? Probably -- since not-completely-conclusive evidence (Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, et. al.) points to Shostakovich as not the loyal Soviet citizen, but as a secret seer stabbing out against the oppressions of totalitarianism. When the music evolves from its grim-yet-peaceful basses to its voluptuous violins one wonders why this music is not on the top of everyone's list, but then the thought kicks in: "Oh, yes. Attention span." There's not a note wasted, perhaps, but it's a generous banquet all the same. Shostakovich was one of the masters of symphonic forms in any century, and probably the premiere symphonies of the last century (Ralph Vaughan Williams was in his league, but is not heard sufficiently in this country these days), picking up the baton from Gustav Mahler). There are immediate joys, if they can be called such. Thrills is better. The hair-raising clip of the second movement has been said to be Shostakovich's satanic Stalin portrait, and the composer's use of a signature *soggetta cavato* ("carved subject") on his own initials (the old transliteration D. SCH., "S" being the German "Es," i.e. Eb, and "H" as the again Teutonic B-natural) -- thumbing his nose at authority -- is well known. And the climaxes of each movement... Let's just say that a certain UCLA sexual-politics musicologist is right on the money.

There were other emotional releases as well. Trumpet virtuoso Sergei Nakariakov astounded in a not-so-astounding Trumpet Concerto by Alexander Aroutounian. Nakariakov shone even more in the encore bon-bon that followed, with voicings that evoked a doublemint of bugles ("two, two, two horns in one"), one high, one low. It was almost enough to make a body forget the cloyingly simple harmonic underpinning that rather made a garage-band rock tune sound complex

## Other Minds Other Contexts

### MARK ALBURGER

Other Minds Festival. March 4, Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, CA. Through March 6.

In its tenth anniversary festival (March 4-6, Yerba Buena Center), Other Minds continues to be an alternative new-music festival of international importance. While the great founding composer-director Charles Amirkhanean describes it as "dedicated to the encouragement and propagation of contemporary music in all of its forms," one of the only assumptions that can be fairly made is that its concerts are less likely feature a mid-to-large size ensembles reading sheet music, led by conductors.

Instead the festival is often about music on the borders, making cross-cultural connections with a variety of world musics in post-minimal contexts. This was certainly true in the first half of March 5's concert with *Ashtayama - Song of the Hours* (1998) -- a collaboration by vocalist Amelia Cuni, electronics wizard Werner Durand, and director-projectionist Uli Sigg. The foundation was Cuni's 10-year study of Indian Dhrupad singing. Durand's layering of Cuni's material, over which she continued to add live realizations, made for stunning effects, augmented by the singer-dancer's own graceful movements and Sigg's alarmingly beautiful visuals. This work had more possible endings than the most recent *Lord of the Rings* movie, in its eight "Yamas," from "sunrise" to "deep night," and only the returning image of a light sphere (after fiery images of cremation and explosions, which elicited audible gasps from the audience) signaled visually, if not musically, a ternary closure.

From here it was a quick trip to more traditional electronic chamber music in Mark Gray's edgy *Sands of Time* (2004) for cello and live electronic processing, from local star Joan Jeanrenaud and the composer. After a very aggressive loopy opening, a contrasting angular plangent lyricism lead to a return to animation, with a nice counterpoint of ascending scalar passages.

The rest of the concert was given over to accordion virtuoso Stefan Hussong, who performed an almost seamless set that featured traditional 10th-century Gagaku *Banshiki no Choshi*, two famous Cage works (*Dream* and *In a Landscape*, both from 1948), Keiko Harad's *Bone+* (1999) and Adriana Holszky's *High Way for One Accordion Solo* (2000). The Gagaku selection could have been written yesterday, with its series of poseur sustains that could do a devotee of La Monte Young or Morton Feldman proud. The Harad and Holszky works seemingly talked across a Cageian divide to one another, in their series of fits and starts, wheezes and wanderings, squeezes and skirmishes.

But it was the Cage selections in all their simplicity that most lingered, certainly due in part to the arresting choreography and costuming of stilt-dancer Pamela Wunderlich. Yes, stilt dancer. Wunderlich appeared as a lonely elongated refugee from an Alberto Giacometti sculpture and dizzied her way slowly across the dim stage to Cage's empty Zen-like, shredded romantic, "proto-minimalist" strains. Her arm extensions writhed like a couple of robotic space serpents. Cage's music on accordion (originally written for piano) seemed tailor-made for all of this.

The program the following evening (March 6) continued along similar Other Minds lines established over the years. Joan Jeanrenaud returned in her own *Hommage* (2004) to Hamza El Din, Terry Riley, and Larry Ochs, which was even more Reichianly cyclic than Gray's work, but in overall more languid contexts. Jeanrenaud found poignant early music connections in her dangerous and lovely high-range vocalises, which found her going beyond the fingerboard to regions unknown.

Music-concrete creator Francis Dhomont appeared amidst the audience for two multi-speakered electronic essays *Les moirures du temps* (*The shimmering ripples of time*) (1999/2001) and *Phonurgie* from *Cycle du son* (1998), and ripples were the order of the evening in shimmering noises that bounced from every corner of the darkened theatre, continuing along august, if very steady, paths established by such pioneers as Pierre Schaffer and Edgar Varèse.

The "and now for something completely different" for the night was bassist Alex Blake and his Quintet, beginning with an impressive solo improv from the bandleader, in frenetic slap pizzicato and crooning wordless falsetto vocals of the like that extend back to the classic early days of bebop. The most distinctive features of Blake's Quintet were the bassist's prominence (center stage) and a conga player in addition to the usual drummer. This second percussionist, Neil Clarke (who was billed on "tablas" which were not apparent) held forth with an electrifying display of Afro-Latino drumming and vocals that rang true. Beyond Blake's second solo as electric bassist, much of the set was given over to fairly straight ahead jazz exercises -- head tune / series of improvised solos / head tune -- that caused a transformation of the audience into a club of hooters and hollerers, with a dissenting minority that hit the door on a fairly regular basis as a small but steady stream of nay-sayers.

But hey, it's all part of the boundaries and edges. Amirkhanian took the audience to the Justice League nightclub a while back for a DJ night, so one continues to be amused and surprised by the various twists and turns that is Other Minds.

## ...Steve Reich: Early Works...

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# Calendar

April 1

San Francisco Symphony in Béla Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* and Sergei Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 1*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

April 2

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and Chanticleer in Iannis Xenakis's *Medea Senecae*, Giacinto Scelsi's *Three Sacred Songs*, Pablo Ortiz's *Oscuro*, and a new work by Betty Olivero. First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA.

April 3

Harriet March Page directs excerpts from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*. Holy Names College, Oakland, CA.

*Flutes CUBE'd*, with music of Charles Ives, Toru Takemitsu, Harvey Sollberger, Ricardo Szpilman, Otto Luening, Amy Williams, and Janice Misurell-Mitchell Grace Place, Chicago, IL

April 4

David Bithell in a concert of trumpet, electronics, and performance art. Campbell Recital Hall, Stanford University, CA.

April 7

California EAR Unit. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

*ALEA II*. Christopher Jones's *Erasing de Kooning* and Hans Thomalla's *Wild Thing*. Campbell Recital Hall, Stanford University, CA.

April 8

*Abstracted Landscapes: John Luther Adams / Claire Seidl*. Rosenberg + Kaufman Fine Art, New York, NY.

April 9

Robert Ashley's *Celestial Excursions*. The Kitchen, New York, NY. Through April 12.

April 12

Penderecki String Quartet in Béla Bartók's *String Quartet No. 1* and *No. 2*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

April 13

Penderecki String Quartet in Béla Bartók's *String Quartet No. 3* and *No. 4*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

Pacific Mozart Ensemble in music of Anne Callaway, Kurt Erickson, Vivian Fung, Philip Glass, David Lang, Frank La Rocca, Jeffrey Miller, and Meredith Monk. Green Room, War Memorial Building, San Francisco, CA.

April 14

Penderecki String Quartet in Béla Bartók's *String Quartet No. 5* and *No. 6*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

Saint Lawrence String Quartet in Mark Applebaum's *20*. Dinkelspiel Auditorium, Stanford University, CA.

April 17

San Francisco Symphony in Sergei Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 6* and Maurice Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*. Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

*TV Dinner No. 16: Robert Ashley*, with John Rockwell. The Kitchen, New York, NY.

April 26

Orchestra 2001 in Andrea Clearfield's *The Long Bright* and P.D.Q. Bach [Peter Schickele]'s *Oedipus Tex* and *The Art of the Ground Round*. Kimmel Center, Philadelphia, PA.

April 28

Xtet. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

April 30

*American Songbook*, with music of John Harbison, Lita Grier, Marilyn Shrude, Patricia Morehead, and Lawrence Axelrod. Sherwood Conservatory of Music, Chicago, IL.

# Chronicle

February 4

Daedalus Quartet in Gyorgy Kurtag's *Officium Breve in Memoriam Andrae Szervanszky*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

February 11

A Tribute to Robert Helps. Weill Recital Hall, New York, NY.

February 14

Copland's *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

*Meredith Monk Marathon*, featuring *Atlas*, *The Games*, *Songs from the Hill*, *Three Heavens and Hells*, *Light Songs*, and *Night from Politics of Quiet*. Mills College, Oakland, CA.

February 18

Alasdair Neale conducts the Marin Symphony in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 10* and Alexander Aroutounian's *Trumpet Concerto*. February 8, Marin Veterans Auditorium, San Rafael, CA.

Tokyo String Quartet, with pianist Joan Panetti, in her *In Dark Time, the Eye Begins to See*. Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY. Panetti's work . . . seemed like a craggy outcropping between a pair of gently rolling hills [by Mozart and Beethoven] . . . a 30-minute burst of contemporary anxiety, couched in a chromatic language that at times evoked Schoenberg' early, pre-Serial style. The piano and string writing was perfectly ballanced" [Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*, 2/20/04].

February 21

Death of Bart Howard [b. Howard Joseph Gustafson, Burlington, IA, of stroke, at 88. Carmel, NY. Howard's signature song ['Fly Me to the Moon' was] originally titled 'In Other Words.' . . . 'I've always said it took me 20 years to find out how to write a song in 20 minutes,' Mr. Howard recalled in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1988. 'The song just fell out of me. One publisher wanted me to change the lyric to 'take me to the moon.' Had I done that I don't know where I'd be today. . . . The success of 'Fly Me to the Moon' made him so materially comfortable that he slowed down as a songwriter. . . . Mr. Howard's songwriting idol was always Cole Porter. 'Shortly after I arrived in New York my agent took me to meet him, and I played my paltry, dreadful little songs,' Mr. Howard said in the 1988 interview.

'But he told me I'd be successful once I learned to sing them myself'" [Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*, 2/23/04].

Orchestra 2001 in James Yannatos's *Prayers from the Ark*, Maurice Ravel's *Trois Poems de Stephane Mallarme*, and Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Trinity Center, Philadelphia, PA. Repeated February 22, Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

February 22

*George Rochberg: Music for Violin and Piano*, including *Rhapsody and Prayer* and *Caprice Variations*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

February 23

Parisi Quartet in music of Pedro Amaral, Emmanuel Nunes, and Gilbert Amy. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

February 29

DVC Orchestra in excerpts from Mark Alburger's *Camino Real*, Béla Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Ric Louchard's *North Beach*, Jan Pusina's *Pink Wind*, Darius Milhaud's *La Creation du Monde*, and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.