

**Writings on Music,  
1965–2000**

*Steve Reich,  
Editor*

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

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# Writings on Music

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1965–2000

STEVE REICH

Edited with an Introduction  
by Paul Hillier

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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a spouse . . .  
associated in a common activity . . .  
on the same side in a game or sport . . .  
companion in a dance

This book is dedicated to Beryl Korot,  
my partner in all senses of the word.

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

In the introduction to my earlier *Writings about Music* in 1974 I wrote, “You want to hear music that moves you, and if you don’t, then you’re not really very curious to find out how it was put together.” I would stress that again today. Movements, be they serial, aleatoric or minimal, pass away rather quickly, and what we are left with is a small number of musical compositions that musicians want to play and audiences want to hear. I also wrote in 1974, “Books by composers, including this one, are probably of most interest to those already interested in the composer’s music.” I believe this is still true.

One of the essays from that early book was “Music as a Gradual Process.” It seems a lot of younger musicians have read this. I was recently in residence at Dartmouth College, and after playing a tape of my recent (1999) *Triple Quartet* for a composition class, one of the students asked how that piece was an example of music as a gradual process. I told him it was most certainly *not* an example of a gradual process. I explained to him, as I have to several others over the years, that from as early as 1973, if not earlier, I have tried to expand and develop my musical vocabulary. I think anyone who listens first to say, *Piano Phase* (1967) and, then to, perhaps, *Tehillim* (1981) might wonder if the same composer wrote both pieces. My essay written in 1968 was an excellent description of the way I wrote music *up to* 1968. It was a piece of music theory describing, as all music theory does, the past. As Walter Piston says in the introduction to his *Harmony* textbook: “theory must follow practice . . . theory is not a set of directions for composing music . . . It tells not how music will be written in the future, but how music has been written in the past.”<sup>1</sup> There were theories, when I was a music student in the late 1950s and early ’60s, coming from Boulez and others in Europe, and from Cage and others in America, that purported to tell one how they should compose and think about music. These theories were dutifully put into

1. Walter Piston—*Harmony*, W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 1978, Introduction to the First Edition (1941) p. xix.

practice by some for a while, but have now thankfully taken their places in the history of music theory. "Music as a Gradual Process" was not a manifesto for me, or anyone else's, musical future. Following manifestos seems profoundly uninteresting. By contrast, if you find a composer's music of interest, you may find the thinking he has done about that music of interest as well. You also may find it of interest to read how that thinking has developed over the years.

This collection of almost everything I have written since 1965 is arranged chronologically. This was Paul Hillier's idea and I believe it has proved to be a sound one. Whenever we diverged from it, the general train of thought became less clear. Readers can, of course, read whatever interests them, and in any order. Some of the essays are partly technical, most are not.

Paul Hillier is, of course, one of our finest singers and conductors of early music. It was my good fortune to have him take an interest in my music several years ago when he sometimes added *Clapping Music* to his performances of Dufay, Machaut, and others. He saw, quite correctly, some of the formal concerns that are common to my canonic practices and those of medieval and Renaissance music. We finally began corresponding, and in the early 1990s he moved to America and we discussed the idea of working together. This led to his conducting all the premiere performances of my first video opera collaboration with Beryl Korot, *The Cave*. He then had the idea of my setting a text for early music voices which led to *Proverb*, a piece dedicated to him. Finally, it was his idea to edit this collection of my writings. He has contributed not only the chronological ordering of materials, but careful editing of every essay as well as brief 'connective tissue' between essays. Beyond that, he has been a pleasure to work with and a constant source of good advice about every aspect of this book.

Paul brought this book to Maribeth Payne at Oxford University Press and I would like to thank her for setting the wheels in motion for its publication. Her assistant, Maureen Buja, was helpful with getting permissions for photos. Shortly after that, Maribeth left Oxford to take over music books at Norton and her assistant Maureen left also. Ellen Welch took over and was very helpful working with designers for the cover as well as editing text for the bookflaps. I want to particularly thank production editor Robert Milks and copyeditor Laura Lawrie, who did all the closely detailed work necessary to clarify just about everything in this book. It was a pleasure working with them.

I would also like to thank many people who, over the years, have been a source of inspiration, clarification and support. First, to all the members of my ensemble, and particularly to Russell Hartenberger, James Preiss, Bob Becker, Garry Kvistad, Nurit Tilles, Edmund Niemann, Tim Ferchen, Gary Schall, Jay Clayton, Leslie Scott and Virgil Blackwell many of whom were there in the early '70s and continue to this very day. More recently, I have also relied on Thad Wheeler, Frank Cassara, Cheryl Bensman Rowe, Marion Beckenstein, Phillip Bush, Elizabeth Lim Dutton, Todd Reynolds, Lois Martin, Scott Rawls, Jeanne Le Blanc, Steven Ehrenberg, Jeffrey Johnson, James Bassi and the wonderful British vocal group Synergy, founded by Micaela Haslam.

I have been fortunate to have worked with Bob Hurwitz at Nonesuch Records ever since 1984. In an industry not known for its interest in music except as a means for making money, Bob has managed to keep focused on the music he loves and, because his tastes are so wide-ranging, he has managed to keep Nonesuch profitable as well. Together with David Bither, Peter Clancy, Karina Beznicki, Debby Ferraro and Melanie Zessos they, together with my producer and long time friend Judith Sherman as well as our engineer John Kilgore have made recording, and everything associated with it, a pleasure.

My music publisher, Boosey and Hawkes, have consistently helped to facilitate performances of my music all over the world. While this is the purpose of any music publisher, anyone connected with the field knows that it is the rare publisher indeed who makes this a reality. I would like to thank Tony Fell, David Drew, Janis Susskind, Sylvia Goldstein, Linda Golding, David Huntley (in memoriam) Holly Mentzer, and Jenny Bilfield who, together with all their colleagues and staff, continue to work so effectively on behalf of my music.

My ensemble has performed throughout the world with the help of Andrew Rosner at Allied Artists in London. It has been my pleasure to have worked with him since the early 1970s and he continues to oversee all our activities in Europe. More recently, we have been fortunate to work with Elizabeth Sobol at IMG Artists in New York to represent us in all areas of the world outside of Europe. Still more recently, Howard Stokar has been managing all my individual activities in America.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my teachers William Austin (in memoriam), Hall Overton (in memoriam), Vincent Persichetti (in memoriam) and Luciano Berio.

In addition I would like to express my gratitude to photographer, patron and friend Betty Freeman and to many others including, Michael Tilson Thomas, Renée Levine, Sydney (in memoriam) & Frances Lewis, Ellis Freedman, James Kendrick, Ed Townsend, Harvey Lichtenstein, Karen Hopkins, Joe Melillo, Michael Nyman, Wolfgang Becker, Bill Colleran, A.M. Jones (in memoriam) and K. Robert Schwarz (in memoriam).

Finally I thank my wife, Beryl Korot and our son, Ezra. They have made it all possible.

### Author's Introduction to *Writings about Music* (1974)

Books by composers, including this one, are probably of most interest to those already interested in the composer's music.

Some of the essays in this book discuss the rhythmic structure of my music since rhythmic structure has a kind of universality that lends itself very naturally to analysis and explanation. Other aspects of the music, like pitch and timbre, while clearly of equal importance, are not mentioned as often because they are more subjective and, perhaps, less suited to explanations and analysis.

The choice of pitch and timbre in my music has always been intuitive. Even the

choice of rhythmic structure or system is finally intuitive. In fact, although there is always a system working itself out in my music, there would be no interest in the music if it were merely systematic. You want to hear music that moves you, and if you don't, then you're not really very curious to find out how it was put together. The truth is, musical intuition is at the rock bottom level of everything I've ever done.

Some of the essays, like *Gahu, a Dance of the Ewe Tribe in Ghana* and *The Phase Shifting Pulse Gate—Four Organs; An end to Electronics*, are partly technical. The others are generally not.

I would like to thank Kaspar Koenig<sup>1</sup> for suggesting I put together this collection in the first place. He and Ilka Schellenberg read all the material, offered useful suggestions, and then worked out the details of layout while I was in Halifax, and later in New York, during the summer and fall of 1973.

Steve Reich 3/74

1. Editor of *The Nova Scotia Series—Source Materials of the Contemporary Arts*, in which Reich's book appeared. Other books in the same series documented work by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and dancer Simone Forti.

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

This collection of writings by Steve Reich contains all the original essays and program notes from his earlier *Writings about Music* (Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1974), together with a great deal more material (including some interviews) from the intervening quarter-century. Some editorial changes have been made to reduce the instances of repetition and to clarify or indeed correct a few minor points. All of these alterations have been discussed with the composer and the resulting text in all details has been given his final approval. Nevertheless, the reader will find that certain ideas and turns of phrase do recur from time to time, and although the texts have been edited with this partly in mind, I have preferred to err on the side of inclusivity. If too much is taken out, smoothed over, or rationalized, then the distinctive tone of the composer's voice would be distorted.

It becomes clear, as we listen to his music or read his words, that Reich is one of those composers who moves steadily and logically from one work to the next. He holds certain views, is preoccupied with certain concepts and processes, which form the background of his life's work. What impresses is not the glittering variety of disparate moods and discoveries but rather the consistency of an unfolding aesthetic development that yields its own kind of variation and ultimately coheres and stands as a very forthright artistic statement. What also becomes clearer with time is the importance of his Jewish heritage, both as an ancient culture from which his life takes meaning and substance, and as a prism for viewing ongoing events.

In my introduction, I have given a short account of Reich's early life, which leads into the period of his first mature works and at that point is overtaken by the writings themselves. In the course of preparing this book, several people who read the manuscript asked that we extend the biographical account to cover the rest of his life. We have chosen not to do so, because in essence Reich's life since then has been the story of his works and the international tours with his ensemble (and others) to perform them. No doubt some account of that activity could be given, but it was felt to be neither necessary nor appropriate here. Instead, we have assembled a final contribution drawn from a series of conversations in which we

discuss his thoughts on composing, younger composers, and *Three Tales* (as we go to press still very much a work in progress).

It has been both a pleasure and an honor to work on this collection of writings and I am grateful to many people for their help and encouragement. Among them I should like particularly to mention Lena-Liis Kiesel, Beryl Korot, Ingram Marshall, and Dean Suzuki.

I have also drawn on two earlier collections of Reich's writings, one published in French: *Ecrits et Entretiens sur la Musique*, ed. Christian Bourgois (Paris, 1981), and one in Italian: *Reich*, ed. Enzo Restagno (Turin, 1994).

My biggest debt, of course, is to Steve Reich himself: for his patience with my tendency to work *adagio* (I don't think this word appears in any of his scores), for his concise and always generous response to my suggestions, and for the opportunity to get to know his music, which I already loved, in greater depth and perspective.

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# Writings on Music

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INTRODUCTION  
PAUL HILLIER

## Music

In the music of Steve Reich, we encounter one of the most radical renewals of musical language in recent times. Beginning in the mid-1960s with an austere reductive minimalism, Reich gradually built up a richly nuanced yet instantly recognizable sound, which has influenced a number of contemporary and younger composers without being directly imitated. Although the core of this sound was well established by the mid-1970s, it has continued to evolve and is still in the process of change and development.

But Reich is no revolutionary. His own influences lie all around us and are easily identified—Bartok, Stravinsky, Weill, postwar jazz (especially John Coltrane), African drumming, the Balinese gamelan, Perotin. Like many successful American composers, Reich has built a language that fuses the heightened discourse of serious music with strong elements of the vernacular. His particular strength lies in having done so in a style that is uniquely and recognizably his own. Reich's works constitute a steady evolution of style and technique, and take their own rightful place in the history of modern music, although at no point do they offer that shock to the system, that affront to normality, which we habitually associate with the new when it is “avant-garde”—except, that is, for a brief period of time in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In works such as *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966), *Piano Phase* and *Violin Phase* (1967), and *Four Organs* (1970), with their rigorous focus on

All quotes in this introduction, unless otherwise acknowledged, are taken from Restagno, 1994, an English typescript of the original interviews (with Enzo Restagno in New York, January 1994) having been given to me for this purpose by the composer. Here and elsewhere in the book small modifications and corrections to previously published material have been made, in consultation with the composer, without further acknowledgment.

process per se, unalleviated by harmonic variation of any kind, and unsoftened by any change of register or timbre, Reich contributed his most radical contribution to the nonmetaphorical, nonallusive style of art that dominated the 1960s and '70s—and was every bit as “avant-garde” as anything that had preceded it. It is also a fair guess that with these abrupt gestures he would have left his mark on music history even had he stopped composing there and then—although it is the later, more developed and better known works, from *Drumming* (1971) on, that give that mark its full significance.

At that point, Reich was one of a number of composers moving in a broadly similar direction—one characterized at the time (often negatively) as a reaction against the prevailing complexities of total serialism. In place of atonality, constant variation, and rhythmic asymmetry, these composers proposed a steady-state tonality, a fixed rhythmic pulse, and unremitting focus on a single, slowly unfolding pattern that anyone could follow who had a mind to do so.

By the mid-1970s, this direction had earned the epithet “minimalist” (borrowed from art critics and never returned), although the composers most deeply involved were already beginning to produce works of such size and stature that both the label and the dismissiveness with which it was so often applied begin to look mean-spirited and, worse, misguided. A year such as 1976 seems to set the tone: Steve Reich produced his second major work,<sup>1</sup> *Music for 18 Musicians*, and his erstwhile colleague Philip Glass finished *Einstein on the Beach* (in close collaboration with the stage director Robert Wilson); in Europe, meanwhile, Louis Andriessen completed the composition of *De Staat*, Arvo Pärt had created the first pieces in his new tintinnabuli style, and Henryk Górecki composed his Symphony no. 3—*The Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*. The differences between these various composers are as significant ultimately as any similarities, and yet the force with which they cast a simultaneous breath of fresh air across the musical world is unmistakable. Each of them, perhaps surprisingly, is rooted in tradition—but tradition as a sense of the past that embraces the ancient and medieval worlds more readily than the Europe of the Age of Enlightenment, and that follows in the paths of Stravinsky and Bartók rather than Schönberg and Berg among the moderns.

The underlying process in all of Reich's earlier music is the simultaneous repetition in two or more voices of a pattern with self-regulating changes. Normally this consists of a melodic/rhythmic pattern, which at any given moment appears fixed and static but full of energy. Through various techniques a process of gradual change is established, which the ear soon recognizes as the work itself in progress. The unfolding of this process constitutes the work's fulfillment.

Above all, it becomes clear that the changes that we hear emerge from the process itself, are a consequence of that process, and are not arbitrarily imposed from without. Reich's special brilliance lies in making apparently simple melodic/

1. The first being *Drumming*.

rhythmic states yield surprising aural ambiguities, so that our sense of a phrase's identity—its beginning and end, or the precise location of its downbeat or principal accents—may suddenly shift as new light is shed on it from within.

This sense of shifting views of the same basic object informs Reich's use of harmony, too, which has evolved directly out of the polyphonic techniques he applies to melodic and rhythmic ideas. All in all, his musical language has been formed in a manner strikingly similar to any one of his earlier works—that is to say, as a gradual process—and, as a result, is profoundly integrated.

The musical process that most closely corresponds to the idea of different views of the same object—which not only permits it but encourages it—is, of course, canon. This, more than any other single device, dominates Reich's musical processes. Whether as strict imitation or in derivative forms (such as voice-exchange or isorhythm), canonic devices permeate the texture of almost every one of Reich's works.<sup>2</sup> This feature links him to composers as far back as Perotin, Machaut, Dufay, Josquin, and, of course, Bach. But the earliest technique used by Reich—phasing—arose directly from his experiments with multiple tape loops, and could hardly have been imagined until the invention of tape and the new opportunities it afforded for manipulating sound.

As Reich has said, phasing is essentially a form of canon using irrational numbers. In his early tapeworks and first instrumental works, a complete pattern is presented at the outset by two players (or tape machines). This is then juxtaposed against itself, as one player moves slightly ahead and therefore out of phase with the other. At first, only minute segments of time separate the two parts, creating the illusion of an acoustic echo. As the disparity between the two parts grows, the aural effect becomes more complex, and eventually this resolves into a clear imitative pattern, once the two parts have achieved a rational degree of separation of one beat or more.

The interlocking of two models of the same pattern at different points produces additionally a series of resultant patterns, which also change as the relationship between the constituent parts changes. In the early works, these resultant patterns, which give the music much of its rich surface texture, are essentially unforeseen and nothing is done with them—they are simply allowed to play out until the next change comes into effect. In later works, such material is specifically emphasized and Reich eventually uses this as a way to generate new melodic entities. This owes much to his earlier manner of working, and yet is open to a more freewheeling, intuitive style of composition.

Another basic rhythmic ingredient in Reich's musical language, in addition to phasing (which he stopped using in 1972), is the use of rhythmic construction—the substitution of beats for rests until a complete pattern is revealed, and then the superimposition of the same process beginning at a different point in the

2. Except *Four Organs*, which uses augmentation—a technique that then remains a basic element of Reich's compositional style.

pattern, or at the same point but on a different beat. *Drumming* is the first work that displays this technique—par excellence—and Reich discusses it in his essay on that work.

Further refinements of these basic ideas continue to produce fresh results throughout Reich's oeuvre; looking back, it seems that each new detail of technique has evolved quite naturally out of the previous work. And if it seems we can find external influences—African drumming, gamelan, medieval organum, Bartók's use of arch form, Janáček's interest in speech melody—in each case Reich reached toward them only after the seed of that particular idea had already been planted in his music, and seems to use them both as confirmation of a direction in which he was already moving and as a springboard for further compositional activity of his own. The development in *Octet* (1979) of melodic construction influenced by Jewish cantillation techniques, for example, is in fact prefigured in earlier works by the use of resultant patterns from phasing to generate short melodic passages.

In the last decade, Reich has turned full circle, scooping up ideas from his earliest works—especially the use of taped speech—and moving into yet another new area of activity that combines familiar concepts but also offers something completely new and unique. He has always preferred the objective “facts to be resolved”<sup>3</sup> to the subjective play of emotion. His choices of topic reflect an interest in social issues, rather than individual drama. His preference is for a documentary account of things rather than fiction. And his approach to a piece of information—historical document, fragment of speech—is to take several looks at it from different points of view. Finally, in *Different Trains* (1988), in *The Cave* (1993), in *City Life* (1995), and now in *Three Tales* (1998–2002), he fuses together two of the strongest elements of his vision: canon and speech-melody—the one essentially repetitive, unified, strictly and even abstractly musical; the other fortuitous, multifarious, corporeal.

## Early Life

Although he is thought of as a quintessentially American composer, Steve Reich traces both sides of his family back to central Europe. His paternal grandfather, Ignaz Reich, was born in or near Cracow and emigrated to New York around 1890. There he met his future wife, Anne, who came from a village near Budapest. “I know my grandfather spoke German, Yiddish, Polish, and English. But when I knew him, he only spoke English, and never talked about Europe, only of America, as many immigrants did. They wanted to talk about the new country, and everything else was forgotten.”

His mother's family, Sillman, came from Germany and had moved to America considerably earlier, settling in Detroit. During the early 1930s, they moved to Los

3. Quoted from “The Desert Music—Text” (no. 27), see p. 126.

Angeles. “Grandfather Mort ran a jewelry store on Hollywood Boulevard, but he was also a piano player and a frustrated vaudevillian, and he encouraged his children to go into show business.” Reich’s mother, June Carroll, became a singer on Broadway and was also a lyricist. Her greatest successes were the songs “Love Is a Simple Thing” and “Penny Candy,” which she sang in the 1952 musical review *New Faces*, produced by her brother Leonard; the show also featured Eartha Kitt.

Reich’s father, Leonard, the youngest child of five, studied law and became an attorney. The composer does not know when or how his parents met, but they were married in 1935. He was born in New York City in 1936, but his parents’ marriage was soon over. They arranged for divided custody, six months with each of them. As his mother had decided to move back to Los Angeles, this meant that from the age of two until five (school age) he was obliged to cross the country by train twice a year accompanied by his governess, Virginia Mitchell. Not surprisingly, these journeys (four days with a change at Chicago) at such a young age left a lasting impression—as *Different Trains*, the most autobiographical of his works, bears witness.

Primarily, however, throughout his boyhood and youth Reich lived with his father in New York City on the Upper West Side; Virginia remained as governess until he was 10. In 1950, they moved to Larchmont, a suburb just north of the city: “It was ’50s America like the Kodak advertisements in *Life* magazine. . . . I think my father probably thought it was a much healthier environment in which to raise a teenager, but whereas in New York I had been somewhat athletic, in Larchmont I became very reclusive because I had no friends. I had to make new ones and one of them was a pianist. We got interested in jazz and I began playing the drums. So I became a composer partly because I had lost all my social contacts when we left New York and went to this place where I knew nobody and investigated my own life.”

In fact, Reich had started playing the piano several years earlier, at first just experimenting with fourths and fifths, “playing what I called cowboy songs,” then from the age of eight or nine taking lessons: “My father seemed to feel I should. He didn’t think it would lead to any trouble—‘trouble’ meaning that I would be like my mother.”

At the age of 14, he had his first exposure to contemporary music, baroque music, and jazz—thanks to a friend’s recordings of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, Bach’s Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, and 1950s bebop jazz—and also began reading philosophy (Plato’s *Republic*). At the same time, he began studying percussion with Roland Kohloff (who later became principal timpanist with the New York Philharmonic). He frequently went into Manhattan to jazz clubs like Birdland, where he heard players such as Bud Powell, Miles Davis, and Kenny Clarke. “Birdland was dark and smoky and romantic—everything that Larchmont was not. Kenny Clarke produced a buoyant, floating sense of time which I think you can hear me trying to imitate in the ’70s pieces like *Drumming* and *Music for 18 Musicians*. I also remember hearing Stravinsky conduct in Carnegie Hall around the same time.”

In 1953, at the age of 16, Reich entered Cornell University where he majored in philosophy. “My father paid my tuition, while I earned money for food by playing in jazz and dance bands on the weekends.” The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein had recently been to Cornell, and made a lasting impression on the philosophy department, particularly through his later work (published in *Philosophical Investigations*). The influence of Wittgenstein’s aphoristic style can quite clearly be discerned in Reich’s own writings.

Reich also pursued music studies at Cornell. His principal music teacher there was William Austin, who provided encouragement to be a composer at the point when Reich had to decide between a career in music or going to Harvard graduate school to study philosophy. He already knew that music was what he wanted to do but was nervous about making the decision. Against his father’s wishes, he returned to New York and began private studies for two years (1957–59) with Hall Overton, a composer and jazz musician who had studied composition with Vincent Persichetti and was also a good friend of Thelonius Monk. They worked on Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, studying the application of modal counterpoint, which provided Reich with a useful model for working tonally, yet outside the tonic-dominant matrix of the classical tradition, and for exploring the basics of canonic technique. “You learn your modes, learn about canons, and play them. It was very clear teaching; skills.

“The milieu around Overton was very lively. Thelonius Monk was there; Jimmy Raney and Jim Hall, the two jazz guitarists; Mal Waldron, the piano player. All these people were coming in and out of the studio and you’d see them. Downstairs from Overton, there was the famous American photographer, Eugene Smith, who made the photographs during the Spanish Civil War for *Life* magazine. I visited him once and he was absolutely insane, fantastic; his entire studio, every wall, was photographs. Into the photographs were stuck more photographs. He wanted to hear my little string quartet pieces—I think I was visiting Overton after I’d been at Juilliard for a while. I was thrilled to play these, not for another student-composer, but for a real artist. So the ambience around Overton was very positive. Later he was asked to go to Juilliard and he accepted. I remember seeing him then and it was as if his shoulders had begun to sag—the weight of the academy was on his shoulders, and he died shortly thereafter. He was a heavy smoker and a bit of a drinker. A wonderful man, and a very gifted teacher.”

In the spring of 1959, Reich entered Juilliard. Here he studied with Persichetti and made analyses of works by Bartok (especially the fourth and fifth Quartets and their arch forms), Schönberg (*Five Pieces for Orchestra* Op. 16 and *Six Little Piano Pieces* Op. 19), and Webern (*Five Pieces for String Quartet* Op. 5)—works that go to the brink of tonality but do not pass beyond it. Studying with someone, however, was not the most important aspect of being at Juilliard. “The most important thing was that I’d write a piece almost every other month and immediately have it played. And this is the good thing about a conservatory. Everybody is a musician. I learned most of my craft there by writing music, having it played, correcting mistakes, taking suggestions from players.”

The final piece Reich composed during his Juilliard years was *Music for String Orchestra* (completed in May 1961), a short serial work with strong tonal tendencies in which the row was simply repeated in its original position, without inversions, retrogrades, or transposition. “Basically what I did was regroup [the row]. The first four notes are a chord. The next time around, the first three notes are a melodic fragment. The fourth note then joins the next three. This was actually a kind of thinking that could happen right now, so writing in the twelve-tone style actually was the beginning, in a sense, of the kind of thinking that I continued in my own music. The repetition of the row is not significant enough to say that’s the beginning of repetition. But, in fact, that’s how I dealt with it and the rhythmic regrouping is, in fact, something that I could see doing now with a limited gamut of tones.”<sup>4</sup>

Of the general New York scene at the time, Reich recalls: “I was aware of the painters in particular. I was sometimes down at the Cedar Bar where de Kooning and Feldman were. I was certainly aware of what John Cage was doing (and went to the famous Cage retrospective at Town Hall in 1958), and Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio. Around that time, Stockhausen gave a lecture at Columbia University and they thought the devil had come to town. In those days, Elliott Carter was still regarded by some Juilliard faculty as part of the lunatic fringe, but I was interested in Carter’s use of metric modulation.”

By 1961, Reich felt the need to leave New York and moved out to northern California: “Like most people who go to California, I was getting away from something—my family, primarily. I wasn’t clear at first whether I would go to UC Berkeley or Mills College (Oakland), but Mills seemed the more interesting place because of Berio.”<sup>5</sup>

“Studying with Berio at that time was extremely exciting. Serialism was just then becoming known in this country, and he was a primary member of the team. So being able to analyze Webern with him was very appropriate. . . . At night I used to go the Jazz Workshop where John Coltrane was playing—modal jazz,<sup>6</sup> with a lot of notes and very few changes of harmony. This was the most interesting music for me at that time—by day I was learning about what I did not want to do, but by night I was learning about something that I did want somehow to work into my life. Student composers at that time were writing enormously complicated pieces, but as Mills didn’t have an orchestra, they weren’t played. You had the feeling that no one was hearing it in their head; no one was playing it on an instrument; it was just paper music. And then at night you see Coltrane playing—he just gets up and plays. So it was at that point that I decided I must play in my own pieces—whatever my limitations, I must become a part of the ensemble. So when I wrote some terrible 12-tone jazz pieces at Mills, the good thing

4. SR interview with Dean Suzuki, May 1984.

5. Berio was a visiting professor at Mills for the academic year 1961–62.

6. The development of modal jazz is discussed in Strickland, 1993, pp. 149–51.

about them was that I put together my own ensemble to play them. It included John Chowning [the computer musician, but trained as a drummer] and Jon Gibson [saxophonist now with Philip Glass], plus trumpet and bass players, and myself playing piano.”

His master’s thesis was the composition *Three Pieces for Jazz Quintet*—trumpet, alto saxophone, piano, bass, and drums—(completed in 1963). “It was basically 12-tone jazz, the worst thing I’ve ever written. . . . The idea that you can take the 12-tone system and bring the rhythmic and gestural world of jazz to it is absurd.”

Among the works Reich showed Berio was *Music for String Orchestra* written the previous year back in New York. Berio’s response was: “If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you?”—Reich assured him that he would.

The record library at Mills had old 78s of African music that “I now began listening to with great interest. In 1962 Berio took our class down to Ojai where Gunther Schuller gave a lecture about the history of early jazz. He mentioned a book, *Studies in African Music*, by A. M. Jones. Back in Berkeley I found a copy in the music library and took it home. It was like looking at the blueprint for something completely unknown. Here was a music with repeating patterns (similar to the tape loop material I was beginning to fool around with), which were superimposed so that the downbeats did not coincide.”<sup>7</sup>

While still at Mills, however, he began to make new contacts—notably with R. G. Davis, who had formed the San Francisco Mime Troupe. This was a politically committed street theater group<sup>8</sup> that worked out of an old church in San Francisco’s Mission District, and for whom, in January 1963, he wrote music to accompany a film. “My first use of tape came when I was making a film track for Robert Nelson, called *The Plastic Haircut*.<sup>9</sup> I took a recording called ‘Greatest Moments in Sport,’ which was a collage of the voices of Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and other famous American athletes from the past, and to make it more complex I overlaid them on top of themselves, and I got into making tape loops. I began listening to what happens rhythmically when you make shorter and shorter loops—and this was right at about the time when I discovered A. M. Jones’s book on African music. I was fascinated with the relationship between what I was hearing in the tape loops and the African use of independent repetition of simultaneous patterns.” The spoken materials are clearly audible at the beginning, but as the fragments begin to overlap with greater and greater rapidity, the sounds eventually merge into noise—a precursor of Reich’s later tape pieces, although without their more controlled structure and more systematic use of repetition.

During his time at Mills, Reich had had a graduate assistantship and supplemented this modest income by teaching rock ‘n’ roll to ghetto children in Hunt-

7. See also “Non-Western Music and the Western Composer” (no. 37), p. 147.

8. Neither purely given to mime nor always in the street.

9. See also “First Interview with Michael Nyman” (no. 6), p. 52.

er's Point. After leaving the college, Reich avoided lingering in academia. "I was married at the time and had to make a living, so I took part-time jobs, including driving a taxi and later working in the Post Office."

His association with the San Francisco Mime Troupe continued, and in the fall of 1963 he composed the incidental music for their production of Alfred Jarry's surrealist masterpiece *King Ubu*. The music was scored for clarinet, strummed violin, and kazoo (played through a PG&E traffic cone megaphone). The show's designer was the artist William Wiley, who later designed the LP cover for Reich's first solo disc in the Columbia Masterworks Series.

Reich now formed a new music improvisation group, which included the trumpeter Phil Lesh (later bass player with The Grateful Dead), saxophonist Jon Gibson, keyboard player Tom Constanten (who also later joined The Grateful Dead), violinist George Rey (also a philosopher), and cellist Gwen Watson. For this group, he composed *Pitch Charts*, "using graphic notation derived from Berio's *Tempi Concertati*, but providing a semblance of tonality in that it remained within given pitch groups for periods between cues. The series of boxes that served as markers in the score went so far as to specify the notes to be played, but not so far as to specify the rhythm or manner of their playing."<sup>10</sup> When one player played a note of the next cell, all the performers are to move to the new cell. This piece was first performed at the Community Music School in San Francisco's Mission District and repeated the following year at a San Francisco Mime Troupe concert.

In February 1964, he composed *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano & Tape* (ex. I-1), in which the influences of Morton Feldman mingled with those of jazz pianist Bill Evans: "It was a series of nine chords in a cycle so that you can play the chord several times, like Morty's 'floating in the air' sound. And a second and third piano would answer all of the chord, or part of the chord, breaking it up freely. And the effect was note upon note in different free rhythms, and timbre upon timbre." The modular structure of this work prefigures Reich's later style, now strongly in the making, and the loosely tonal foundation of the harmonies seems characteristic of his later chordal patterns.

"It was influenced by a hearing of Stockhausen's *Refrain* (1959), which was itself influenced by Feldman's *Four Pianos* (1957). It was also very much influenced by jazz structure (a sequence of chords which form a cycle which can be repeated for as many 'choruses' as you like). It was particularly influenced by the sound of Bill Evans."<sup>11</sup>

Reich continued to experiment with tape: "When I had the job as a taxi driver, I used to put a microphone up where the dome light is inside the cab, and so I could bug the cab. In this way, I gathered a large amount of material out of which

10. Strickland, 1993, p. 185.

11. SR, letter to Dean Suzuki, May 1982.