

## The Stage Works of Philip Glass

*The Stage Works of Philip Glass* is the first publication to exclusively examine Glass's stage works from 1976 to the present day. Glass, who is regularly acclaimed as the most popular living classical composer, created stage works that have had a mesmerizing effect on younger generations. Robert Waters analyzes Glass's music for the theater in the context of works by other composers interested in so-called minimalist features. His discussion includes three introductory chapters that address the validity of terms such as minimalism, post-minimalism, postmodernism, and neo-Romanticism, followed by a brief overview of Glass's life and works in the period before he began to compose for the theater. Waters examines the different types of theater responsible for Glass's impact, including Robert Wilson's Theater of Images. He sheds light on Glass's philosophy regarding staging, text, and other theatrical components, which includes a defiance of conventional narrative, visual and aural dissociation as a theatrical technique, and deconstructionist concepts.

ROBERT F. WATERS teaches at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He has also held faculty positions at Seton Hall University and Wake Forest University. His published research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century music in France and the USA. He has lectured and presented papers throughout the USA as well as in the UK, Europe, and Australia. Waters also wrote as a music critic for the *Washington Post* for ten years and has performed as a pianist.

# The Stage Works of Philip Glass

ROBERT F. WATERS  
New Jersey Institute of Technology



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*for Jennifer*

## CONTENTS

List of Figures	page ix
List of Tables	x
List of Music Examples	xi
List of Selected Stage Works of Philip Glass	xii
Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xix

## PART I BACKGROUND 1

1 Introduction	3
2 Terminology and Stages of Minimalism	8
3 Terminology: Post-Minimalism, Postmodernism, and Neo-Romanticism	29
4 Philip Glass's Early Life and Career 1937–1975	45

## PART II STAGE WORKS 71

5 Theater	73
6 Language and Philosophy	96
7 Themes, Genres, and Archetypes	112
8 Multimedia and Hybrid Genres	128
9 Dance	151
10 Music	171

viii Contents

11	Critical and Audience Reception	185
12	Conclusion	199
	Notes	205
	Select Bibliography	238
	Index	254

## FIGURES

4.1 Additive and subtractive structure in Glass's 1 + 1	page 59
9.1 <i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Field Dance 1, choreography by Andrew de Groat; Théâtre Municipal, Avignon, 1976	157
9.2 <i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Field Dance 1, choreography by Lucinda Childs; Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, 2012	158
10.1 <i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Bed Aria Scene, enlargement of rhythmic pattern	175
10.2 <i>Appomattox</i> (2007 version), Act I, Prologue, pitch levels with rhythmic cyclic construction	177

## TABLES

2.1 Stages of minimalism with examples	page 18
5.1 Selected Mabou Mines productions with music by Philip Glass	79
7.1 Selected themes in Philip Glass's stage works, with antecedents	113
8.1 Selected artistic collaborators on Philip Glass's stage works	129
9.1 Selected choreographers of Philip Glass's works	156

## MUSIC EXAMPLES

9.1	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Dance 1, Modules 1–2	page 163
9.2	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Dance 1, Module 14	164
10.1	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Prologue, Instructions	173
10.2	<i>The Voyage</i> , Prologue, measures 1–5, piano reduction	174
10.3	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Bed Aria Scene, excerpt, <i>meno mosso</i>	176
10.4	<i>Appomattox</i> (2007 version), Act I, Prologue, measures 1–5	177
10.5	<i>Satyagraha</i> , Act III, Aria, excerpt	178
10.6	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Knee Play 1, modules 1–2	180
10.7	<i>Satyagraha</i> , Act I, Scene i, modules 1–2	181
10.8	<i>The Voyage</i> , Act I, Prologue, measures 38–42, piano reduction	183
10.9	<i>Einstein on the Beach</i> , Knee Play 4, module 1	184

SELECTED STAGE WORKS OF PHILIP GLASS

first dates are those of composition; premiere in same year  
 unless noted otherwise

- Einstein on the Beach* (1976; opera)  
*Satyagraha: M. K. Gandhi in South Africa* (1979, premiere 1980; opera)  
*A Madrigal Opera* (1980; opera)  
*The Photographer: Far from the Truth* (1982; mixed media in three parts)  
*Akhnaten* (1983; opera)  
 the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down, Rome Section (1983; opera)  
 the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down, Cologne Section (1984;  
 opera)  
*The Juniper Tree* (1984, premiere 1985; opera)  
*A Descent into the Maelström* (1985, premiere 1986; dance–theater work)  
*In the Upper Room* (1986; chamber ballet)  
*The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1986, premiere 1988; opera)  
*The Fall of the House of Usher* (1987, premiere 1988; opera)  
*1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988; music theater work)  
*Hydrogen Jukebox* (1990; music theater work)  
*The White Raven* (1991, premiere 1998; opera)  
*The Voyage* (1992; opera)  
*Orphée* (1993; chamber opera)  
*La belle et la bête* (1994; opera for ensemble and film)  
*The Witches of Venice* (1995; theater–ballet)  
*Les enfants terribles* (1996; dance–opera spectacle)  
*Monsters of Grace* (1997, premiere 1998; digital opera in three dimensions)  
*The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* (1997; opera)  
*Waiting for the Barbarians* (earliest program notes 1999, premiere 2005; opera)  
*In the Penal Colony* (2000; chamber opera)  
*Galileo Galilei* (2001, premiere 2002; opera)  
*The Sound of a Voice* (2003; opera)

*List of Selected Stage Works of Philip Glass*

xiii

- Appomattox* (2007, revised 2015; opera)
- Kepler* (2008, premiere 2009; opera)
- Spuren der Verirrten* (*The Lost*) (2013; opera)
- The Perfect American* (2013; opera)
- The Trial* (2014; pocket opera)
- Drowning* (2019, premiere 2020; pocket opera)
- Mud* (2019, premiere 2020; pocket opera)
- Circus Days and Nights* (2020, premiere 2021; opera)

## P R E F A C E

Twentieth-century American opera has been my second area of interest for the last twenty-five years. I had been involved in *fin de siècle* French music as a former pianist since the mid-1970s, and as a musicologist since 1981. My last book, published in 2008, concerned Déodat de Séverac, a French composer and colleague of Debussy and Ravel. I addressed his relationship to regionalism, an artistic and political movement in France, at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> I first became enamored of American opera, however, in the mid-1990s when preparing to teach a class entitled *History of Opera* for the first time. I had just finished analyzing better-known works, including the Prologue and end to Act III of Alban Berg's *Lulu*, when I had my first encounter with Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land*. These two works could not be more antithetical to each other in spirit and although I had always been a fan of Berg's two Expressionist operas, Copland's work was a different type of revelation. I subsequently heard and studied a plethora of American operas, some familiar to the public and others obscure, the latter including Douglas Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, Amy Beach's *Cabildo*, and Marc Blitzstein's *Regina*. More famous ones included Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* and *Trouble in Tahiti*, and Philip Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*. I then began researching and preparing a book entitled *Twentieth Century American Opera*, when the commissioning editor of Cambridge University Press, Vicky Cooper, approached me and asked if I would consider writing a book on the stage works of Philip Glass. She was aware of my work with Ashgate Publishing, as well as my book-in-progress on American opera. I then did preliminary research on what had been written up to that point on Glass and minimalism and discovered that there were very few books about operas by minimalist composers. This was not too surprising since operas by nature tend to be more maximalist than

minimalist. I then concluded that this idea merited attention, not just in discussing a composer and his operas but in the context of other composers who were interested in repetitive structures and the stage works composed by those musicians; I then began work on this project, with the result being *The Stage Works of Philip Glass*.

This book will discuss Glass's stage works from 1976 up to the present day. Rather than treating individual stage works one by one, the chapters are established according to shared characteristics of these works. An introductory discussion of terminology related to genre and aesthetic will be followed by a brief biographical chapter, primarily covering the 1960s and early 1970s, which will contain a discussion of Glass's earlier minimalist works.<sup>2</sup> I will then examine the influence that various types of theater have had on Glass's stage works, including his choice of themes and his viewpoint regarding theatrical components within his stage works. He adapted a philosophy comprised of a defiance of conventional narrative, visual and aural dissociation as a theatrical technique, deconstructionist concepts, and semantically ambiguous language within some compositions. This book will also treat multimedia in Glass's stage works, including dance. His uses of various types of media were influenced, in part, by Lucinda Childs's dance choreography and Robert Wilson's stage direction, not to mention important engineers who worked with Glass on video and film. Wilson's talents were an important component in four of Glass's operas, notably *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), the Rome and Cologne portions of the *CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down* (1983–4), *Monsters of Grace* (1997), and *The White Raven* (1991, first performed 1998).<sup>3</sup> This book will also discuss common themes, characters, and archetypes in Glass's operas, some adapted from Indian sources as well as European ones. Finally, I will examine the reception of Glass's stage works among critics and the general public. My intent is to provide a clearer picture as to the evolution of Glass's style and approach in creating these compositions, as well as their critical and popular reception.

This book remains the only one to date that solely treats Glass's stage works, which he produced over a period of forty-five years. In fact, there are only a handful of books that treat Glass's music exclusively, and those that do emphasize different criteria from those presented here. Richard

Kostelanetz's *Writings on Glass* (1997) is an eclectic compilation of interviews, press reviews, and essays written by various authors about Glass's early instrumental and vocal music.<sup>4</sup> Kostelanetz's book is valuable in its insightful discussion of various aspects of Glass's style, but its chapters on his stage works are mostly brief, including a chapter on *The Photographer: Far from the Truth* (1982) and a journal review of *The Voyage* (1992). The essays on *Einstein on the Beach* and *Satyagraha* (1979; premiere 1980) contain mostly anecdotal description, although two chapters provide a penetrating and thorough discussion of *Akhnatn* (1983), including musical analysis, and one chapter contains a detailed essay on the poet Allen Ginsberg's text to Glass's *Hydrogen Jukebox* (1990). Glass discussed his three so-called portrait operas in his own autobiography, written early in his career, entitled *Music by Philip Glass* (1987), where he went into depth about his motivations, influences, and compositional processes; the three stage works that he discussed are *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhnatn*. Glass's coverage of his compositional methods, however, is brief.<sup>5</sup> Glass has since written a second autobiography entitled *Words Without Music* (2015), which presents more autobiographical information than music discussion.<sup>6</sup> John Richardson's book *Singing Archaeology: Philip Glass's Akhnaten* (1999) deals solely with that opera, and the book primarily treats philosophical issues, including the use of symbolism in the libretto as well as staging, with only brief music description.<sup>7</sup> Keith Potter's superbly insightful *Four Musical Minimalists* (2000) analyzes Glass's music with effective detail in the section devoted to Glass, but Potter treats mostly early compositions written by La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Glass.<sup>8</sup>

Other books have been written on minimalism in music, discussing the topic in general, including Steve Reich's "Music as Gradual Processes" (1968), Robert Schwarz's *Minimalists* (1986), a compilation of critic Tom Johnson's articles for the *Village Voice* entitled *The Voice of New Music, 1972–1982* (1989), Dean Suzuki's PhD Dissertation "Minimal Music, Its Evolution as Seen in the Works of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young" (1991), Edward Strickland's *Minimalism: Origins* (1993), and Wim Mertens' *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Rich, Philip Glass* (1994). Robert Fink's *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (2005) is an insightful look into minimalism and its effects

xviii Preface

on society, and Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (2006) explores the effect John Cage has had on various composers, including minimalists.<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bernard's article "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies* (1995), is an interesting study, and finally, there is a detailed and insightful compendium of relevant topics in the multi-authored *Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (2013), which describes various types of minimalism within diverse musical fields.<sup>10</sup>

Academic journals have included worthy articles related to minimalism, such as Jonathan Bernard's "Minimalism, Post-Minimalism and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music" in *American Music* and Timothy Johnson's "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style or Technique?" in *The Musical Quarterly*.<sup>11</sup> Books related to this subject, specifically discussing avant-garde theater, include Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* (1964), Arthur Holmberg's *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*. (1996), Eric Salzman's and Thomas Desai's *The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body* (2008), and Iris Fischer's *Mabou Mines: Making Avant-Garde Theater in the 1970s* (2012).<sup>12</sup> Roger Copeland's multi-authored *What Is Dance: Readings in Theory and Criticism* (1983) has made an invaluable contribution to the discussion of avant-garde dance of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>13</sup> A more recent contribution to writings about dance during this period can be found in the multi-authored book *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (2018).<sup>14</sup> Writings contributing to the study of multimedia works from the 1960s up until the end of the century include Kostelanetz's *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments and Other Mixed-Means Presentations* (1968), William Duckworth's and Richard Fleming's *Sound and Light: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela* (1996), Nicholas Cook's *Analyzing Musical Multimedia* (1998), and David W. Bernstein's *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (2008).<sup>15</sup> Finally, invaluable information regarding critical and audience reception of Glass's works can be found in a plethora of newspapers and journals, including John Rockwell's writings for the *New York Times* and Tom Johnson's and Kyle Gann's writings for the *Village Voice*.

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