

## Glass: rock, jazz and 'serious' blend

by Juanita Spears

Some love Philip Glass! Some don't. But none can deny the influence he has had on the sound of music in the second half of this century. Being named *Musical America's* Musician of the Year in 1985, undeniably carved a niche for Glass in the annals of music history.

His music is heady and euphoric — a curious blend of "serious", jazz and rock music. The style is based on repetitive cycles of melodic and rhythmic motifs which grow in additive cycles, creating an almost trancelike effect.

This style, shared by other composers such as Terry Riley and Steve Reich, was coined *minimalism* in the sixties (a term not preferred by the composers). Today critics still call Glass a minimalist composer, however, he claims that "for me, minimalism was over by 1974."

In the 1960's Glass rejected the dictates of the serial composers. "I always found serialism ugly and didactic." And he further rejected the idea of non-tonal and aleatoric music, shunning entirely the idea that music had to be an intellectual enterprise. "I wanted to create music that spoke to me emotionally," Glass explains.

However, during the emotional sixties and early seventies, his music was not, shall we say, universally accepted. "Oh sure, in the beginning it was tough. The audience literally threw things at us. But I knew it was just a matter of time before things changed."

And change they did. After the performance of his first opera, *Einstein on the Beach* in 1975, Glass has never looked back. His operas consistently play to sellout houses and, in fact, many believe that it is Glass who has brought the "given-up-for-dead" art form back to life.

If some still have doubts about his import, CBS does not. They have signed him to an "exclusive composer" contract. He is only the third composer ever to enjoy this privilege — his predecessors being Stravinsky and Copland.

Being a precocious child, Glass learned to play the piano by imitating his older brother and sister after eavesdropping in on their lessons. At 8 he began playing the flute and just two years later was playing in orchestras.

It is not surprising that this ability to learn quickly spilled over onto his academics. At age 15, Glass entered the University of Chicago, majoring in mathematics and philosophy. At the same tender age, he began composing.

Upon graduation, Glass had decided that music and, in particular, composition was the career he wanted to follow. The hard part was breaking it to his parents.

"They were absolutely horrified when I told them. They never really understood my decision, but by the time I made it to the 'Met' they had gotten over it," chuckled Glass.

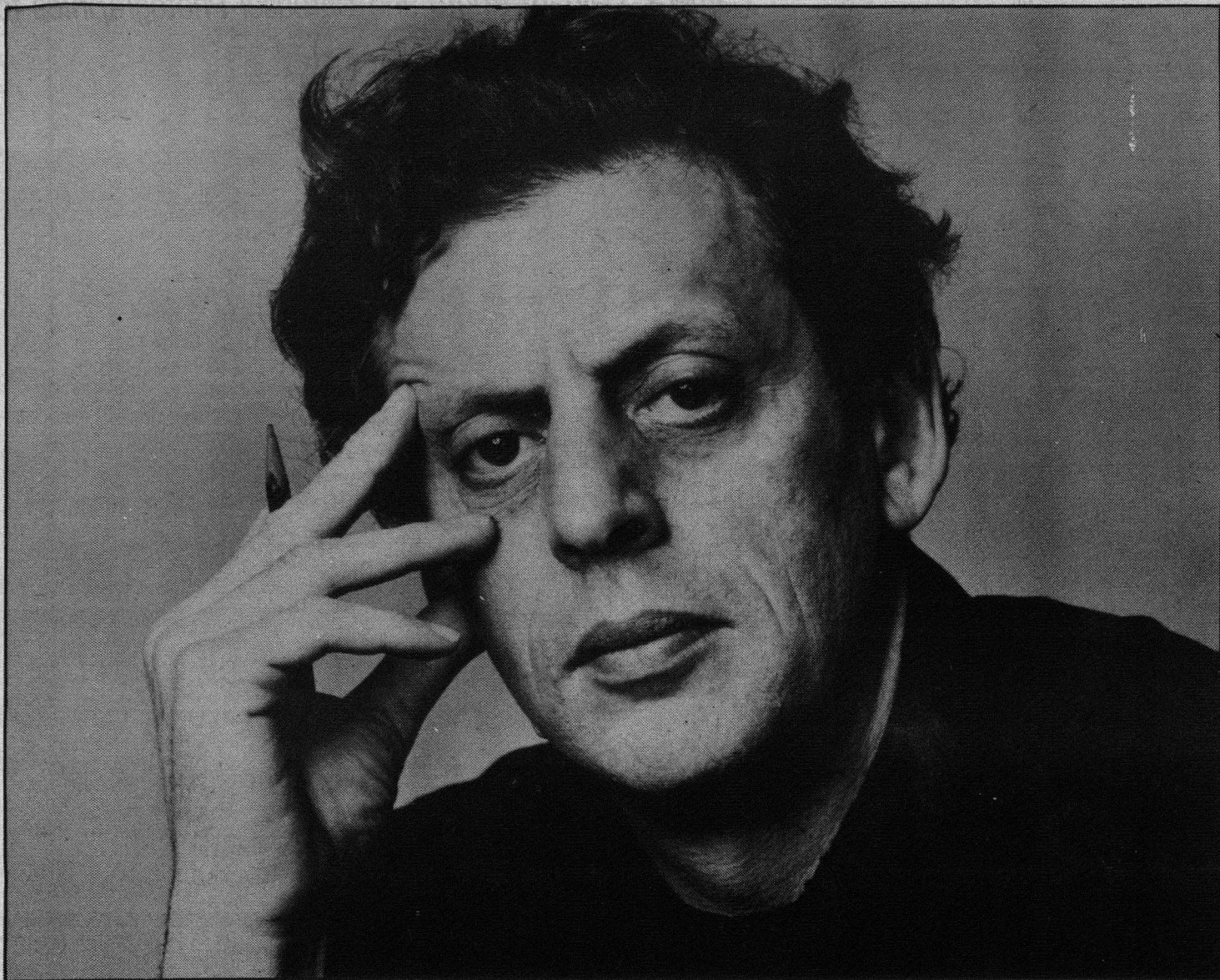
Glass was referring to 1976 when, after a highly successful and extensive tour in Europe, his opera *Einstein on the Beach* was performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

The Juilliard School of Music was the next stage for his studies. He graduated from there in 1962. Three years later, at age 27, Glass set off to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger for two years. It was there that he met and worked with Ravi Shankar, someone who was to have a profound influence on his music. After this time, Glass began to apply principles of Indian music to his own works, in particular, the rhythms which are so characteristic of his music today.

In the spring of 1987, the Stuttgart Opera will present his first three operas, *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhmaten* in trilogy. He has just recently completed an opera called *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* by Doris Lessing who is also author of the libretto.

When history is written, Glass wishes to be best remembered for his operas. It is obvious when he discusses them that they are the works he holds most dear. "I think they're adorable," he adds affectionately.

However, his list of compositions is not



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exclusively operatic. He has written scores for movies (*Mishima*, Warner Bros. 1985), ballets (some of which are permanent repertoire for the New York City Ballet), and endless chamber works. In fact, he composed the music for the opening Torch-Lighting ceremony for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

Glass is constantly on the go. He begins each day at 6 a.m. and composes until noon. Glass, like most composers, does most of his composing at his desk. But occasionally he makes a trek to the piano to test the length of a section or, if he gets "lonely", to get back in touch with what he calls the "physical music" once more.

From lunch until 7 p.m., he rehearses with his ensemble, auditions performers, takes care of business, and gives interviews. His evenings are spent quietly with his family — his son Zachary 15, his daughter Juliet 17, his live-in girlfriend (he has survived two marriages), his two calico cats, a parrot, and a fish of unknown species. Glass admits that he "likes to have lots of life around him" and that it does not interfere with his work.

Glass is very much a recluse, giving little of his free time to friends, however, he does spend a good deal of time on the telephone keeping in touch.

His schedule does not change much when he is touring 12 weeks out of the year. However, since 1969, Glass has spent 4-6 weeks in his summer house in Cape Breton. "No one knows this, but every one of my operas have been partially written in Canada... I love it up there."

The music of Philip Glass evokes mixed emotions from its listeners. As his popularity grows, the more vocal his critics become. "Many still don't like my music, but I don't think they can ignore it any longer," admits Glass.

And nor should they ignore it. It's heady, euphoric, original, rhythmic, and mystical — it's Philip Glass — a sound that is undeniably his.

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