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2CDS



philip glass  
complete string quartets

the smith quartet

# PHILIP GLASS COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS

## CD 1

### String Quartet No.3: "MISHIMA"

- |        |                                    |        |
|--------|------------------------------------|--------|
| 1. I   | "1957: Award Montage"              | [4.08] |
| 2. II  | "November 25: Ichigaya"            | [1.14] |
| 3. III | "Grandmother and Kimitake"         | [3.19] |
| 4. IV  | "1962: Body Building"              | [1.42] |
| 5. V   | "Blood Oath"                       | [2.51] |
| 6. VI  | "Mishima/Closing<br>(End Credits)" | [2.50] |

### String Quartet No.2 "Company"

- |        |        |
|--------|--------|
| 7. I   | [2.51] |
| 8. II  | [1.49] |
| 9. III | [1.46] |
| 10. IV | [2.12] |

### String Quartet No.4: "BUCZAK"

- |         |        |
|---------|--------|
| 11. I   | [7.30] |
| 12. II  | [8.25] |
| 13. III | [6.57] |

Total time [47.49]

## CD 2

### String Quartet No.1

- |       |        |        |
|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. I  | Part 1 | [8.48] |
| 2. II | Part 2 | [7.28] |

### String Quartet No.5

- |        |        |
|--------|--------|
| 3. I   | [1.35] |
| 4. II  | [3.12] |
| 5. III | [6.30] |
| 6. IV  | [5.08] |
| 7. V   | [7.59] |

Total time [40.50]

## THE SMITH QUARTET

IAN HUMPHRIES - VIOLIN  
DARRAGH MORGAN - VIOLIN  
NIC PENDLEBURY - VIOLA  
DEIRDRE COOPER - CELLO

### 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.'

In the pantheon of composers working in the so-called Western classical tradition, few have attained the popular acclaim, critical plaudits, financial success and instant recognisability that Philip Glass has garnered during his lifetime. Fewer still can boast a similarly wide range of works spread across genres familiar to the classical cognoscenti: opera, orchestral, chamber and instrumental works; whilst also moving seamlessly into music of real significance for film, theatre, dance, multi-media experiments and on into the realms of contemporary electronic, ambient rock and world musics. Whether bringing younger audiences into the opera house or indeed the concert hall through his Philip Glass Ensemble, collecting multiple Oscars for film scores, writing symphonies based on the material of David Bowie and Brian Eno, collaborating with songwriters Paul Simon, and Suzanne Vega, or avant-garde independent electronic artists such as The Aphex Twin, Glass's musical reach extends to the most disparate corners of the musical world. His reaction, (alongside fellow Americans Terry Riley, Steve Reich and La Monte Young) against the extremes of the music of Stockhausen, Boulez, Ligeti and their followers, continued a rediscovery of the musical language in use since

Bach's day. Boiling the musical elements down to basics by utilising constant, slowly shifting, mostly consonant, harmonies, a motoric, often insistent pulse and repetitive, highly organised compositional procedures Glass and his contemporaries breathed new life into the old tonal system, bringing forth music that is both immediately familiar and utterly modern at the same time. The sobriquet *Minimalism* may not be to the liking of many a *Minimalist* - Glass himself has referred to his own output as 'music with repetitive structures' - but, that the name sticks is only recognition of a significant and distinct movement in the music of our time.

From the mid 1960s to the early 90s Glass completed eight String Quartets, though the three earliest have been withdrawn, presumably as journeyman works. He speaks for the majority of his fellow composers down the ages when he explains, 'It's almost as if we say we're going to write a string quartet, we take a deep breath and we wade in to write the most serious, significant piece we can.' His five string quartets, as a whole, exhibit the intense introspection that this genre, perhaps above all others, inspires. From the later quartets of Haydn, through Mozart, Beethoven and the Romantics and onwards to Bartók, Shostakovich, Hindemith and Elliott Carter in the



Twentieth Century, the string quartet has held composers in its thrall. It is one of the prime forms that can, through time, seriously cement a composer's reputation or, at worst, consign major talents to the wasteland of the middle-ground. Glass's string quartets happily flaunt their influences which range from Bach to Shostakovich, but range well beyond the musical sphere, delving deeply into every major art form. He has always responded instinctively to extra-musical sources: painting, film, theatre, dance and literature are constant catalysts for his inspirations and enquiring mind.

The String Quartet No.1 dates from 1966, not long after Glass had completed his composition studies in Paris with the redoubtable French pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger. Pierre Boulez and his established Parisian *avant-garde* failed to hold the young American in their thrall and he turned to other, less readily radical sources. One such source that proved of real significance was a commission by the former drunk, drug addict and some-time film-maker, Conrad Rooks, to transcribe Ravi Shankar's score for the bizarre film, *Chappaqua* for conventional Western instruments. The cyclical structures and rhythm patterns of Indian music afforded Glass the first glimmerings of what he would develop into a style

he might call his own. The first of his mature quartets, while not exhibiting any explicit link to Indian music, does employ certain repeating patterns and cyclical procedures. Although the style is leaning towards more original works to come, eg the use, when performed live, of a two minute theatrical pause between Part 1 and Part 2, the pulse is not yet entirely stable and the harmony retains a good sprinkling of chromatic writing, the drones and short motifs, in particular, occasionally bringing Shostakovich in melancholy mood to mind.

It was some 17 years before Glass felt the need to return to the quartet form. The intervening two decades witnessed the perfecting of his style, his 'music with repetitive structures', through compositions spanning the musical spectrum. There were significant operas (*Einstein on the Beach*, *Akhmaten* and *Satyagraha*), music for dance, film, theatre and, perhaps most notably, an important body of work for his Philip Glass Ensemble. The String Quartet No.2, 'Company' (1983) was written as four separate musical interpolations for Samuel Beckett's prose-poem, *Company*. As often with Beckett the themes of death, solitude and the nature of identity loom large - the opening line setting the theme, 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.' Glass's music

reflects these themes in music of often surprisingly intense lyricism. There is no real sense of Beckett's own insistence - emotional angst, but instead a beautiful wistfulness that is a serious counterpart to the text and also serves the piece well in its abstraction as a stand-alone work.

The String Quartet No.3, written in 1985, is the only quartet which has an explicit programme, each movement clearly labelled. This is entirely due to its genesis as music for Paul Schrader's film on the life of author, playwright and self-styled, latter-day Samurai, Yukio Mishima. The film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*, employs three distinct musical outfits: full orchestra for scenes portraying Mishima's writings; string orchestra depicting Mishima's unworldly last day as his own militia usurps one of Japan's defence force headquarters; and the scenes for quartet which were shot in monochrome, composed for childhood flash-back scenes. As such, they often have a wistful, sometimes joyful, carefree feel. While this piece, like its predecessor has extra-musical connections, Glass was aware from the outset that the string quartet sections might work well when freed from the score and given a life of their own, as a single, complete utterance, in the concert hall.

The early death from complications of HIV/AIDS of the artist, Brian Buczak was the spur for Glass's String Quartet No.4, 'Buczak'. Together with the quartet's commissioner, Geoffrey Hendricks, Buczak had established the *Money for Food Press*, initially as a vehicle to further their art practises. The *MFFP* traced its roots back to the New York-based early multi-media experiments of the *Fluxus* art movement of the 1960s - and one of Hendricks' early 'Cloud' images was appropriated for John Lennon's *Imagine* album. Written for a memorial concert for Buczak in 1989, Glass wanted his fourth quartet to represent, 'a musical impression of [Buczak] as a person as well as a tribute to his life's work.' The quartet opens with a broad, almost Schubertian sweep before the composer's familiar pulse gently introduces itself. Touches of Schubert and Beethoven pervade the quartet while Glass produces an astringent lyrical beauty, most notably in the second movement, that well befits a heartfelt memorial.

Just two years later, in 1991, Glass produced his fifth, and so far final, quartet. Prior composing the work the composer later explained, 'I was thinking that I had really gone beyond the need to write a serious string quartet and that I could write a quartet that is about musicality, which in a certain way is the most serious subject.' Indeed,

the work succeeds brilliantly perhaps by virtue of the composer's less deliberately contemplative approach. Both Romantic and thoroughly modern, the music is by turns, insistent, luminous, incandescent and dark - ultimately a triumphantly successful exercise in contrasts and a truly great string quartet.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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### THE SMITH QUARTET

**Violins: Ian Humphries, Darragh Morgan.**

**Viola: Nic Pendlebury. Cello: Deirdre Cooper**

Now in its 20th year, the Smith Quartet has established itself as a major force in the contemporary music world. The ensemble has built an impressive repertoire of works by many of the world's most exciting and innovative composers earning plaudits for its dynamic performances and original approach to contemporary music. From its beginning the quartet has been dedicated to the commissioning of new works and to date over 100 have been written for the group. Michael Nyman, Kevin Volans, Django Bates, Gavin Bryars and Howard

Skempton are among those who have written for them and new works from Nyman and Volans are scheduled for 2009.

The quartet's touring schedule has taken it to North and South America, South East Asia and Japan as well as major European and UK venues. In recent seasons festival appearances have included the Huddersfield Festival, Les Jardins Musicaux, Switzerland, West Cork Chamber Music, Musica Viva in Lisbon, Vancouver Festival, the Venice Biennale, Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires, Jauna Muzika in Vilnius, L'Itineraire de Nuit in Paris, the Flanders Festival and the Vale of Glamorgan Festival. Highlights have included a sell out concert at the BBC's John Adams Weekend at the Barbican and the European premiere of Steve Reich's Triple Quartet at the Cheltenham International Festival.

The group's eclectic tastes have led to collaborations with artists from the jazz, pop and contemporary dance worlds, including Django Bates, Andy Sheppard, John Harle, John Taylor, Pulp and Gerard McChrystal as well as Siobhan Davies, Shobana Jeyasingh and the Belgian Dance Theatre Group, Ultima Vez. Most recently they have performed with the Malian singer Rokia Traore as part of Peter Sellars 2007 Barbican festival *New*



*Crowned Hope*. The quartet's longstanding collaboration with Soundintermedia has helped the ensemble, through the use of live electronics and multimedia, to expand its repertoire beyond the more "traditional" role of the string quartet and to perform in new concert spaces, some extraordinary eg in 1996 it played Reich's *Different Trains* from a platform suspended 60 feet above the Koln Hauptbahnhof during the rush hour!

A regular performer on BBC radio and Classic FM, the Smith Quartet has also featured on many recordings including Steve Martland's *Patrol* for BMG, Django Bates' *You Live and Learn...* (apparently) and Karl Jenkins' popular album, *Diamond Music*, for Sony. In 2005 the Smith Quartet appeared in the acclaimed BBC film *Holocaust - A Music Memorial Film from Auschwitz* performing the 2nd movement *Vocalise* from Messaien's *Quartet for the End of Time* and *Europe - During the War* from *Different Trains*. Shot on location at Auschwitz in November 2004 and broadcast to mark the 60th Anniversary of the liberation of the camps, the film went on to win many prestigious awards in 2006 notably the BAFTA for Best Documentary and The EMMY for Best Arts Documentary. On the strength of its work on this film the Smith Quartet was invited to record with Signum Records and released its

album of Reich in 2005. It featured *Different Trains*, *Triple Quartet* and *Duet* and went on to receive rave reviews from the music press. Its 2nd album *Ghost Stories*, released in 2007, was also critically acclaimed. The album of Phillip Glass quartets is the Smith's 3rd recording for Signum.

The Smith Quartet is currently enjoying a number of prestigious residencies in its 2007/2008 season including an ongoing relationship with Queen's University Belfast as quartet in residence at the Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC) and an exciting series of concerts throughout Europe featuring the music of celebrated Portuguese composers as part of Miso Music's Circuits Tour. As artists in residence at the 2006 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival they performed all of Morton Feldman's works for piano and strings with the celebrated pianist John Tilbury. Performances for which the quartet, and Tilbury, were shortlisted for the Royal Philharmonic Society Chamber Music Award in 2007. The quartet have recently been awarded a PRS award and are due to visit Hong Kong and Korea at the end of 2008 and South Africa and the United States in 2009 as well as visits to Germany, Austria, Sweden, Slovenia, Ireland and Italy.



Recorded at St. Paul's Church, Deptford, UK, 26 - 28 July 2007

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