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DIFERENT TRAINS

A NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

It has become clear in the last 30 years that new string quartets have appeared who have completely changed the nature of what that traditional ensemble was about. The Smith Quartet is at the forefront of this historical change. Now repertoire, some of it commissioned by the quartet and the use of various kinds of electronics to expand the very nature of the music they play are all clearly in evidence. I am enormously pleased with the interest the Smith Quartet has taken in my own music which has been a part of this sea change in the string quartet literature. Different Trains (1988) introduced prerecorded speaking voices whose speech melody generated the melodic content of the piece. It also introduced an element of music theater into the string quartet literature. Finally, it used prerecorded string quartets in addition to the live quartet to change the single quartet into three or sometimes four quartets all playing simultaneously. This idea was then used by itself, without the use of prerecorded voices, to produce Triple Quartet. The Smith Quartet has made these pieces their own by making their own prerecorded tapes via computer and elegantly performs them here with clarity and intensity.

Steve Reich - May 2005

TRIPLE QUARTET

Triple Quartet is for three string quartets, all of which on this recording are played by the Smith Quartet.

The initial inspiration for the piece comes from the last movement of Bartok’s Fourth Quartet. While no musical material is taken from the Bartok, its energy was my starting point. While working on Triple Quartet, two other composers found their way into my consciousness. As I was beginning the piece my friend Betty Freeman sent me a CD of the complete Schmitke string quartets. I had never heard a note of his music. In listening to his quartets I was struck by his virtuosity and moved by the incredible Mestro of his Second Quartet. Listening to the “density” of his music goaded me to thicken my own plot harmonically and melodically. Rhythmically, the second and third quartets play in conflicting values partly inspired by Michael Gordon’s Yo Shakespeare. The result, all in all, is a piece considerably more dissonant and expressionistic than expected.

STEVE REICH - THE SMITH QUARTET

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The piece is in three movements (fast-slow-fast) and is organized harmonically on four dominant chords in minor keys: a minor third apart: E minor, G minor, B-flat minor, C-sharp minor, and then returning to E minor to form a cycle. The first movement goes through this harmonic cycle twice with a section about one minute long on each of the four dominant chords. The result is a kind of variation form.

Rhythmically the first movement has the second and third quartet playing interlocking chords while the first quartet plays longer melodies in canon between the first violin and viola against the second violin and cello. The slow movement is more completely contrapuntal with a long slow melody in canon eventually in all 12 voices. It stays in E minor throughout.

The third movement resumes the original fast tempo and maintains the harmonic chord cycle, but modulates back and forth between keys more rapidly. The final section of the movement is in the initial key of E minor, and there the piece finally cadences.

**Triple Quartet** was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, David A and Evelyne T Lennette, Patricia Unterman and Tim Savinar, and Meet the Composer/Arts Endowment Commissioning Music/USA, which is made possible by generous support from the Helen F. Whitaker Fund, and the Catherine Flinn Shouse Foundation.

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**DUET**

Duet was composed in 1994 and is dedicated to Yehudi Menuhin and to those ideals of international understanding which Sir Yehudi practiced throughout his life. The piece is approximately five minutes in length. In this version performed by the Smith Quartet it is scored for two solo violins, four violas and four cellos. Beginning and ending in F the music is built around simple unison canons between the two violins who, from time to time, slightly vary the rhythmic distance between their two voices.

**Duet** was commissioned by the Gstaad Festival for Yehudi Menuhin and the Gstaad Festival Orchestra.

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**DIFFERENT TRAINS**

**Different Trains**, for String Quartet and pre-recorded performance tape, begins a new way of composing that has its roots in my early tape pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). The basic idea is that carefully chosen speech recordings generate the musical materials for musical instruments.

The idea for the piece came from my childhood. When I was one year old my parents separated. My mother moved to Los Angeles and my father stayed in New York. Since they arranged divided custody, I travelled back and forth by train frequently between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942 accompanied by my governess. While the trips were exciting and romantic at the time I now look back and think that, if I had been in Europe during this period, as a Jew I would have had to ride very different trains. With this in mind I wanted to make a piece that would accurately reflect the whole situation. In order to prepare the tape I did the following:

1. Record my governess Virginia, then in her seventies, reminiscing about our train trips together.
2. Record a retired Pullman porter, Lawrence Davis, then in his eighties, who used to ride lines between New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about his life.
3. Collect recordings of Holocaust survivors Rachella, Paul and Rachel, all about my age and then living in America — speaking of their experiences.
4. Collect recorded American and European train sounds of the '30s and '40s.

In order to combine the taped speech with the string instruments I selected small speech samples that are more or less clearly pitched and then notated them as accurately as possible in musical notation.

The strings then literally imitate that speech melody. The speech samples as well as the train sounds were transferred to tape with the use of sampling keyboards and a computer. Three separate string quartets are also added to the pre-recorded tape and the final live quartet part is added in performance.

**Different Trains** is in three movements (played without pause), although that term is stretched here since tempos change frequently in each movement. They are:

1. America - Before the war
2. Europe - During the war
3. After the war

The piece thus presents both a documentary and a musical reality and begins a new musical direction. It is a direction that I expect will lead to a new kind of documentary music video theatre in the not too distant future.

Again all parts on this recording are played by the Smith Quartet.

**Different Trains** was commissioned by Betty Freeman for the Kronos Quartet.
The piece is in three movements (fast-slow-fast) and is organized harmonically on four dominant chords in minor keys: a minor third apart: E minor, G minor, B-flat minor, C-sharp minor, and then returning to E minor to form a cycle. The first movement goes through this harmonic cycle twice with a section about one minute long on each of the four dominant chords. The result is a kind of variation form.

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“Different Trains” was commissioned by Betty Freeman for the Kronos Quartet.
TEXTS
Different Trains (1988)
for string quartet and electronic tape

Mvt 1 America - Before the War

“from Chicago to New York” (Virginia Mitchell)
“one of the fastest trains”
“the crack’ train from New York” (Lawrence Davis)
“from New York to Los Angeles”
“different trains every time” (Virginia Mitchell)
“from Chicago to New York”
“in 1939”
“1939” (Lawrence Davis)
“1940”
“1941”
“1941 I guess it must’ve been” (Virginia Mitchell)

Mvt 2 Europe - During the War

“1940” (Rachella)
“on my birthday”
“The Germans walked in”
“walked into Holland”
“Germans invaded Hungary” (Paul)
“I was in second grade”
“I had a teacher”
“a very tall man, his hair was completely plastered smooth”
“He said: ‘Black Crews invaded our country many years ago’” [i.e. Jews]
“and he pointed right at me”
“No more school!” (Rachel)
“You must go away”
“and she said ‘Quick, go!’” (Rachella)
“and he said: ‘Don’t breathe!’”
“into those cattle wagons” (Rachella)
“for four days and four nights”

Mvt 3 – After the War

“and then we went through these strange - sounding names”
“Polish names”
“Lots of cattle wagons there”
“They were loaded with people”
“They shaved us”
“They tattooed a number on our arm”
“Flames going up to the sky - it was smoking”

“and the war was over” (Paul)
“Are you sure?” (Rachella)
“The war is over”
“going to America”
“to Los Angeles”
“to New York”
“from New York to Los Angeles” (Mr. Davis)
“one of the fastest trains” (Virginia)
“but today, they’re all gone” (Mr. Davis)
“There was one girl, who had a beautiful voice” (Rachella)
“and they loved to listen to the singing, the Germans”
“and when she stopped singing they said, ‘More, more’ and they applauded”

1 “crack” in the older sense of “best”
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BIographies

STEVE REICH

Born in New York, Steve Reich graduated with honors in philosophy from Cornell University in 1957. He subsequently studied composition with Hall Overton, and from 1958 to 1961 he studied at the Juilliard School of Music with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. At Mills College in 1963 he received his M.A. in Music and had the opportunity to work with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud. Steve Reich studied drumming at the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana in Accra, Bahinese Gamelan Semar Pegulingan and Gamelan Gambang at the American Society for Eastern Arts in Seattle and Berkeley, California and he also studied the traditional forms of cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew scriptures in New York and Jerusalem.

In 1966 Steve Reich founded his own ensemble of three musicians, which rapidly grew to 18 members or more.

Mr. Reich’s 1988 piece, Different Trains, marked a new compositional method, in which speech recordings generate the musical material for musical instruments.

Over the years, Steve Reich has received commissions from the Barbican Centre London, the Holland Festival; San Francisco Symphony; the Ruthko Chapel; Vienna Festival, Hebbel Theater, Berlin, the Brooklyn Academy of Music for guitarist Pat Metheny; Spoleto Festival USA, West German Radio, Cologne; Settembre Musica, Torino, the Fromm Music Foundation for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman; the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra; Betty Freeman for the Kronos Quartet; and the Festival d’Auneau, Paris, for the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

Steve Reich’s music has been performed by major orchestras and ensembles around the world.

In 1994 Steve Reich was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, to the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1995, and, in 1999, awarded Commandeur de l’ordre des Arts et Lettres. The year 2000 brought five additional honors: the Schuman Prize from Columbia University, the Montgomery Fellowship from Dartmouth College, the Regent’s Lectureship at the University of California at Berkeley, an honorary doctorate from the California Institute of the Arts and Musical America’s Composer of the Year.

www.stevereich.com

THE SMITH QUARTET

Since its formation in 1988, the Smith Quartet has been closely associated with the performance of Steve Reich’s music. None more so than with his haunting work Different Trains which they have performed all over the world, not only on the concert platform but with the renowned Siobhan Davies Dance Company, and as part of the BBC’s specially commissioned Holocaust — A Musical Memorial Film from Auschwitz, which marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp.

As well as the works of Steve Reich, the quartet is dedicated to the development and performance of new music and has built a repertoire by some of the world’s most exciting composers, establishing an international reputation for their dynamic style and original approach to contemporary music. Kevin Volans, Michael Nyman, Graham Fitkin, Django Bates, Stephen Montague, Karl Jenkins, Sally Beamish, Michael Daugherty, Howard Skempton and Michael Finnissy are amongst many whom have written for them. To date they have premiered over 100 new works.

It is the aim of the quartet to bring contemporary music to as wide an audience as possible. They have expanded the potential of the “string quartet” to the fullest, not only by using amplification and live electronics in many of their concerts, but also in their work with dance companies such as Siobhna Leyasingh, Siobhan Davies and Ultima Vez and artists of other musical genres. Saxophonists John Harle and Gerard McChryystal, guitarist David Tanenbaum and Tim Brody, jazz musicians Andy Sheppard and John Taylor have all worked with the group. Of particular note has been the quartet’s relationship with the jazz artist Django Bates, which has produced the effervescent quartet, Pond Life (1993), a film for Britain’s Channel 4 TV and the critically acclaimed album you live and learn... apparently with Bates’ own group Human Chain. The quartet has also featured in the Barbican’s American Pioneers series alongside Britpop superheroes Pulp in a sell out performance of Terry Riley’s In C, with the composer at the piano.

The quartet’s long standing partnership with their sound designers Soundintermedia has also enabled them to take performances to unusual spaces and venues including The Music Summit Metropolis Cologne where they played Different Trains suspended above the tracks of Cologne’s Haupt Bahnhof.
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Their busy touring schedule has taken them as far afield as North and South America, Scandinavia and the Far East. They have appeared regularly at Europe’s leading festivals including La Biennale in Venezia, The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, The City of London Festival, The Vale of Glamorgan Festival and the Cheltenham Festival (where they gave the UK premiere of Reich’s Triple Quartet).

In addition to regular broadcasts with the BBC they have played on commercial CDs including Good Medicine (Glissando), Karl Jenkins’ Diamond Music (Sony), Graham Fitkin’s Slow (Decca), Steve Martland’s Patrol (BMG), and the BBC’s Late Junction Label.

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Different Trains:
Recorded between January and February 2005 at TCM Studios, London, UK
Engineered and mixed by David Sheppard
Produced by the Smith Quartet
Backline track recorded in January and February 2005 at TCM Studios by David Sheppard

Triple Quartet and Duet:
Recorded on June 4, 5, 6 and 7 2005
Kok studios, London, UK
Engineered by Mike Hatch
Produced by Martin Cotton

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