

Steve Reich (b. 1936)

Triple Quartet (1999)

Steve Reich has been recognized internationally as one of the world's foremost living composers. From his early taped speech works *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) to *The Cave* (1993) and *Three Tales* (2002), his collaborations with the video artist Beryl Korot, Reich's path has embraced not only aspects of Western classical music, but the structures, harmonies, and rhythms of non-Western and American vernacular music, particularly jazz.

Born in New York, Reich graduated with honors in Philosophy from Cornell University and studied at Juilliard with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. After receiving his M.A. in Music from Mills College, Reich studied drumming at the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana and traditional forms of cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew scriptures in New York and Jerusalem. Reich founded his own ensemble, Steve Reich and Musicians, which since 1971 has frequently toured the world, performing at venues as diverse as Carnegie Hall and the Bottom Line cabaret.

Reich's 1988 piece *Different Trains*, written for Kronos, marked a new compositional method, rooted in *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, in which speech recordings generate the musical material for musical instruments. In 1990 he received a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition for *Different Trains* as recorded by Kronos on Nonesuch. In 1997, Nonesuch released a ten-disc retrospective box set, *Steve Reich Works: 1965-1995*. He won a second Grammy Award in 1999 for his piece *Music for 18 Musicians*, also on Nonesuch.

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.

About *Triple Quartet*, Reich writes:

õ*Triple Quartet* is dedicated to the Kronos Quartet. It is for three string quartets. For Kronos or any other single string quartet to perform the piece they must prerecord quartets two and three and then play the quartet one part along with the prerecorded tape. Alternately, the piece can be played by twelve players with no tape.

õThe piece is in three movements: fast-slow-fast. It is organized harmonically on four dominant chords in 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 in all twelve voices. The third

movement resumes the original fast tempo, maintains the harmonic chord cycle but treats all the previous material in the piece more freely.ö

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