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The Recent Phases of Steve Reich

Before embarking on this article, readers might like to look at the list of works given at its end. The situation regarding Reich's recent scores is a little confusing, chiefly for three reasons. Firstly, three works exist in more than one version: in each case, the later one is more a rescoring of the original for either expanded or reduced forces than a radical reworking of the musical material. Secondly, the composer has in one instance retitled a new version rather than simply used the original title; and in at least one other instance he has allowed a title for a new work to circulate before changing his mind and calling it something else. Thirdly, Reich's music of the last few years is, inevitably perhaps, somewhat patchily known, even by the majority of his most enthusiastic admirers. While listeners in, say, New York have not unsurprisingly been able to hear most of the new works in live performances, those in, say, London have had no opportunity of hearing anything recent in concert performance since *Tehillim* except *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, a tape piece the origins of which actually go back to 1967. The situation regarding recordings is better: most of the recent works are now available on disc. Some, though, will find it hard to obtain them all; though not as difficult as it now is to obtain the DG boxed set that includes *Drumming*. Details of recordings are given at the end of this article.

1984 saw the premières of two extended compositions by Reich: *The Desert Music* for chorus and orchestra (Cologne, 17 March) and *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* (Paris, 19 December). These stand out not only as their composer's most recent pieces but as his most important works since *Tehillim* of 1981; *The Desert Music*, in particular, is already quite clearly one of Reich's major works. Before considering these two pieces, however, it is necessary to look back in order to put these new works in context. This requires returning not only to the period 1978-81 which culminated in *Tehillim*, but to a brief examination of two compositions of the earlier 1970s which have proved, like *Tehillim*, to be important influences on Reich's subsequent music.

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ, completed in May 1973, has never appealed to me as much as most of its composer's other music, both earlier and later, but it is undoubtedly one of the linchpins in Reich's compositional development. Its importance may be briefly summarised by making two points. The first is that the work takes one step further in exploring the techniques—harmonic and textural as well as rhythmic—that the composer had already begun using in *Four Organs* (1970) and *Drumming* (1970-71); techniques that were designed to replace the gradual process of 'phasing' with which Reich's name has become so closely identified. The second is that some of these techniques, at least, are made much harder to hear precisely. This is due partly to the increased concern of *Music for Mallet Instruments* with combined and contrasting textures and partly to an overall approach to harmony that, while still some way from what would generally be regarded as 'functional', is at least one significant notch in the direction of the increased directionality that does a good deal to characterise the repetitive

music of the last ten years or so.

The immediate effect of *Music for Mallet Instruments* is, I think, its harmonic and textural sumptuousness; some might call it 'Romantic', others merely 'commercial'.¹ An important element in this is the doubling of electric organ and women's voices; another is the use of this 'new timbre which is both instrumental and vocal at the same time'² as the protagonist in an extended process of augmentation and diminution of sustained notes, a technique the composer had first employed in *Four Organs*. It is the combination of longer note values and the post-phasing rhythmic techniques used up to then in pieces consisting largely of short time values that K. Robert Schwartz implies is most responsible for the reputation of *Music for Mallet Instruments* as 'a breakthrough piece'.³

Even more important in terms of Reich's later development, however, is *Music for Eighteen Musicians* which, completed in March 1976, occupied its composer for most of the previous two years. Schwartz proclaims that the composition 'clearly delineates the beginning of a new style period within Reich's output; it is also the work that was most influential in establishing Reich's name before a mass public'.⁴ The second part of this statement seems almost as significant as the first. Among other things it goes some way towards explaining how the work has come to have such a widespread influence on young composers in the late seventies and early eighties—both on those whose approach derives fairly directly from the old 'experimental music' and on those who come to it via avant-garde 'texture music' or even commercial music.

Again it is the approaches to texture and harmony that are the most significant. Regular orchestral instruments—violin, cello, two clarinets doubling bass clarinet—are used in the newly expanded Steve Reich and Musicians for the first time in addition to the now familiar tuned percussion, keyboards and women's voices. (*Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* is scored for eleven performers.) At least equally significant is the use of pulsing notes played or sung for the length of a breath: in the composer's words, 'gradually washing up like waves against the constant rhythm of the pianos and mallet instruments'.⁵

It is, however, the arrival of the pre-composed harmonic cycle as generator of the entire composition that is of greatest importance. In *Music for Eighteen Musicians* this cycle consists of eleven chords, which are played at the beginning and end of the work in the 'pulsing' manner described above. As a result of this, as Reich pointed out, 'There is more harmonic movement in the first 5 minutes of "Music for Eighteen Musicians" than in any other complete work of mine to date'.⁶ In between, the bulk of the piece consists simply of each of these chords held in turn for about five minutes while what the composer calls 'a small piece'⁷ is constructed on it. Harmony in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* is closer to the traditionally 'functional' than that of *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*; the way in which Reich builds his chords around a relatively static middle register and avoids a 'traditionally functional' bass line allows him, however, considerable opportunities for tonal ambiguity. In addition, the technique, also new in Reich's music, of underpinning a repeated melodic pattern by rhythmically shifting chord changes relates harmony and melody in a way new in repetitive music—a way that to some extent brings harmony and melody closer to their more traditional functions.

After the completion of *Music for Eighteen Musi-*

cians there is something of a break in Reich's output until we get to three pieces which follow each other in fairly quick succession between the end of 1978 and 1979. These three works—*Music for a Large Ensemble*, *Octet*, and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*—not only form a chronologically close and in some respects compositionally related group; they also lead fairly directly to what is undoubtedly the next major and 'breakthrough' piece: *Tehillim*, not completed until August 1981.

Music for a Large Ensemble, completed in December 1978, follows the tendency that by now seemed built into its composer's development: the increase in size of ensemble and concomitant range of sonorities. 'The instrumental forces are the largest I have ever used', Reich wrote at the time, 'and include all the orchestral families, plus women's voices.'⁸ While large, the ensemble required is, however, far from the traditional orchestral complement: the instrumentation is essentially a natural expansion of that used in *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. At its centre are the familiar tuned percussion and pianos (eleven players altogether); six strings and a wind group (including, notably, four trumpets) are joined by two female voices. *Music for a Large Ensemble* may be the first repetitive piece Reich wrote for musicians other than those of his own group, but the piece was seemingly easily adapted for Steve Reich and Musicians soon afterwards; the original version now appears to have been withdrawn.

Stylistically and technically, the work is simply 'a development'⁹ of *Music for Mallet Instruments* and *Music for Eighteen Musicians*. From the former come, among other things, the process of augmentation and diminution, now seemingly related to the repeating-melody shifting-chords technique of the latter. The trumpets are confined to sustained chordal passages beginning in the middle of each of the four sections of the piece; these are based on Reich's continued 'interest in the human breath as the measure of musical duration',¹⁰ but without the pulsing that went with it in *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

Music for a Large Ensemble seemed a considerable disappointment at the time and I still think it so now. *Octet* and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* are much better and more interesting pieces; with the benefit of at least a little hindsight, it may be said that the reason for this is that both the later works exhibit much more clearly Reich's developing interest in melody and, in the case of *Variations* more particularly, with a more 'functional' approach to harmony. The tendencies towards more sustained and clear-cut melodic writing and tonality are perhaps the most interesting aspects of the composer's development to the present.

One could, in fact, trace at least the origins of this apparently new concern with melodic line as far back as one wishes. The introduction of voices in *Drumming* and *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* had in a sense already signalled Reich's interest in, as it were, 'lyrical processes' as well as rhythmic ones. More significantly, I think, the way in which Reich varies the effect of a constant melodic pattern in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* by changing the harmonic rhythm underneath it increases the sense that there is a melody to be heard. It is interesting to observe, too, that in his notes for this work, the composer suggests that canonic procedure is simply another sort of phasing; he refers to 'The process of building up a canon, or phase relation, between two xylophones and two pianos which first occurs in section 2' (the italics are mine).¹¹ So far as I am aware

at present, this is the first reference Reich makes to something which in all probability had already been in his mind for some time: the fact that 'phasing' as he used it in the late sixties and early seventies is simply a special case of canon. Thinking in canonic terms inevitably gives rise to more traditional notions of counterpoint in which the generating force is the melodic line.

There is, though, a reason why melody became important for Reich at the time it did. During the relatively 'fallow' years of 1976 and 1977 his main musical preoccupation, aside from increasingly successful tours with his group, was the beginning of an investigation of his own Jewish heritage. Reich's new interest in Hebrew, the Torah, and—in terms of purely musical influence naturally the most important—in traditional cantillation systems and their notation brought another dimension to the expansion of his range of techniques and ways of thinking that, in retrospect, seems to have been necessary at that time. And while in one sense Jewish music can simply be added to the list of 'non-classical' influences that have helped to shape Reich's work into the original contribution to 20th-century music that it is, the nature of the source in this case acts to pull his musical development in a direction quite different even from that taken in his compositions of the early and middle seventies.

The signs of this influence—most notably the new interest in expanded melodic line—can even be seen to a limited extent in *Music for a Large Ensemble*. The writing for violins and clarinets around the middle of each of the four sections of the piece is still 'composed of smaller melodic patterns', as its composer says,¹² but is arguably heard in a more continuous fashion than any melodic patterns in Reich's earlier music. Besides, he himself draws attention to the connection between this new method of folding together small units that would formerly have been more separate and repetitive and the cantillation of Hebrew scriptures, 'the technique of which,' he says, 'is the putting together of small motives to make long melodic lines that make sense of the sacred text'.¹³ In context, however, this intermittent focus on line is swamped by the work's textural and harmonically undirected blandness.

Octet, completed in April 1979, and *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*, finished in December the same year, make much more interesting as well as more expanded use of what is basically only the same kind of melodic technique. The flute solo at Figure 3c, for instance—a lively ten bars outlining a slow descent, finished off with an ascending flourish so as to return to the higher notes for the repeat—is just the start of a longish sequence in which melody etches itself clearly against the familiar constant rhythmic chatter. The latter is in this case provided not by the tuned percussion that has become such a trademark in Reich's music, but by two piano parts of an almost legendary difficulty: 'the result,' the composer says, 'of years of writing for those mallet percussion instruments is transferred to the keyboard, so that there is some rather complex rhythmic interlocking going on between the two pianos which generates the rhythm for the entire *Octet*'.¹⁴

The overall effect of *Octet* is of greater focus, even of concision. The instrumentation—a string quartet and two 'doubling' woodwind players in addition to the two pianos—could almost be described as 'classical', and is a welcome antidote to the apparent assumption that bigger means better. Even the arrangement that Ransom Wilson has made of the piece for chamber orchestra, which goes under the title *Eight Lines*, seems to convey an impression of

clarity and precision. *Octet's* harmonic language has been compared to that of *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*,¹⁵ but even though the chordal vocabulary is somewhat similar, the total effect seems to me quite different: it's not only the instrumentation that keeps these chords under tight control. At under 18 minutes, *Octet* is one of Reich's shorter recent works, too; indeed, all three works of 1978-9 move quite rapidly and less repetitively through their material. At the same time, clarity of line does not lead to clarity of structure, since changes between sections are achieved seamlessly, almost by stealth: concision leading to elision.

The 'classical' aspect of *Octet*, something that Schwartz also notes, could easily be overplayed, but it has to be said that it takes on added meaning in context when compared with the approach of *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*. Again the instrumentation itself gives the clue: though percussion was absent from *Octet* too, and even though he uses his familiar pianos and electric organs to double the flutes and oboes, the combination of orchestral sounds and slower pace brings the new work much closer to a 'mainstream Western' approach than Reich had perhaps ever come before.

Structurally, *Variations* is what Michael Steinberg aptly describes as a 'mega-chaconne'.¹⁶ The harmonic basis is more 'functional' than previously even though the chaconne's harmonic cycle is worked through only three times in the course of 22 minutes, each 'variation' presenting a more active surface to the music than the last. *Variations* picks up the influence of *Music for Eighteen Musicians* in terms of harmonic structure and harmonic motion much more than do the intervening two pieces, using each chord in the chaconne progression in something like the 'stretched' manner of the earlier work. Melodically, too, *Variations* comes closer to Western models; the effect, Reich says, is 'one of a considerably more florid, melismatic, developed melodic vocabulary than in any work of mine to date'.¹⁷

Between *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* and *Tehillim* comes one piece: the already-mentioned *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, which dates officially from 1980. I do not intend to devote any further space to it here. At present it seems like a throwback to Reich's music of the late 1960s, being a phase piece on tape and based on short texts (in this case, the names of members of the composer's own group). Reich calls it a 'work in progress' and has said he has more ambitious and original plans for it.¹⁸

It is inevitably with the overtly Jewish-based *Tehillim* that Reich's tendencies towards more sustained and clear-cut melodic writing make themselves most felt; to a considerable extent this is true of its development of harmony and tonality too. These things are set off not only by the natural extension of the composer's immediately preceding involvement with melody and harmony, but also by what is the new work's single most radical step: as Reich says, 'This is the first time I have set a text to music since my student days and the result is a piece based on melody in the basic sense of that word'.¹⁹

The need to set the text (extracts from four psalms in Hebrew) 'in accordance with its rhythm and meaning' led Reich to avoid the short repeating patterns so characteristic of his earlier music. It also led to the absence of what the composer calls 'fixed meter or metric pattern'; the constantly changing bar-lengths that necessitated the use of a conductor for Steve Reich and Musicians for, I think, the first time probably constitute the other most radical step in *Tehillim*. On the other hand, as Smith suggests,

perhaps this aspect of the new work is overplayed by its composer: there is a continuous fast pulse throughout, despite the presence of 'the first slow movement I have composed since my student days', and while rhythmic repetition in the old sense has otherwise disappeared, there is still plenty of melodic repetition.

The melodic material of *Tehillim* is not based on Jewish themes; Reich says that one of the reasons he chose to set psalm extracts rather than, say, parts of the Torah or Prophets 'is that the oral tradition among Jews in the West for singing Psalms has been lost'. He has in fact managed to compose extended melodic structures entirely of his own that, while still subject to a good deal of repetition, are not made up even like the folding fragments of the other pieces inspired by Jewish cantillation techniques; their combination and proliferation are effected by techniques that are essentially canonic. Schwartz's summary is apt: 'we are dealing with genuine melodic material', he says, 'fully-formed melody, conceived as an integral, independent entity'.²⁰

Harmonically, *Tehillim* is interesting as well. As so often, the composer's own notes on the piece give clues to his way of thinking that go beyond even his own succinct summaries of what he considers the important points about a new work. The sleeve note to *Tehillim* is full of the straightforward technical terms used to describe and analyse traditional Western tonal music. '... ending in a crystal clear A major triad . . . set in C sharp minor with a strong G natural (lowered fifth, tritone or diabolus in musica) . . . later harmonized with an altered A dominant chord . . . to suggest that the G natural may be a leading tone to a G sharp Phrygian [sic] mode . . .': these are typical.²¹ It is no surprise to read, in the light of this, that the 'last movement affirms the key of D major as the basic tonal center of the work after considerable harmonic ambiguity earlier'. The structural basis of *Tehillim* is closely related to that of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*: what Schwartz calls 'several interrelated harmonic cycles'²² are used in a rather freer way than in the earlier work.

Harmonic cycle and a kind of functional harmony; traditional melodic invention and canonic elaboration of it; the setting of a text and the acceptance of its implications for rhythm and metre; these aspects of *Tehillim*, several of them to be found in Reich's work from the middle seventies onwards anyway, seemingly form the basis for Reich's present style. They are all to be found in what is already becoming seen as at least the other major work of the last five years, if not even the more important: *The Desert Music*.

Before this, though, comes one other short piece: *Vermont Counterpoint*, completed in 1982. This is intended principally as a solo work for flute accompanied by ten other flutes on tape; it could, though, be done by eleven live flute players—colleges and university music departments with large numbers of flutes, please note, particularly the flute choirs common in some American institutions. (*Violin Phase*, of 1967, can likewise be done either as a solo piece with tape or by four violinists; neither version, however, is exactly easy.) On the only occasion I have heard *Vermont Counterpoint* I enjoyed its relative clarity of contrapuntal textures and purpose, but felt that essentially the piece only dallies with ideas given much more interesting treatment in *Tehillim*. Reich intends to compose a whole series of pieces for solo instrument and tape/choir of the same instruments. The next one—*New York Counterpoint* for clarinet—is currently in progress and is already scheduled for its première on 6 December 1985 at Avery Fisher Hall, New York City.

Reich worked on *The Desert Music* for chorus and orchestra from September 1982 to December 1983. The work takes its title from a book of collected poems by William Carlos Williams, who, intriguingly, is one of three poets whom Reich mentions in *Writings* as particular interests of his in the early sixties, when he 'tried, from time to time, to set their poems to music, always without success'.²³ His 'first compositional activity'²⁴ in the present instance was to choose parts of several different poems for setting, including in the end a small part of a poem from a different collection. The use of an English-language text is entirely new in Reich's mature, 'repetitive' music, and as with the Hebrew psalm texts of *Tehillim*, he sets the words in a manner somewhat resembling the Western traditional notion of the term 'setting'. (The early, pioneering phase pieces using English words—*It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966)—as well as *My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait*, are derived entirely from their spoken texts in a unique and experimental way.)

The other notably new aspect of *The Desert Music* is its sheer scope; it was claimed to be Reich's largest-scale work. Not only is it a little longer than *Tehillim*, itself considerably longer, I think, than anything he had composed since *Music for Eighteen Musicians*; more importantly, the number of performers involved and the work's expressive range give some substance to the claim made by Boosey and Hawkes, his new publishers, that *The Desert Music* 'stands as a summation of his compositional activity to date'.

The choral forces required by the work are confined to a fairly modest two or three dozen mixed voices in eight parts (much larger than Reich had ever asked for before, however). But the orchestra is 87 strong: quadruple woodwind and brass, two timpanists doubling on roto-toms, six other percussionists, four pianists at two pianos, and 47 strings. In actual performance the extent to which Reich still relies on a central core of tuned percussion and pianos is made even clearer by the use of members of his own group. In Cologne, four of them did a good deal to hold a somewhat shaky performance together. At the American première performances in Brooklyn in October 1984, on which the forthcoming record is based, the composer's ensemble took an even larger part, I think.

More importantly, though, the Brooklyn performances made Reich all the more certain that he had finally solved the problem of writing his own kind of music in an orchestrally idiomatic way that serves his style rather than hinders it. One significant reason for this was the way in which the string players were regrouped as three separate orchestras; the strings have a lot of tricky polyrhythmic canons to perform and traditional grouping on the platform makes these even harder. The solution to this problem results in a much better performance, as I was able to hear from a tape. Reich seems justified in regarding *The Desert Music* as a significant step forward in terms of his orchestral writing; he now thinks both *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* and the orchestral version of *Tehillim* to be simply steps along the road.

The Desert Music draws fully on the expressive meaning of Williams's poetry in ways that are sometimes surprisingly direct. The opening fast movement, for instance, sets the first of the six lines the composer has selected from a poem entitled *Theocritus: Idyll 1—A version from the Greek* as a typically repeating structure, suggesting an approach quite alien to traditional notions of 'word setting'. But the other five lines receive a straightforward and non-repetitive

treatment in simple block chords, the repeating elements being left to the orchestra.

Both this poem and *The Orchestra*, from which the words for the second, third and fourth movements are taken, come from Williams's collection which gives Reich's piece its name. The second and fourth share both a moderate tempo and the same text: both the words themselves and the use of wordless vocalise in these two movements suggest what Reich himself calls the 'constant flickering of attention between what words mean and how they sound when set to music' which is apparently a central concern of *The Desert Music*. 'Well,' the poem reads, 'Shall we/think or listen? Is there a sound addressed/not wholly to the ear?'

The central third movement's slow outer sections present an essentially straightforward setting of a passage reflecting the poet's concern about the atom bomb. The middle section, on the other hand, in the tempo of the second and fourth movements, moves from rhythmic unison to vocal canons and thereby to the light fantastic kaleidoscope of constantly changing metres familiar from *Tehillim*. The words here are appropriately reflexive but slightly odd in the context of the movement as a whole: 'it is a principle of music/ to repeat the theme. Repeat/and repeat again,/as the pace mounts . . .' The final movement in this continuous 49-minute arch structure returns to the fast tempo of the first, but sets a text taken from another collection altogether: a poem called *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower*.

Reich himself describes the musical techniques used in *The Desert Music* as a combination of those to be found in *Music for Eighteen Musicians* and *Tehillim*. I have already mentioned the constantly changing metres of the latter as an influence on the new work; extensive use of canonic structures, particularly in the orchestral parts, is another. From *Music for Eighteen Musicians* comes the use of harmonic cycles presented in the form of pulsing chords constantly rising and falling in dynamic; the harmony, though, as the composer himself points out, is darker and more chromatic than in the earlier work. Other aspects of *The Desert Music*—notably the extensive doubling of the vocal parts and the use of amplification—are more generally familiar from Reich's earlier music.

The Desert Music points up, even more than his other music of the last ten or so years, the extent to which Reich now thinks in much more traditionally Western terms than before. In the workshop sessions he gave at the American Center in Paris in connection with the performances of *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* (of which more in a moment) he talked a great deal about harmony. It is very noticeable that his references are now more likely to be to Debussy or Bartók than to Javanese gamelan or Pérotin. He feels a strong and perhaps increasing kinship with Debussy, whose non-'functional' but dominant-quality harmony now seems very close to his own, particularly in terms of tonal ambiguity. In the past he has cheerfully related his use of a kind of chordal suspension technique in *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards* to a study of Bartók's Second Piano Concerto.²⁵ In present-day terms, at least in 'avant-garde' terms, he argues, 'I am a harmonic conservative.' 'Major, minor, Dorian: these are my big three', he says. Reich himself regards *Tehillim* as his most traditional piece; partly, I think, because the pauses between its four parts make him think of it in terms of movements and classical forms. He still in fact prefers the concentration and sense of focus created by a single-movement span; nowadays, though, he cites Bartók's Third String Quartet as a

model in this respect. In this light, Smith's comparison of *Tehillim* with Stravinsky, and in particular he feels with *Les noces*, seems perfectly natural.²⁶

Music for Percussion and Keyboards, composed in 1984, is intended in the first instance for the Canadian percussion group Nexus. Four percussionists perform variously on marimbas, vibraphones, bass drums, crotales, a tam-tam, and—briefly in the interests of establishing a new tempo, primarily I think—on percussion beaters themselves. There are also, however, two keyboard players who double on pianos and synthesizers. It was apparently Reich's original intention to compose keyboard parts simple enough for the percussionists themselves to play, but things got out of hand and he has had to call in two specialists.

Especially in view of this, writing for a slightly expanded Nexus is not, of course, very different from writing for Reich's own Musicians; the two groups even have players in common. *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* is in fact also intended for touring with the smaller version of the composer's ensemble, which has been starved of new pieces since Reich's increasing fame allowed him to expand his forces to match.

Structurally, as in several other respects, this latest composition is rather similar to *The Desert Music*. Five sections are played continuously to form an ABCBA arch using three harmonic cycles; the tempo moves from fast to the central slow section and back to fast via the moderatos of the second and fourth. The relatively long first section is typically Reichian in its woody, continuous chatter, but after this the textures become generally sparer. The second section makes extensive and interesting play with more sustained notes on bowed vibraphones—a technique that had

already appeared in the first section. This attempt to overcome the problem of the relatively short duration of percussion sounds is but the most recent example of Reich's successful integration of more sustained melodic lines into his music. The texture of this section is also quite original, not only because of the sustained vibraphone sounds with their little built-in crescendi and diminuendi on each note, but because the rather lumbering, dry piano parts and the eerie punctuation of the bass drums offset them in an interesting way.

On the other hand, the synthesizer melody of the fourth section, using the same harmonic cycle as that of the second, seems contrived and out of place against the dry, repeated vibraphone chords. The single stroke on the tam-tam near the end of the performance, though, is masterly.

Music for Percussion and Keyboards is not, I think, as important in Reich's output as *The Desert Music*, though at almost exactly half an hour in duration it must rank in at least one sense as Reich's other most substantial work since *Tehillim*. It may be that I was inclined to underestimate it partly because Nexus's Paris performances in the Pompidou Centre were at an early and uncharacteristically rough stage; the circumstances of the performances were not ideal either. The piece itself also had an unpolished air about it in some respects, most notably when it ended abruptly without completing its last harmonic cycle. On the other hand, even the relatively poor Cologne performance of *The Desert Music* made the very considerable qualities of the work quite clear.²⁷

Reich himself pointed out in Paris that *Tehillim* at present represents something of an extreme point in his music, being what he called 'straightforwardly melodic'. And while *The Desert Music* retains a clear

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Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ for 4 marimbas, 2 glockenspiels, metallophone, 3 female voices, and electric organ (1973)

Music for Eighteen Musicians (1976)

Music for Large Ensemble (1978)

Octet for 2 pianos, string quartet, 2 clarinets/bass clarinet/flute/piccolo (1979)

Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards for chamber orchestra or orchestra (1979)

Tehillim for voices and ensemble or voices and full orchestra (1981)

Vermont Counterpoint for flute and tape, or 11 flutes, or violin and tape (1982)

Eight Lines, arrangement of *Octet* for chamber orchestra by Ransom Wilson (1983)

The Desert Music for chorus and orchestra (1983)

Sextet for percussion and keyboards (1985)

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melodic impetus, but 'less so', as the composer said, *Music for Percussion and Keyboards* is 'more verging towards pattern' once more. Yet he also already saw the possibility that the importance of melody in his work might go in waves, as it were. He suggested that the new clarinet and tape piece he is to write for Richard Stolzman, *New York Counterpoint*, might well be much more overtly melodic again, as befits an essentially solo piece. I wonder how Reich's recent involvement with melody would stand the test of a purely solo work . . .

¹ For a view inclining to the latter see Dave Smith's review, in *Contact 24* (Spring 1982), p.34, of the September 1981 London concert by Steve Reich and Musicians that included *Octet* and *Tehillim* as well as *Music for Mallet Instruments*. This occasion, by the way, was the last time the composer's own group performed in Britain.

² Reich, *Writings about Music* (Halifax, Canada: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design/London: Universal Edition, 1974), p.70.

³ 'Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, part II', *Perspectives of New Music*, vol.20 (1981/1982), p.241. The first part of Schwartz's article appears in *PNM*, vol.19 (1980/1981), pp.373-92. This two-part survey of Reich's development up to *Tehillim* is the best I have seen, even though it leans heavily (and not always with full acknowledgement) on the composer's own *Writings* and on descriptions of later pieces in programme notes, etc.

⁴ Schwartz, op. cit., p.244.

⁵ Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for a Large Ensemble*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Sleeve notes to the recording of *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.

¹² Wayne Alpern, 'An Interview with Steve Reich', *New York Arts Journal*, vol.17 (1980), p.17, as quoted in Schwartz, op. cit., p.252.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Smith, op. cit.

¹⁶ Sleeve notes to the recording of *Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards*.

¹⁷ Alpern, op. cit., p.18; quoted in Schwartz, op. cit., pp.257-58.

¹⁸ Schwartz, op. cit., pp.260-62.

¹⁹ This and the following four quotations are taken from the sleeve notes to the recording of *Tehillim*.

²⁰ Schwartz, op. cit., pp.263, 264.

²¹ This and the following quotation are taken from the sleeve notes to the recording of *Tehillim*.

²² Schwartz, op. cit., p.264.

²³ *Writings about Music*, p.49.

²⁴ Reich, programme note for *The Desert Music*.

²⁵ See Schwartz, op. cit., p.257.

²⁶ See Smith, op. cit.

²⁷ This article had already reached proof stage when I learned that Reich had produced what sounds like an extensively revised version of *Music for Percussion and Keyboards*; he has also given it the new title, *Sextet*. By the time this article appears in print, the first performances

will have been given by Nexus on its European spring tour. The American première will be given at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in the autumn when it will be choreographed by Laura Dean; the US concert première will be given in the New York programme on 6 December that also includes *New York Counterpoint*. There are plans for a British première in early 1986.

Works, 1978-84

Music for a Large Ensemble, completed December 1978.

Commissioned: Holland Festival. First performance: Netherlands Wind Ensemble, cond. Reinbert de Leeuw, June 1979. Forces: uncertain. (In his sleeve note to the recording of the version for his own group, Reich writes: 'During the fall and winter of 1979, while rehearsing with my own ensemble, the piece was extensively revised. The middle section was removed, shortening the piece from about 21 to about 16 minutes; two violas were added, which made it necessary to changes [sic] notes in the women's voices, violins and soprano saxophones; a flute was removed; and the tempo was increased from about 184 beats per minute to about 212.' A good idea of the original 'large ensemble' can be gained from the instrumentation of the revised version shown below, plus the information above. It may be noted that Schwartz's list of instruments (*PNM*, vol.20, p.251) does not tally with that drawn from the record sleeve.)

Revised version, fall-winter 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians (?without conductor), Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. Forces: flute, 2 clarinets, 2 soprano saxophones, 4 trumpets, 4 marimbas, 2 xylophones, vibraphone, 4 pianists, 2 female voices, 2 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, 2 double basses; winds, pianos, voices, and strings amplified.

Octet, completed April 1979. Commissioned: Radio Frankfurt (Hessischer Rundfunk). First performance: Netherlands Wind Ensemble, cond. Reinbert de Leeuw, Hessischer Rundfunk, 21 June 1979. Forces: 2 clarinets doubling flutes and bass clarinets, 2 pianos, 2 violins, viola, cello; amplification optional. (At the première there were four woodwind players.)

Revised version, fall-winter 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians (without conductor), Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. (Reich writes in his sleeve note to the recording of this version that 'while rehearsing with my own ensemble the piece was revised to include piccolo and the tempo was slightly increased.')

Version for chamber orchestra, entitled *Eight Lines*, arranged Ransom Wilson, ?1983. First performance: Solisti New York, cond. Ransom Wilson, 92nd Street Y, New York, 10 December 1983. Forces: 6 winds, 2 pianos, 8 violins, 4 violas, 4 cellos, double bass. (According to Allan Kozinn's sleeve note to the recording of this version, the double bass part is drawn from the cello and bass clarinet lines.)

Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards, completed December 1979. Commissioned: San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. First performance: SFSO, cond. Edo de Waart, May 1980. Forces: 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 pianos, 3 electric organs, strings.

Revised version, 1979 (?-80). First performance: Steve Reich and Musicians, (?without conductor) Carnegie Hall, New York, 19 February 1980. Forces: 25 performers.

My Name Is: Ensemble Portrait, ?1980-81. (Based on *My Name Is*, for three or more tape recorders, performers, and audience (1967). Two performances of this are listed in *Writings about Music*, p.73, but it is otherwise unmentioned there. Described by Schwartz (p.260).) First performance: Whitney Museum, New York, 6 January 1981. (On this occasion the piece began with the eight performers of Steve Reich and Musicians on whose names this realisation was based stepping forward to microphones and introducing themselves before the tape began.)

Tehillim ('Psalms'), completed 18 August 1981. Commissioned: jointly by West German Radio, Cologne, South German Radio, Stuttgart, and Rothko Chapel, Houston. First performance: (first two parts only) South German Radio Orchestra, cond. Peter Eötvös, June 1981; (complete) Steve Reich and Musicians, cond. George Manatian, West German Radio, Cologne, ?September 1981. Text: setting in Hebrew of extracts from four Biblical psalms: Part One, Psalm 19:2-5 (1-4 in King James Version); Part Two, Psalm 34:13-15 (12-14 in King James Version); Part Three, Psalm 18:26-7; Part Four, Psalm 150:4-6. Forces: 4 female voices (high soprano, 2 lyric sopranos, alto), piccolo, flute, oboe, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, 6 percussionists (maracas, clapping, tuned tambourines without jingles, marimba, vibraphone, crotales), 2 electric organs, 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass; winds, voices, and strings amplified.

Version for orchestra. First performance: New York Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Zubin Mehta, Avery Fisher Hall, New York, 16 September 1982. Forces: 4 female voices (as above), piccolo, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 4 clarinets, bassoon, 6 percussionists (as above), 2 electric organs, strings in five parts; winds, voices, and strings amplified.

Vermont Counterpoint, 1982. Commissioned: Ransom Wilson. First performance: Ransom Wilson, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, 1 October 1982. Forces: flute, tape; or 11 flutes.

The Desert Music, September 1982-December 1983. Commissioned: jointly by West German Radio, Cologne, and Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York. First performance: West German Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, cond. Peter Eötvös, West German Radio, Cologne, 17 March 1984. Forces: 27 mixed voices in 8 parts (SSAATTBB), 4 flutes (3 doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (3 doubling cor anglais), 4 clarinets (3 doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons doubling contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets (1 doubling piccolo trumpet (optional)), 3 trombones, tuba, 4 pianists (2 pianos), 7 percussionists (6 if timpanist assists), 2 timpanists doubling roto-toms, strings (12,12,9,9,6); woodwinds and voices amplified.

Music for Percussion and Keyboards (originally announced as *Five Lines*), 1984. Commissioned: Pompidou Centre, Paris. First performance: Nexus, Pompidou Centre, Paris, 19 December 1984. Forces: 4 percussionists (3 marimbas, 2 vibraphones, 2 bass drums, crotales, percussion beaters, tam-tam), 2 pianists doubling synthesizers; amplification.

Revised version, ?December 1984-?January 1985. First performance: announced as Nexus, Helsinki, 10 March 1985. ('Substantial' alterations to the original version, according to Reich, but, so far as I am aware, the same instrumentation.)

Recordings of works, 1973-84

All discs devoted entirely to performances of Reich by the composer's own ensemble unless otherwise stated.

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ (together with *Six Pianos*, also 1973) was originally issued as part of a DG boxed set devoted primarily to *Drumming*: DG 2740 106 (1974). This is now deleted, but *Music for Mallet Instruments* and *Six Pianos* are still available separately as DG Privilege 2535 463 (cassette 3335 463). (When I was in Paris last December for *Music for Percussion and Keyboards*, I found a copy of the boxed set in the FNAC department store; other copies may still be unsold on shelves somewhere.)

Music for Eighteen Musicians, ECM 1129 (1978)

Music for a Large Ensemble, Octet (with *Violin Phase*), ECM-1-1168 (1980)

Variations for Winds, Strings, and Keyboards (original orchestral version) (with John Adams, *Shaker Loops*), San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, cond. Edo de Waart, Philips 412 214-1 (1984)

Tehillim, ECM 1215 (1982)

Vermont Counterpoint (with Philip Glass, *Facades* (arranged for two flutes and strings); Frank Becker, *Stonehenge*; Debussy, *Syrinx*; André Jolivet, *Ascèses (I)*), Ransom Wilson (flute), EMI Angel DS-37340 (1982) (import only)

Eight Lines (chamber orchestral version of *Octet* made by Ransom Wilson) (with John Adams, *Grand Pianola Music*), Solisti New York, cond. Ransom Wilson, EMI Angel DS-37345 (1984) (import only)

The Desert Music, Steve Reich and Musicians with chorus and members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Michael Tilson Thomas, Nonesuch, due for release in summer 1985.

The Desert Music will receive its British première at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert on 29 July 1985.