

The sixth category to be decided in the sixth edition of these awards

## Steve Reich wins the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award for his renewal of musical language, wedding popular with high culture and the European tradition with the music of Africa and Asia

- One of the leading exponents of the music of our time, Steve Reich has, in the words of the jury, reinvented the form of the concert and musical theater, blurring the divide between genres
- Reich's work engages frontally with world issues, from the Israeli-Palestine conflict to the terror attacks of 9/11 by way of the relations between faith and science, and has reached multiple and varied publics
- He has combined electro-acoustics with instruments from non-western traditions, pushing rhythm and percussion into the foreground and forging a new relationship between text and music

**Madrid, February 11, 2014.-** The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Contemporary Music category goes in this sixth edition to U.S. composer Steve Reich for "bringing forth a new conception of music, based on the use of realist elements from the realm of daily life and others drawn from the traditional music of Africa and Asia." His work, adds the jury, "has carved out new paths, establishing a dialogue between popular and high culture and between western modernity and non-European traditions, and achieving a rich combination of complexity and transparency."

The jury also singled out his ability to attract the widest, most varied publics "by engaging with world issues, from the Israeli-Palestine conflict to the 9/11 attacks, as well as contemporary problems like the relations between faith and science and technology."

Steve Reich is the author of a vast output of indisputable excellence, which has opened up new and exciting directions in contemporary musical creation, on which he has set a uniquely American stamp. His work and ideas have played a fundamental role in the transformation and evolution of the musical techniques

and language of the late 20th and early 21st century. An early contribution was the creation and development of "minimalism" in music, through compositional processes where the reiteration of motifs of popular and, at times, jazz origin, generate micro-rhythmic textures of great originality and expressive beauty. His use of controlled feedback techniques, phasing and natural mathematical processes, is a key component of his aesthetic, and one that has unquestionably influenced many composers of his own and later generations, for whom experimenting with new technologies has become a standard compositional resource.

In one of his first writings, in 1967, Reich talks of short, tight, energetic propositions in an early intimation of what would become known as minimalist music: "I am interested in perceptible processes, music where process and sound are unified. Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest, or turning over an hour glass and watching the sand slowly run through the bottom."

These processes inform many of Reich's landmark works, among them *Piano Phase*, *Pendulum Music* or *Drumming*, where Reich adds to the mix the idea of "phasing"; that is, the subjection of a given musical material to a drawn-out process of synchronization and desynchronization, in which rhythm is phased against rhythm, producing an acoustic disorientation that is of considerable interest from a micro-temporal standpoint. Reich's core idea in his first compositions was to follow the natural progress of this phenomenon, eschewing a direct compositional intervention with regard to form, gesture and, even, his own intuition as an artist. The music thus produced invites us to reflect on natural processes and step outside dialectic time, rather than simply adding to the classical canon.

### **The break with serialism**

Steve Reich was born on October 3 in New York City, and raised between there and California. He started out studying piano then moved on to percussion. In 1953, he entered Cornell University where he graduated with a degree in philosophy, as well as studying musical history from Bach to the 20th century as an assistant to William Austin. Back in New York, he took composition classes with the jazz musician Hall Overton. From 1958 to 1961, he studied at the Juilliard School of Music with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti, then returned to California to enroll at Mills College, where he worked with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud.

Curiously enough, it was as a student of Berio's that he turned his back on the European heritage of the Second Viennese School to plunge into the stream of American contemporary music. Reich has this to say about his change of direction: "I became a composer because I adored Stravinsky, Bach, Pérotin's music from the early middle ages, the jazz of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, bebop ... And none of that had anything to do with the serial, twelve-tone music I was learning at university, so I decided to pursue the music that I loved."

In 1963, he obtained his M.A. in music, and one year later took part in the premiere of *In C* by Terry Riley, who would be influential in drawing him to repetitive music.

By then he was experimenting at the San Francisco Tape Music Center and working on his first pieces for tape, among them *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), based on multiple tape loops shifting gradually out of sync, a technique that he would later employ in his instrumental compositions. His next move, again in New York, was to found this own ensemble, Steve Reich and Musicians, who have since performed to sold-out houses all round the world.

He discovered Indonesian music reading *Music in Bali* by Colin McPhee and also frequented painters of his generation like Sol LeWitt and Robert Smithson, performing regularly at the Park Place Gallery from 1966 to 1967. He had by now become a leading exponent of minimalism, with the emblematic *Pendulum Music*, located somewhere between sound sculpture and performance art, which he premiered with painter William Wylie in 1968. In 1969, he and Philip Glass spent time with the avant-garde artist Moondog whom they hailed as the founding father of "minimalism". In summer 1970, Reich took a course on African percussion at the University of Ghana's Institute for African Studies, an experience that would later resonate in his celebrated *Drumming* (1971-1972) for voice and percussion.

The jury also cites Reich's adoption of elements of African and Asian traditional music. The author explains the history behind the process: "When I was a kid, I was a drummer. At the end of my studies, I realized, however, that I wanted to keep my drumming part of what I was doing. I asked myself: In what tradition is percussion the dominant voice of the orchestra? And the answer was West Africa and Indonesia. So from 1970 through 1974, I proceeded to study both of those musics – I traveled to Ghana in 1970 and then later studied Balinese gamelan music in Seattle and Berkeley. What really interested me about this music was that it was put together in different ways from how western music is generally constructed, so that several repeating patterns are superimposed; it was the rhythmic structure that interested me, rather than the sound of the instruments."

After a time collaborating closely with dancer and choreographer Laura Dean, in 1973 and 1974, he practiced the technique of Balinese gamelan Semar Pegulingan and Gambang at the American Society for Eastern Arts in Seattle and Berkeley, California. It is to this period that we owe *Six Pianos* (1973) and *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1976).

In the year 1974, he met his future wife Beryl Korot, who reawakened his interest in Judaism and the Hebrew language. From 1976 to 1977, he studied the traditional forms of cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew scriptures in New York and Jerusalem, which were later the inspiration behind *Tehillim* (1981), based on the biblical psalms, and *Desert Music* (1984), a setting of poems by William Carlos

Williams. Both these pieces illustrate his growing attachment to the word in music. In the late 1980s, Reich returned to the tape, in works like *Different Trains* for string quartet and tape, recalling a childhood spent traveling back and forth between New York and Los Angeles, but also the European trains transporting prisoners to the Nazi death camps. His innovation in these pieces consisted of using taped voices to generate the musical material.

Reich's output has since moved progressively away from its minimalist beginnings. *City Life* (1995), which uses digital samplers among the live instruments, playing back a wide variety of street sounds and speech fragments, marked a milestone in the use of technology, while his love for early music (Pérotin) was given free rein in 1995's *Proverb* (1995). The jury's citation, in this regard, remarks that Reich has developed "new relations between text and music, in which speech generates melodic and rhythmic structures."

With *The Cave* (1989-1993) Reich broke new boundaries in multimedia creation. The work revolves around the figure of Abraham, father of the three monotheist faiths, and is scored for an instrumental ensemble accompanying video footage by Beryl Korot. It is in works like this that Reich "has reinvented the form of the concert and musical theater, and blurred the divide between musical genres," the citation continues. "His operas use visual media in place of actors, while his music has inspired the work of numerous choreographers."

In 1994, Reich was elected to the American Academy of Arts. From 1998 to 2002 he composed *Three Tales*, a digital video opera that explores the role of technology in the 20th century through three historical episodes: the *Hindenburg* crash of 1937, the U.S.'s nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean between 1946 and 1952, and the cloning of Dolly the sheep in 1997. This was also a time of international recognition, including Japan's Praemium Imperial award in 2006, Sweden's Polar Music Prize in 2007 and the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his composition *Double Sextet*.

Asked what interests and/or perturbs him about modern-day science, Reich replies: "Science has done great things. In medicine, we have seen huge advances in cancer, polio vaccination and also in genetics, which are helping to prevent and cure disease. But human invention is like a double-edged sword, and technology has in our days provided biomedical breakthroughs but also the destruction of lives through the use of arms. Technology has become more powerful than ever, and the atom bomb marked the first time when it was truly possible to destroy most of our world. We must be wary, because we can do a lot of good, but if we make a mistake, the consequences could be catastrophic."

Since *Three Tales*, Reich has tended to concentrate on instrumental pieces, such as *You Are (Variations, 2004)*, *Variations for Vibes, Piano and Strings (2005)* and

*Daniel Variations* (2006). He also wrote *WTC 9/11* for String Quartet and Pre-Recorded Voices in memory of the Twin Tower attacks, incorporating the voices of emergency personnel and New York residents recorded on the day of the tragedy. It was premiered in March 2011 by the Kronos Quartet, at Duke University in North Carolina.

On March 5, 2013 the London Sinfonietta, conducted by Brad Lubman, gave the world premiere of *Radio Rewrite* (for ensemble with 11 players), inspired by the music of Radiohead.

Reich has just finished writing a quartet for two vibraphones and two pianos, and is working on a new piece for the Royal Ballet in London and the Signal Ensemble in Chicago (United States), which should premiere in 2016.

## **The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards**

The BBVA Foundation promotes, funds and disseminates world-class scientific research and artistic creation, in the conviction that science, culture and knowledge in its broadest sense hold the key to a better future for people. The Foundation designs and implements its programs in partnership with leading scientific and cultural organizations in Spain and abroad, seeking to identify and prioritize those projects with the power to move forward the frontiers of the known world.

The BBVA Foundation established its Frontiers of Knowledge Awards in 2008 to recognize the authors of outstanding contributions and radical advances in a broad range of scientific and technological areas congruent with the knowledge map of the late 20th and 21st centuries, and others that address central challenges, such as climate change and development cooperation, deserving of greater visibility and recognition. Their **eight categories** include classical areas like *Basic Sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics)* and *Biomedicine*, and other, more recent areas characteristic of our time, ranging from *Information and Communication Technologies*, *Ecology and Conservation Biology*, *Climate Change* and *Economics, Finance and Management* to *Development Cooperation* and the innovative realm of artistic creation that is *Contemporary Music*.

The **juries** in each category are made up of leading international experts in their respective fields, whose involvement endorses the rigor of the awards and has indeed been instrumental in consolidating their prestige. The BBVA Foundation is aided in the organization of the awards by the **Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)**, the country's premier multidisciplinary research organization. As well as proposing each jury chair, the CSIC is responsible for appointing the Technical Evaluation Committees that undertake an initial assessment of candidates and draw up a reasoned shortlist for the consideration of the juries.

In the Contemporary Music category, Committee members were Cristina de la Puente, of the Council's Center for Human and Social Sciences (CCHS-CSIC); and Emilio Ros-Fabregás and María Gembero, both of the "Mila y Fontanals" Institution (CSIC).

**Contemporary Music jury**

The jury in this category was chaired by **Philippe Albèra**, Director of Éditions Contrechamps (France), with **Ranko Markovic**, Artistic Director of the Konservatorium Wien Privatuniversität (Austria) acting as secretary. Remaining members were **Edith Canat de Chizy**, composer and member of the Académie de Beaux-Arts, Institute de France (France); composer **Cristóbal Halffter**, member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando; **Winrich Hopp**, Artistic Director of Musikfest Berlin (Berliner Festspiele) and the Musica Viva concert series (Germany); **Johannes Kalitzke**, composer and conductor with the Komische Oper Berlin (Germany); **Martin Kaltenecker**, Associate Professor of Musicology at Université Paris Diderot (France); and **Dimitri Vassilakis**, pianist and member of Ensemble Intercontemporain (France).

**Previous laureates**

Last year's winner in this category was **Pierre Boulez** for "his influence both as a composer and a key figure engaging in every aspect of musical reflection and transmission." The award in the fourth edition went to Italian composer **Salvatore Sciarrino** for "renewing the possibilities of instrumental and vocal music and the singularity of his sound materials," in the words of the jury's citation. Preceding them were **Helmut Lachenmann** for a creative output that has "enlarged the world of sounds in the last fifty years in a way unmatched by any other contemporary composer" and **Cristóbal Halffter** who, the jury said, "since the late 1950s and early 1960s has made a major contribution to the reintroduction of Spanish music into the world of contemporary music. Finally, the award in the inaugural edition (when the category was the broader "Arts") was granted to architect **Steven Holl** of Columbia University (United States) for "his humanistic approach to architectural design."

**UPCOMING AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>DATE</b>
<b>Economics, Finance and Management</b>	February 18, 2014
<b>Development Cooperation</b>	February 25, 2014

## Fundación **BBVA**

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