

## MARIA BACHMANN, VIOLIN / JON KLIBONOFF, PIANO



Philip Glass: Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano (2008)

Johann Sebastian Bach Charles Gounod: Ave Maria / Meditation on Prelude No. 1 in C Major

Franz Schubert: Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, Op. 162

Maurice Ravel: Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano

Orange Mountain Music

Philip Glass has taken his position in musical history not through the invention of a new and complex harmonic world, but by the reduction of musical materials to a bare minimum through the use of repetition. That stark definition of Minimalism fails in its application to Glass's music because it omits the emotional charge infused into the works by way of subtle harmonic changes and shifts in tempo and mood. Glass comments on his move away from the complexities of Modernism: "There was a generation about ten years older than me, like Xenakis, Stockhausen and Boulez, who were so damn good at what they did that there was no need to write any more of that kind of music. Working with Ravi (Shankar), I saw there was another way music could be organized, around rhythmic ideas instead of around structure. Rhythm could be the structural basis of the music instead of just an ornament."

Glass' first experiments in the application of this theory came in string quartet form in 1966 in Paris after his studies with Nadia Boulanger and his historic meeting with Indian sitarist Ravi Shankar. It was in this early string quartet that Glass first used his series of short cells of repeated motives, the highly reductive style we have come to know as Minimalism. Since then, to the surprise of fans of his larger works, he has written eight string quartets, and most recently, a cello sonata and the Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano heard on this recording.

Despite those accomplishments, Philip Glass remains most famous for such large works as his trilogy of operas, the four-hour long *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), *Satyagraha* (1980), and *Akhmaten* (1984). Two new opera commissions, *Kepler* (Landestheater in Austria) and *The Perfect American* (a fictional story about Walt Disney (New York City Opera), have recently been announced. A 1990 reunion with Ravi Shankar produced *Passages*, and a collaboration with avant-garde stage director, designer and playwright Robert Wilson gave us the audio-visual extravaganza *Monsters of Grace*. More recently his scores for such films as *The Hours* and *Notes on a Scandal* have brought him Academy Award nominations. Other recent film scores include Scott Hicks' *No Reservations*, and Woody Allen's *Cassandra's Dream*. Most recently, *LIFE: A Journey Through Time*, a multimedia production featuring Frans Lanting's photographs and Glass's music, was performed in Geneva to inaugurate the Large Hadron Collider, the most powerful machine ever built to study the origins of the universe. In his recently published *The Rest is Noise*, prize-winning *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross described Philip Glass as having "vaulted to a level of popular recognition that no modern composer since Stravinsky had enjoyed."

**Philip Glass (b. 1937)**  
**Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano**

The Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano bears Glass's familiar imprint of repetitive, motor-like rhythms but applied in his ever unique way. One is reminded of the *skill* and *art* of repetition as employed by no less composers than Bach, Schubert, and Ravel, all of whom are represented on this recording because of their influence on the music of Philip Glass. Indeed, it is skillful and artful repetition that both sustains the tension in Glass's score for the film, *The Hours*, and gives the Sonata its great emotional intensity. Ask any performer about the singular difficulty of repetition, and you will not question its validity. The challenge comes not only in sustaining the repetition but also making the subtle changes that interrupt it. Of course no discussion on the art of repetition would be complete without mention of Ravel's ever-popular *Bolero*, where it is taken to a famous high.

Yet repetition is only one facet of Glass's Sonata. Others are the inventive and daring harmony that marks the first movement and the moving melodic quality of the second movement. The third movement, with its soloistic passages for both instruments, is singular in its powerful effectiveness. Unexpectedly, Glass chooses to end this wonderful work with a simple and quiet chromatic statement only hinted at earlier in the movement.

Through Meet the Composer, the Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano was commissioned by Martin Murray, in honor of his wife, this writer. It was written for Maria Bachmann who, with pianist Jon Klibonoff, gave the world premiere performance for Market Square Concerts on February 28, 2009 in Harrisburg's Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts. Maria Bachmann and Jon Klibonoff also gave the New York premiere at Rockefeller University in December 18, 2009 and performed the work at the 2009 Telluride MusicFest where Philip Glass was Composer-in-Residence.

Philip Glass comments on his work:

*Among my earliest memories of enjoying music are the many hours spent listening to the great masterpieces of 19th century chamber music with my father, Benjamin Glass. He had a small record shop in downtown Baltimore and he regularly would bring home albums of 78 rpm's, the staple for music lovers in those days. Among his favorites were the violin/piano sonatas of Brahms, Faure and the great masterpiece of Franck. I spent many, many hours with my father listening to these works.*

*When Maria Bachman approached me about a new work for her and Jon Klibonoff, these musical memories immediately came to mind. Of course, the great composers of the past have set an almost impossible standard for the present. However, it is fair to say that they continue to inspire today's and, hopefully, future generations. Also it is fair to say that, even as the language of music continues to grow with the times, many basic elements of structure, harmony and rhythm will have a somewhat familiar sound to today's audiences.*

*During the composition of the Sonata, I met numerous times with Maria and Jon to hear them play through new movements and revisions as they were completed. I want to thank Maria for the many suggestions regarding bowing, phrasing and other musical details that became part of the work. On his part, Jon, with his wealth of experience, provided the support and encouragement that make the work of a composer somewhat easier and most enjoyable.*

**Charles Gounod (1818-1893)**

**Ave Maria (Adaptation of the Prelude No. 1 in C Major from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, BWV 846 by Johann**

**Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

The decision to include Gounod's famous adaptation of Bach's C Major Prelude on this recording was not based on its fame—or infamy, as the case may be—but on its relationship to the music of Philip Glass. No other composer has been more influential on Glass's music than Bach. As Maria Bachmann comments: "In connecting Glass to Bach, the First Prelude demonstrates clearly how the work is driven harmonically—and this is how Philip describes his own music." As chordal arpeggiations with a melody on top are common to Bach, so are they to Philip Glass. In order to illustrate this, Jon Klibonoff performed the C Major Prelude as the opening work on the concert that included the New York

premiere of Glass's Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano. Those who attended will not forget the Glass Sonata nor the moving performance of the Bach Prelude that preceded it. Somehow that pairing made a magical point that transcended any commentary. Bravely including Gounod's translation gives both Maria Bachmann and Jon Klibonoff the opportunity to underscore this point and to reveal the beauty of a simple melody combined with basic harmonies.

Interestingly, the first publication of Gounod's adaptation was the version for violin and piano, entitled *Méditation*, that we hear on this recording. With Gounod's melody superimposed on Bach's Prelude, the work is unashamedly beautiful, as it is in almost any of its many translations. If its use has been abused, that is not the fault of Gounod or Bach.

The tale of its origin is somewhat less reverent than its effect. Apparently Gounod first conceived the melody in an after-dinner gathering. His father-in-law wrote it out and saw to its publication, and the publishers speedily provided arrangements for a variety of instruments when they saw its instant success. The Latin text we associate with the work was merely a replacement suggested by the mother of the young married lady who inspired Gounod's original choice of a sensuous poem by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) entitled "Lines written on a young lady's album."

Maria Bachmann's and Jon Klibonoff's version manages reverence for Bach, Gounod—and Philip Glass.

### **Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

#### **Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano, Op. 162, D. 574**

"It sometime seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all," Schubert said of himself. While that statement speaks to the character of his music, it also reminds us that, indeed, he belonged to the world so briefly that the size and impact of his output is astonishing. Although he received little recognition within his lifetime, his works represent a profound development in music history. Schubert managed to culminate one period of music and forge another. Within the strictures of Classical form, he explored the Romantic spirit in a way foreign even to Beethoven. As musicologist Alfred Einstein points out, he was "a Romantic Classicist who takes his rightful place in the ranks of the truly great, together with Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven." Nor did he suffer, says Einstein, "from the impotent exaltation which Grillparzer accused the German Romantics of suffering from and which permeated their poetry and the greater part of their music."

The A Major Sonata for Violin and Piano, written in August of 1817 when Schubert was twenty, comes from the same fertile period that produced the songs, masses, symphonies, piano sonatas, string quartets, and string trios mentioned earlier. It is spoken of in the same breath as the wonderful A Major Piano Sonata, the Sixth Symphony, and even the famous "Trout" Quintet. While it is considered more ambitious than the earlier Op. 13 sonatinas, it is a far sunnier work than the G Minor Sonatina. Still its development is notable in the use Beethovenian techniques, particularly in the employment of four movements and the replacement of the Menuetto with a full-fledged Scherzo. The pervading atmosphere of the work, however, is Schubert's glory, the song. Like so many of his works, it was given its first hearing at one of the Schubertiads in the home of Josef Witteczek.

There is no more idyllic representation of the so-called First Viennese School than these Schubertiads. Some eighty years later, Gustav Klimt would paint a panel for the music-salon of Nikolas Dumba in which he portrayed Schubert at the piano. Despite Klimt's nostalgic recollection, however, this early sonata is far from "homey." Already it reveals the emotional breadth that transports us, if not into an idealized Viennese domestic life, at least into the better world Schubert longed for.

In the first movement, the violin sings over a rhythmically interesting bass line of the piano, which also has its moments of song. The second movement *Scherzo* brings a closer balance between the two instruments as they both treat the rising seven-note figure that becomes the motto of the movement. The third movement *Andante* is once again beautiful Schubertian song. In the fourth movement *Allegro Vivace*, the motto of the *Scherzo* is reflected, this time in a rising three-note pattern with subtle harmonic changes. Still a sense of song governs all.

Schubert's influence on the music of Philip Glass is most readily noticeable in the use of repeated triplets and the chromatic changes in harmony—too technical an explanation of the effective

tension present in both composer's works. So, too, do they both honor song. Pianist Jon Klibonoff has noted the similarity of technique demanded for playing Schubert and Glass. Maria Bachmann points to a "similar pathos" between the two composers, particularly in the opening movements of both sonatas. She comments further: "Even when the music is in a major key and is seemingly happy, there is still a note of sadness underneath. I think that is part of the depth of emotion of both composers and why it can be hard to interpret them." Bachmann notes that performers must "go beyond the page" to honor a similar transparency of texture in Schubert and Glass. "That transparency," she says, "demands a technical purity and a carefully thought out architectural interpretation. We can't do anything to excess. Rubatos, phrasings, changes in vibrato, and other expressive devices are very apparent when applied to the music of both composers, and we must be careful to use them with subtlety."

### **Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)**

#### **Sonate Posthume (Posthumous Sonata) for Violin and Piano**

The interesting choice of Ravel's Posthumous Sonata for this recording once again reflects and honors Philip Glass and his desire to reduce musical materials to a minimum but not at the expense of harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic interest. The Minimalist definition cheats both composers in their common desire for expressiveness. After all, it was Ravel himself who said that "sensitiveness and emotion constitute the real content of a work of art." Thus it is with the Posthumous Sonata composed in 1897 but never published, apparently by Ravel's own wish. It was recovered and edited by Arbie Orenstein, Professor of Music at Queens College's Aaron Copland School of Music and first published in 1975. The reasons for Ravel's refusal to publish it are as elusive as the composer himself but possibly rooted in his desire for perfection and, as stated in his lecture of 1928, the elimination of "everything that might be regarded as superfluous in order to realize as completely as possible the longed-for final clarity." Indeed, Ravel makes the most out of the fewest number of notes. Ironically, the virtuosic demands of the work remain impressive.

Maria Bachmann, too, points to Ravel's elusiveness in the Posthumous Sonata and refers to its "smoky quality" and its subtexts. "As an interpreter," she says, "you have to bring a certain atmosphere to it and develop the repetitions in a way that is organic to the piece, subtly and with purpose." The use of repetition that seems to change within a certain context is something that Bachmann sees as common to Ravel and Glass. In other words, repetition in both composers is no simple matter.

Coupled with Ravel's desire for expressiveness in the Posthumous Sonata is an honoring of Classical form. Despite its single movement, the Sonata contains a clear structure of traditional exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda. Structure, however, is only the underpinning for the work's haunting and passionate lyricism, thrilling and unexpected harmonic changes, and complex dynamics. If this is "Minimalism" it is a lush one fraught with emotionalism and intensity. Ravel's equal treatment of both instruments may reflect its original indication as a *Sonate pour piano et violin*.

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