

The University at Buffalo Department of Music and
The Robert & Carol Morris Center for 21st Century Music present

Ensemble Signal

Brad Lubman, Music Director

with guests from UB's Slee Sinfonietta

Tuesday, September 19, 2017
9:00pm
Lippes Concert Hall in Slee Hall

PROGRAM

Music for 18 Musicians (1974-76)
Steve Reich

“For countless numbers of people during the past 45 years or so, Steve Reich has been a very important composer, musical thinker, and source of inspiration. He has certainly touched my life in a profound way, as well as the lives of the musicians of Ensemble Signal. I have found that one can have many sources of inspiration in one’s life, many different people and mentors, different pieces of music, but it’s another thing when a single person and his music continually provide inspiration, fascination, and joy. Like all great music, you can return to Reich’s greatest pieces time and time again, always making new discoveries and having new perceptions. The musicians of Ensemble Signal and I are very fortunate and thankful to have had - and to continue to have - many wonderful musical experiences with Steve Reich and his music. Most importantly, we are always thrilled to be able to share these experiences with our audiences.”

-Brad Lubman

PERSONNEL

Ensemble Signal

Brad Lubman, Music Director

Paul Coleman, Sound Director

Olivia De Prato, Violin

Lauren Radnofsky, Cello

Ken Thomson, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet

Adrián Sandí, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet

David Friend, Piano 1

Oliver Hagen, Piano 2

Karl Larson, Piano 3

Georgia Mills, Piano 4

Matt Evans, Vibraphone, Piano

Carson Moody, Marimba 1

Bill Solomon, Marimba 2

Amy Garapic, Marimba 3

Brad Lubman, Marimba

Sarah Brailey, Voice 1

Mellissa Hughes, Voice 2

Kirsten Sollek, Voice 4

With guests from Slee Sinfonietta:

Stephen Lattimore, Maracas

Tom Kolor, Xylophone 1

John Smigielski, Xylophone 2, Marimba

Tiffany Du Mouchelle, Voice 3

COMPOSER'S NOTES

Music for 18 Musicians is approximately 55 minutes long. The first sketches were made for it in May 1974 and it was completed in March 1976. Although its steady pulse and rhythmic energy relate to many of my earlier works, its instrumentation, structure and harmony are new.

As to instrumentation, *Music for 18 Musicians* is new in the number and distribution of instruments: violin, cello, 2 clarinets doubling bass clarinet, 4 women's voices, 4 pianos, 3 marimbas, 2 xylophones and metallophone (vibraphone with no motor). All instruments are acoustical. The use of electronics is limited to microphones for voices and some of the instruments.

There is more harmonic movement in the first 5 minutes of *Music for 18 Musicians* than in any other complete work of mine to date. Though the movement from chord to chord is often just a re-voicing, inversion or relative minor or major of a previous chord, usually staying within the key signature of three shapes at all times, nevertheless, within these limits harmonic movement plays a more important role in this piece than in any other I have written.

Rhythmically, there are two basically different kinds of time occurring simultaneously in *Music for 18 Musicians*. The first is that of a regular rhythmic pulse in the pianos and mallet instruments that continues throughout the piece. The second is the rhythm of the human breath in the voices and wind instruments. The entire opening and closing sections plus part of all sections in between contain pulses by the voice and winds. They take a full breath and sing or play pulses of particular notes for as long as their breath will comfortably sustain them. The breath is the measure of the duration of their pulsing. This combination of one breath after another gradually washing up like waves against the constant rhythm of the pianos and mallet instruments is something I have not heard before and would like to investigate further.

The structure of *Music for 18 Musicians* is based on a cycle of eleven chords played at the very beginning of the piece and repeated at the end. All the instruments and voices play or sing the pulsating notes with each chord. Instruments like the strings which do not have to breathe nevertheless follow the rise and fall of the breath by following the breathing patterns of the bass clarinet. Each chord is held for the duration of two breaths, and the next chord is gradually introduced, and so on, until all eleven are played and the ensemble returns to the first chord. The first pulsing chord is then maintained by two

pianos and two marimbas. While this pulsing chord is held for about five minutes a small piece is constructed on it. When this piece is completed there is a sudden change to the second chord, and a second small piece or section is constructed. This means that each chord that might have taken fifteen or twenty seconds to play in the opening section is then stretched out as the basic pulsing melody for a five minute piece very much as a single note in a cantus firmus, or chant melody of a 12th century Organum by Perotin might be stretched out for several minutes as the harmonic centre for a section of the Organum. The opening eleven chord cycle of *Music for 18 Musicians* is a kind of pulsing cantus for the entire piece.

On each pulsing chord one or, on the third chord, two small pieces are built. These pieces or sections are basically either in form of an arch (ABCDCBA), or in the form of a musical process, like that of substituting beats for rests, working itself out from beginning to end. Elements appearing in one section will appear in another but surrounded by different harmony and instrumentation. For instance the pulse in pianos and marimbas in sections 1 and 2 changes to marimbas and xylophones in section 3A, and to xylophones and maracas in sections 6 and 7. The low piano pulsing harmonies of section 3A reappear in section 6 supporting a different melody played by different instruments. The process of building up a canon, or phase relation, between two xylophones and two pianos which first occurs in section 2, occurs again in section 9 but building up to another overall pattern in a different harmonic context. The relationship between the different sections is thus best understood in terms of resemblances between members of a family. Certain characteristics will be shared, but others will be unique.

Changes from one section to the next, as well as changes within each section are cued by the metallophone (vibraphone with no motor) whose patterns are played once only to call for movements to the next bar, much as in Balinese Gamelan a drummer will audibly call for changes of pattern in West African Music. This is in contrast to the visual nods of the head used in earlier pieces of mine to call for changes and in contrast also to the general Western practice of having a non-performing conductor for large ensembles. Audible cues become part of the music and allow the musicians to keep listening.

-Steve Reich

ABOUT BRAD LUBMAN

Brad Lubman, conductor/composer is one of the foremost conductors of modern music and a leading figure in the field for over two decades. A frequent guest conductor of the world's most distinguished orchestras and new music ensembles, he has gained widespread recognition for his versatility, commanding technique, and insightful interpretations. His flexibility in a variety of settings has led him to conduct a broad range of repertoire from classical to contemporary works, and to direct projects including orchestra, opera, multimedia, and mixed ensemble.

Lubman has led major orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, The San Francisco Symphony, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, Dresden Philharmonic, DSO Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, WDR Symphony Cologne, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Finnish Radio Symphony, the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic and the National Symphony.

In addition, he has worked with some of the most important European and American ensembles for contemporary music, including Ensemble Modern, London Sinfonietta, Klangforum Wien, Musik Fabrik, ASKO Ensemble, Ensemble Resonanz, and Steve Reich and Musicians. Lubman has conducted at new-music festivals across Europe, including those in Lucerne, Salzburg, Berlin, Huddersfield, Paris, Cologne, Frankfurt, and Oslo.

Lubman is founding Co-Artistic and Music Director of the NY-based Ensemble Signal. Since its debut in 2008, the Ensemble has performed over 150 concerts and co-produced eight recordings. Their recording of Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* on harmonia mundi was awarded a Diapason d'or in June 2015 and appeared on the Billboard Classical crossover charts.

Lubman has conducted numerous world premieres. Among these are Steve Reich's *Three Tales*, *Daniel Variations*, *Radio Rewrite*, and *Variations for Vibes, Pianos and Strings*. Additional world premieres given by Lubman include Helmut Lachenmann's *Concertini* and Michael Gordon/David Lang/Julia Wolfe's *Shelter*, as well as works by Philip Glass, Charles Wuorinen, John Zorn, and Hilda Paredes.

His own music has been performed in the USA and Europe, and can be heard on his CD, *Insomniac*, on Tzadik. Brad Lubman is on faculty at the Eastman School of Music and the Bang on a Can Summer Institute.

ABOUT ENSEMBLE SIGNAL

Ensemble Signal, described by the New York Times as "A new-music ensemble that by this point practically guarantees quality performances..." is a NY-based ensemble dedicated to offering the broadest possible audience access to a diverse range of contemporary works through performance, commissioning, recording, and education. Since its debut in 2008, the Ensemble has performed over 150 concerts, has given the NY, world, or US premieres of over 20 works, and co-produced nine recordings.

Signal was founded by Co-Artistic/Executive Director Lauren Radnofsky and Co-Artistic Director/Conductor Brad Lubman. Called a "new music dream team" (TimeOutNY), Signal regularly performs with Lubman and features a supergroup of independent artists from the modern music scene. Lubman, one of the foremost conductors of modern music and a leading figure in the field for over two decades, is a frequent guest with the world's most distinguished orchestras and new music ensembles.

Signal's passion for the diverse range of music being written today is a driving force behind their projects. The Ensemble's repertoire ranges from minimalism or pop-influenced to the iconoclastic European avant-garde. Signal's projects are carefully conceived through close collaboration with cooperating presenting organizations, composers, and artists. Signal is flexible in size and instrumentation - everything from solo to large ensemble and opera, including film or multimedia, in any possible combination - enabling it to meet the ever-changing demands on the 21st century performing ensemble.

The Ensemble is a frequent guest of the finest concert halls and international festivals including Lincoln Center Festival, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Series at Walt Disney Concert Hall, BIG EARS Festival, Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, Lincoln Center American Songbook, Cal Performances, Tanglewood Music Festival of Contemporary Music, Ojai Music Festival, the Guggenheim Museum (NY) and the Bang on a Can Marathon. They regularly work directly with nearly all the composers they perform in order to offer the most authentic interpretations, a list that includes Steve Reich, Helmut Lachenmann, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Julia Wolfe, David Felder and Hans Abrahamsen.

Upcoming premieres include a new work by Steve Reich entitled *Runner*, for 19 musicians, which Signal premieres in the US beginning in 2017 at venues including Cal Performances, Washington Performing Arts/ The Library of Congress and Carnegie Hall. Signal's recording of Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* was released in May 2015 on harmonia mundi and received a Diapason d'or and appeared on the Billboard Classical Crossover Charts. Additional recordings include a CD & DVD of music by Lachenmann, with the composer as soloist in "...Zwei Gefühle..." (Mode) and Steve Reich's *Double Sextet & Radio Rewrite* (harmonia mundi). Signal's educational activities include community outreach programs in diverse settings as well as workshops with the next generation of composers and performers at institutions including the the June in Buffalo Festival at the University at Buffalo's Center for 21st Century Music where they are a visiting resident ensemble.

Liner notes from Ensemble Signal's CD recording of *Music for 18 Musicians*, by Ashley Capps.

I have a vivid memory from the spring of 1977. It was a relatively warm and bright sunny April afternoon as I was exploring the streets of Soho in downtown Manhattan, having slipped away to the city from the school I was attending a short two-hour drive upstate. In those days, Soho was a rather forlorn and relatively deserted district of warehouses and boarded-up storefronts – there were no fancy boutiques or upscale restaurants to speak of and certainly no hordes of tourists crowding the sidewalks. But I was on a mission. I was looking for The Kitchen, an experimental arts outpost then located on Wooster Street, which was presenting an evening – three in a row if I recall correctly – with Steve Reich and Musicians. It was my first opportunity to hear the music of this young, pioneering composer performed live, and I was taking no chances, scouting out the location of this legendary venue while intending to snag a ticket several hours before show time.

It was when I turned the corner on Wooster Street that I heard the music floating down the street - a richly textured pulsating rhythm with a beautiful, intricate, repeating melody dancing lightly above it. My afternoon was immediately transformed. I felt suddenly and remarkably lucid, in a state of intense hyper-awareness. Everything around me seemed radiant and magical: the quality of light streaming down the streets, illuminating buildings and the occasional truck or car; the feeling of the warm, light breeze, and that hypnotic music gently but insistently drawing me into its utterly unique and captivating world of sound.

I soon realized, of course, that I was hearing Steve Reich & Musicians rehearsing for that evening's concert, the windows of the Kitchen's loft space opened to embrace the beautiful spring afternoon. I know now that I was hearing them play a segment of Reich's relatively new work at the time, *Music for 18 Musicians*, still unreleased on record. But I didn't know this as I stood spellbound on that Soho sidewalk. Obviously, I was familiar with Reich's recorded work and quickly recognized the music as his, but there was something distinctly different here from anything that I had heard before. I was entranced. Later that evening, I listened and watched as the full piece unfolded, and this music forever entered my being.

Simply put, *Music for 18 Musicians* is a masterpiece. In discussing Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Reich references a writing by Ezra Pound, in defining a classic as "news that stays news."¹² For the generations that have come of age in the past fifty years, *Music for 18 Musicians* is their *Rite of Spring*. A nurturing wellspring of vitality and inspiration that one returns to again and again as its gifts continue to be revealed after each experience of listening. And, like *The Rite of Spring*, listening is an experience. *Music for 18 Musicians* unfolds like a ritual, a visitation, a celebration with the opening and closing pulsations of mallet instruments, voices and bass clarinets announcing its arrival and departure as well as setting the stage for a sequence of remarkable dances. It invokes and illuminates a deep understanding of what it means to be human.

I had discovered Steve Reich's work several years before, exploring the music library of my local NPR station, where I had somehow secured my very own radio show while still in high school. I discovered it mostly in sequence with its creation and release or record, first the 'tape' pieces, *Come Out* then *It's Gonna Rain* and *Violin Phase*. Then *Four Organs* and the Deutsche Grammophon three LP set that included *Drumming*. These days, this music – and that which came after – has become so much of an influence on our musical culture that it can be rather difficult to convey its initial impact on those who heard it in those early days. Even for those of us who had perhaps been somewhat prepared by Terry Riley's *In C* and *A Rainbow in Curved Air* or by the long modal improvisations of John Coltrane, Reich's music delivered quite a jolt - an invigorating, revitalizing burst of fresh air for some or an entirely unwelcome bucket of cold water for others. The intense, relentless repetition; the very slow – at times almost imperceptible – changes; its seemingly utter simplicity -even to the most receptive listeners, a first encounter with Reich's music back then could be bewildering and perplexing. This was music that simply refused to do many of the things that people felt music was supposed to do. It was hard to know what to make of it, and, being more than two decades before the internet connected us to fellow seekers and put information at one's fingertips, we were mostly left to grapple with it through our own set of experiences and on our own terms.

¹ Steve Reich, "The First Time I Heard *The Rite of Spring*," WQXR, Q2 Music, May 24, 2013, <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/294969-first-time-i-heard-em-rite-springem/>

² Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 29.

Another bit of the context here: After decades of rapid cultural change and continual experimentation pushing all boundaries in the arts, by the point when Reich was writing his early works much of contemporary concert music had backed itself into a corner – if not having sealed itself off from most of the world. Much of this music was either rooted in seemingly formless open improvisation or produced in accordance with rigid, abstract, and complex compositional structures, often indiscernible to the listener. Rhythm and melody were notably absent, as was an audience of any significant size.

In retrospect, it seems completely clear what Steve Reich was doing. He was clearing the air. He was returning music to its essence, reducing it to its primary components and restoring its heartbeat and its soul – the pulse, the rhythm, the repetition, the stable harmony – and inviting listeners back into the process of making music.

There were the rhythms emerging from the human speech of a San Francisco street preacher in *It's Gonna Rain* and a young man involved in the Harlem Riot of 1964 in *Come Out*; the pulsating slabs of organ driven by the unwavering shaking maracas in *Four Organs*; the ritualistic drive and slowly shifting textures of *Drumming*. This music kept pulling us back for more and gradually offering its rewards. There were no secrets. Reich's meticulously detailed program notes carefully described exactly what was going on compositionally, though not necessarily revealing why he was doing it. But Reich very much wanted you to listen, and he was opening up the doors and windows to make it as inviting as possible.

These were also the heady days of the rock revolution. Rock music was everywhere and it was the music of the people. It spoke to us, with a directness, an insistence, and a power. It wanted us to feel things. I believe that we responded to Reich's music in a similarly visceral way. While it was in no way rock, it had a rock and roll heart.

Like all great rock and roll, it was also nearly impossible at that time to imagine Reich's music being performed by anyone other than the band which existed for no other purpose than to play it, Steve Reich & Musicians. They were the music. They were specialists: seemingly the only musicians on the planet with the focus, the concentration, the skill, the stamina to bring this amazing music to life. So it seemed to me on that unforgettable April evening at the Kitchen in Soho.

This all changed quickly. Let's be clear: when we call *Music for 18 Musicians* a classic, we are not merely saying that it has stood the test of time. This is music that has had a deep and profound influence in shaping and transforming our culture. Not long after that evening in 1977 one could hear, with increasing regularity, the rippling echoes of Reich's music resonating from a dizzying array of sources. Those ripples turned into waves. As critic Alex Ross has written, "Reich's influence is vast, reaching far outside classical composition to encompass jazz, rock, pop, electronic music, and hip hop. On some days, as familiar shimmering patterns echo on the soundtracks of commercials and from the loudspeakers of dance clubs, it seems as though we are living in a world scored by Reich."³

This remarkable new recording of *Music for 18 Musicians* by Ensemble Signal is a testament to that reality and to Reich's remarkable legacy. Most of the musicians in Ensemble Signal had not been born when this piece was first premiered, and they have grown up with Steve Reich's music as a given. They are also an exciting generation of musicians whose vast musical training has been fueled by rich exposure to an unprecedented range of musical and cultural influences. In listening deeply to this recording in tandem with the original, it's easy to imagine that it is those influences – combined with a familiarity with Reich's work that comes from his now unquestionable place in the lineage of great composers - that inform the intangible quality that sets this recording apart from its predecessors.

To be clear, there are important bridges between Ensemble Signal and the Reich legacy as well. Ensemble Signal's co-founder and Music Director Brad Lubman has worked closely with Reich for some two decades, premiering his new work and conducting and directing performances of other Reich pieces throughout the world. Lubman provides a direct link to an aural tradition of working directly and closely with the composer. Similarly, Artistic Director, Co-Founder, and cellist Lauren Radnofsky delved deeply into both the artistic and technical aspects involved in the live production of Reich's music, attending countless performances of Reich's music by Steve Reich & Musicians as well as other ensembles throughout the world.

³ Steve Reich, *Phases: A Nonesuch Retrospective*, Nonesuch, 79962-2, 2006, 5 compact discs, Liner notes by Alex Ross.

This recording, therefore, occupies a special place, where that direct link to Steve Reich himself and the early traditions of performing his music, serves to connect and inform a new generation of musicians who are bringing their own experiences and offering new perspectives to the music.

One more powerful memory. In March of 2014, I had the opportunity to present the music of Steve Reich during the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee. As a festival producer and concert promoter, I had been dreaming of this weekend - if not actively planning it - for decades, and, for me, one thing was a given: the weekend would end with a performance of *Music for 18 Musicians*. Knowing of their close association with the composer, I contacted Lauren and Brad about the possibility of bringing Ensemble Signal to perform. The logistics and scheduling were challenging, but some nine months after the initial outreach, I found myself eavesdropping on three days of rehearsals with an immensely gifted and wildly enthusiastic group of young musicians, under the direction of Brad Lubman and Steve Reich himself, as everyone dove passionately and deeply into the intricacies of the work. On that Sunday evening, the concluding concert of the festival weekend opened with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood, performing Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, followed by a new composition, *Radio Rewrite*, inspired by two of Radiohead's songs.

After an intermission, the young musicians of Ensemble Signal took the stage to perform *Music for 18 Musicians* and soon the pulsing pianos, mallet instruments, voices, and bass clarinets transformed the concert and beckoned the spellbound audience into an unforgettable musical world. Listening and watching that evening - the pulsing heartbeat, the dancing rhythms, the intricate and beautiful melodies emerging and receding along with the wide-awake balance and interaction of the musicians, the subtle visual cues signaling each stage of the piece - was nothing short of a transcendent experience. Almost fifty years after its premiere, it spoke with an incandescent power that was as real, as contemporary, and as completely and utterly 'of the moment' as any music I have ever heard.

This beautiful and powerful recording is nothing less than an extraordinary performance of a timeless work of art - at its heart, an exultation and celebration of the very essence of what it means to be a human being. Listen!

-Ashley Capps