

THE JOHN ADAMS INSTITUTE

AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction of Philip Glass by Melchior Huurdeman
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Good evening, and thank you so much Tracy Metz for your introduction. I am really pleased to be here to interview the eminent composer Philip Glass. (By the way, am I talking to an audience of real Glass fans? Anyone here who read the book? Yes? Can I see some fingers please?) In a few minutes I will have an interview with Mr. Glass mainly about his book '*Words without Music*' - his memoirs - but please let this also be an interactive evening. This is also an opportunity for you to ask whatever you have always wanted to ask this very inspirational man.

I have been asked to introduce Philip Glass. After reading his memoirs I thought: it's simple, everyone who is in the audience has to buy and read his book. It's full of fun and revealing anecdotes about his travels to India, his lessons with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. About how his opera 'Einstein on the Beach' came about. His successions of jobs - my goodness, this guy was good with his hands. Plumbing, steelwork, and all without gloves. It is a miracle he didn't turn out to be a single left-handed pianist. It is also a very interesting book regarding the development of his music, as well as an honest book about his personal life. While reading '*Words Without Music*', Mr. Glass became as vivid as the first time I met him.

That was back in 1993. I was working as the editor in chief for a live music show called 'Reiziger in Muziek', the precursor of my VPRO music show 'Vrije Geluiden'. All my heroes appeared in our studio: Dietrich Fischer Dieskau, Pierre Boulez, Hans Vonk, Karl Heinz Stockhausen, Yehudi Menuhin...and you know what? They were all so easy to work with.

'Reiziger in Muziek' was a low budget show, so sometimes I had to pick musicians up and drive them to the studio myself.

Two trips I will never forget. One I made with the outstanding pianist and close friend of Bela Bartok, Gyorgy Sandor. By then he was around 80 and I drove him from Cologne to Amsterdam, in the middle of the night. Along the way he talked openly about his friendship and his lessons with Bartok. And about the night he premiered Bartok's 3rd pianoconcerto in February 1946. Meanwhile it was raining cats and dogs and I could hardly see the road. Then there was a big

bang. The car flew off the highway and ran through the mud, spinned 180 degrees and found the tarmac again. We drove on. I looked at him, I was so embarrassed. But he was really calm and just smiled and laid his hand on my shoulder. The only thing he said was: "I know I am old, but please..."

The other memorable trip was in November 1993 - with Philip Glass. I picked him up in Brussels after a solo concert. We drove for more than 2 hours and talked and talked. He made a big impression on me. It was almost a father to son conversation. About relationships, the love for the piano, stage fright, about Nadia Boulanger, the soundscreens along the road, yoga, growing older and about him being a vegetarian. He changed me in a way because I immediately noticed that at the gas station along the road I didn't even look at the meatballs. I became a vegetarian myself. To be honest it lasted only 3 weeks - but anyway. The next morning Philip Glass played on national TV. It was a memorable performance.

Being a taxidriver for Mr. Glass was truly a highlight. Since then I listen to his music as if he were a close friend. I know the ins and outs of one of my favorite pieces of all time, his first violin concerto written in 1987. I play this concerto on so many occasions, but especially when I am sad. Not to cheer me, up but to share my misery with the music. It only happens with great composers that after just a few bars you can say for sure that this is definitely Philip Glass. This is Glasswork, with his distinct, hypnotic musical language and his sound. If you ask him: what does your music sound like? He replies by saying: "It sounds like New York to me."