

Musical Arts CONCERT SERIES 2015-2016

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
LAIDLAW PERFORMING ARTS CENTER RECITAL HALL

Steve Reich at 80

Music for 18 Musicians

**Luis Rivera, Matt Greenwood, Brian Nozny,
Benjamin Fraley, Soren Odom, Ryan Boehme,
Luke Smith, Alex White, percussion**

**Robert Holm, Jasmin Arakawa,
Joshua Vaughn, Shawn Wright, piano**

**Kip Franklin, Alyssa Weiskopf, bass clarinet
Alexys Bush, Christina Buchler, clarinet**

Gosia Leska, violin and Tobin Nelson, cello

Nicole Carrion, Eraka Millhouse, voices

Music for 18 Musicians (1976)

Pulses
Section I
Section II
Section IIIA
Section IIIB
Section IV
Section V
Section VI
Section VII
Section VIII
Section IX
Section X
Section XI
Pulses

Steve Reich
(b. 1936)

The Sixtieth Concert of Academic Year 2015-2016

**Wednesday, March 23, 2016
7:30 p.m.**

“The first sketches for *Music for 18 Musicians* were made 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, harmony and structure are new.

As to instrumentation, *Music for 18* 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 vibraphone. The use of electronics is limited to microphones for the voices and some of the instruments.

There is more harmonic movement in the first five minutes of *Music for 18* 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 one key signature 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 different kinds of time occurring simultaneously. 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 voices 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* is based on a cycle of 11 chords played at the very beginning of the piece and repeated at the end. All the instruments and voices play or sing pulsing notes within each chord. Instruments which do not have to breathe nevertheless follow the rise and fall of the breath by following the breath patterns of the bass clarinet. Each chord is held for the duration of two breaths, and the next chord is gradually introduced, until all chords are played and the ensemble returns to the first chord. This first pulsing chord is then maintained by 2 pianos and 2 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 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 harmony for a 5-minute piece very much as a single note in a *cantus firmus*, or chant melody of 12th century organum by Perotin might be stretched out for several minutes as the harmonic center for a section of the organum. The opening 11-chord cycle for *Music for 18* is a kind of pulsing *cantus firmus* for the entire piece.

One of the basic means of development in many sections of this piece is to be found in the rhythmic relationship of harmony to melody. Specifically, a melodic pattern may be repeated over and over again, but by introducing a 2- or 4-chord cadence underneath it, first beginning on one beat of the pattern, and then beginning on a different beat, a sense of changing accent in the melody will be heard. This play of changing harmonic rhythm against a constant melodic pattern is one of the basic techniques of this piece, and one I have never used before. Its effect, by change of accent, is to vary that which is in fact unchanging.

Changes from one section to the next, as well as changes within each section are cued by the vibraphone, whose patterns are played once only to call for movements to the next bar, much as in a Balinese Gamelan where a drummer will audibly call for changes of pattern, or as the master drummer will 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, 1976