

Piano Concerto No.2 (After Lewis and Clark) **By Philip Glass**

- I. The Vision 12'**
- II. Sacagawea 10'**
- III. The Land 12'**

I met Philip Glass in 1995 on a plane heading from Lincoln Nebraska to Chicago. We began talking about religion and piano music and soon I was transcribing Glass's theater works for the piano. My first three transcriptions, one each from *Einstein on the Beach*, *Satyagraha*, and *Akhknaten* were published in 2000 as *The Trilogy Sonata* by Chester Music of London. In April of 2001 I gave the world premier in New York City of Glass's *Orphée Suite for Piano*, a series of seven transcriptions I had done from Glass's theater work *Orphée*. Chester is currently preparing *Orphée Suite for Piano* for publication this year. In June of 2003, Glass's recording label [Orange Mountain Music](#) released my solo piano recording of the *Orphée Suite* along with the *Trilogy Sonata*.

The next logical step in our professional relationship was the commissioning of a new work for piano. And with the approaching bicentennial commemoration of the Lewis and Clark expedition and my own connections to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as Associate Professor and Co-chair of the Piano area, the idea of a piano concerto commemorating the bicentennial was born. When I initially approached Glass about basing the new work on Lewis and Clark, he was particularly interested in the challenging task of presenting both the white and the Native American perspective. The commissioning of the new concerto was funded by the Nebraska Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Commission, the Lied Center for Performing Arts, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts. Without the vision and financial support of this consortium, the work would not have been possible.

The concerto is written in the traditional three movements. The first movement entitled "The Vision" is based on Lewis and Clark and was described by Glass as a "musical steamroller" signifying the tremendous resolve and energy required of Lewis and Clark for their remarkable expedition. It is scored for piano, single woodwinds, brass, strings and percussion. The movement opens in the key of G minor with a driving *molto allegro* theme in the orchestra in the irregular meter of 6+4/8 with the piano providing the underlying rhythmic drive. This energetic section is followed by a piano segue into a slower contrasting section in 4/4 time beginning with a piano ostinato. This section gradually increases in musical complexity as more and more instruments are added to the musical texture each with their own rhythmic identity. The opening *molto allegro* section then returns in the right hand of the piano with the violins in 5/4 time and then is ingeniously combined with the ostinato of the slower 4/4 section played by the left hand of the piano and the violas and cellos. The pianist therefore has the interesting rhythmic challenge of playing an intense polymeter with the left hand in 4/4 time the right hand in 5/4 simultaneously. This rhythmic tension is finally resolved as the movement reaches its climax at the fortissimo statement of the opening theme in the piano this time with

everyone in the triumphant meter of 4/4. A coda follows with the return of the slower tempo punctuated by virtuoso double octaves in the piano. The movement ends pensively with piano alone. Particularly challenging for the pianist is the fact that throughout the entire energetic experience of this opening movement, the piano gets only four bars of rest. Although nothing compared to the expedition of Lewis and Clark over the Bitterroot Mountains, it is an athletic feat nonetheless.

The second movement "Sacagawea" is scored for strings only and features a duet between the piano and the Native American flute performed here by the renowned Native American flutist R. Carlos Nakai. The movement is based on Sacagawea, Shoshone Indian, mother, and indispensable companion to Lewis and Clark. The opening theme in the flute is a musical representation of the name 'Sacagawea.' This lyrical contemplative theme in the brooding key of F Sharp minor gives way to a faster section exploiting the B major/minor triad which accompanies a traditional Shoshone theme. These two distinct and rather disparate thematic ideas are then combined in a developmental middle section. The mood is one of dark, lyrical contemplation mixed with the more festive traditional Shoshone theme. The return of the Sacagawea theme begins with rather heavy, angst-laden syncopated chords in the piano. But as the return progresses, the chords are gradually replaced by the calming effect of undulating triplets. The movement ends with quiet resignation and resolution in A major.

The third and final movement entitled "The Land" is a gloriously expansive theme and variations reflecting the great vastness of the land explored by Lewis and Clark. And this expansiveness refers not only to the vast area involved, but the expanse of time over which the land has evolved. As Glass commented in our final working session on the concerto in July of 2004, "I wanted this final movement to reflect also the expanse of time - what the land was before the expedition and what it became after." The movement begins with an extended introduction in the orchestra followed by the initial statement of the theme in the piano alone. This stately theme derived both from the closing measures of the first movement and the opening theme of the Sacagawea movement is characterized by large, opulent chords animated by unusual inner lines creating a Bach-like relationship between the vertical chord structures and the inner voices. Six variations follow in a unique type of canon where Glass orchestrates the piano part of the previous variation while the pianist plays the new variation. Fascinating sonic interplay results as overlapping harmonies and counterpoint characterize the remarkable interaction between the piano and the orchestra. Variations two and three feature the use of extended trills and scales respectively while variation four explores a neo-romantic Brahmsian texture in the piano. Variation five includes the return of the original form of the theme with varied rhythmic counterpoint in the piano. The sixth and final variation culminates in virtuoso piano passagework and a dramatic restatement of the opening theme. Following this variation is a solo cadenza I composed based closely on the opening solo theme in the piano. The cadenza is followed by a repeat of variation six, and the work concludes with a pensive coda reminiscent of the ending of the first movement.

The world premier performance of Glass's Piano Concerto No.2 (After Lewis and Clark) took place in Lincoln, Nebraska on September 18th 2004 with the Omaha Symphony at

the [Lied Center for Performing Arts](#) . Additional performances included two more performances with the [Omaha Symphony](#) as well as performances with the [Pro-Arte Chamber Orchestra of Boston](#) on November 28th, 2004, and the [Cabrillo Contemporary Music Festival](#) with Marin Alsop conducting on August 6, 2005 and a performance with the Northwest Chamber Orchestra on Sept 25, 2005. Nebraska Educational Telecommunications produced a one-hour television documentary of the world premier performance that has won a regional Emmy and a National Educational Telecommunication Association award for best performance production.

Notes by Paul Barnes