

Saturday 3 October / 5pm
Steve Reich at 90: Radio Rewrite

Steve Reich (born 1936)

Pulse (2015)

Eight Lines (1983)

Radio Rewrite (2012)

One of the cleverest gambits in Steve Reich's repertory is his ability – like any good modernist – to suggest abstraction, or artistic detachment. His studiously simple titles are part of that illusion. A pulse is simply a rhythm, the pattern that drives and defines a piece of music. But it's also a biological phenomenon; the essential precondition for life and (between two people) part of the experience of intimacy. Reich's own description of **Pulse** leaves the ears – and the heart – to do the real work:

Pulse, for winds, strings, piano and electric bass, was completed in 2015 and was, in part, a reaction to my Quartet of 2013 in which I changed keys more frequently than in any previous work. In Pulse I felt the need to stay put harmonically and spin out smoother wind and string melodic lines in canon over a constant pulse in the electric bass and or piano. From time to time this constant pulse is accented differently through changing hand alternation patterns on the piano. All in all, a calmer more contemplative piece lasting about 16 minutes.

Eight Lines (1983), too, seems to do exactly what it says on the tin; a robust, bright-edged working through of musical possibilities that's typical of Reich's approach in the early 1980s. Dazzling sonic patterns, or something altogether more personal? Again, it's only towards the end of his own description that the Jewish Reich offers us a (non-musical) clue:

Eight Lines is structured in five sections, of which the first and third resemble each other in their moving piano, cello, viola and bass clarinet figures, while the second and fourth sections resemble each other in their longer held tones in the cello. The fifth and final section combines these materials. The transitions between sections is as smooth as possible with some overlapping in the parts so that it is sometimes hard to tell exactly when one section ends and the next begins.

In the first, third and fifth sections there are somewhat longer melodic lines in the flute and/or piccolo. This interest in longer melodic lines composed of shorter patterns strung together has its roots in my earlier music as well as my studies in 1976-77 of the cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew Scriptures.

But with **Radio Rewrite** the illusion lifts and we see Reich as a musician among musicians, engaging on the profoundest creative level with his peers and his times. The composer takes up the story:

In September 2010 I was in Krakow for a festival of my music. One of the featured performers was Jonny Greenwood of Radiohead who had prepared all the backing tracks for my piece, Electric Counterpoint and then played electric guitar live against those tracks in concert. It was a great performance and we began talking. I found his background as a violist and his present active role as a composer extremely interesting when added to his major role in such an important and innovative rock group. When I returned home I made it a point to go online and listen to their music and two songs stuck in my head.

It was not my intention to make anything like 'variations' on these songs, but rather to draw on their harmonies and sometimes melodic fragments and work them into my own piece. This is what I have done. As to actually hearing the original songs, the truth is - sometimes you hear them and sometimes you don't. Radio Rewrite is in five movements played without pause. The first, third and fifth are fast and based on 'Jigsaw' and the second and fourth are slow and based on 'Everything'. It was completed in August 2012.

Colin Currie

Hailed as being “at the summit of percussion performance today” (Gramophone), Colin Currie is a solo and chamber artist who champions new music at the highest level. His performances are likened to “witnessing a cross between a ballet dancer and a 100-meter sprinter” (The Times); and he works and performs regularly with today’s foremost conductors and orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Philharmonia Orchestra and London Philharmonic Orchestra.

A dynamic and adventurous soloist, Currie’s commitment to commissioning and creating new music was recognised with the Royal Philharmonic Society’s 2015 Instrumentalist Award. Currie has premiered works by Steve Reich, Louis Andriessen, HK Gruber, Sir James MacMillan, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Jennifer Higdon, Brett Dean, Helen Grime, Julia Wolfe, Kalevi Aho, Andy Akiho, Andrew Norman, Bruno Mantovani, Gavin Higgins, Dave Maric, Nicole Lizée, Danny Elfman, Guillaume Connesson, Steve Martland, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Elliott Carter, and Dani Howard.

At the start of his 2026-2027 season, Currie premiered the 40th concerto of his career – Tansy Davies’ Earthworks at Aldeburgh Festival with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Other concerto highlights of Currie’s season include performing Helen Grime’s Percussion Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Andy Akiho’s Percussion Concerto with the Tenerife Symphony Orchestra and Andrew Norman’s Switch with Orquesta Sinfónica Castilla y León. A major focus of this season will be the celebration of Steve Reich’s 90th birthday, with Currie appearing in multiple roles as curator, conductor and performer with his ensembles the Colin Currie Group and Colin Currie Quartet. Currie conducts programmes of Reich with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony and Royal Northern Sinfonia; at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Currie has curated a full, multiple-concert Reich celebration weekend in October 2026.

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