Sunday 4 October / 6pm

Steve Reich at 90: The Four Sections

Steve Reich (born 1936)

Three Movements (1986)

Variations for Winds, Strings & Keyboards (1979)

Electric Counterpoint (1987)

The Four Sections (1987)

There comes a moment when every musical revolution makes its peace with the mainstream, and when the mainstream – if it has any sense – allows itself to be invigorated, challenged and refreshed by what new voices have to say. When Steve Reich forged his musical language in the late 1960s, he saw himself as an outsider; part of a counterculture determined to say its own thing on its own distinctive terms. The idea that he would ever write for a symphony orchestra seemed unthinkable. “I don’t have any anger against the orchestra” he explained, in 1990:

I think that Beethoven and Brahms and the rest of the orchestral literature should be maintained by a few crackerjack orchestras around the world and well-subsidised… But I feel that the orchestra is not my vehicle of choice.

Yet by the 1980s – as minimalism (for want of a better word) captured imaginations far beyond the New York underground and the West Coast fringe – minds began to open. We began this festival with *The Desert Music* (1984), Reich’s first approach to a large scale orchestral work. We’ll end it with three works written for prominent US orchestras and a fourth that demonstrates Reich’s ongoing determination to explore new sounds - to refuse to be categorised. **Electric Counterpoint** was written in 1987 for the guitarist Pat Metheny and is (says Reich):

…the third in a series of pieces all dealing with a soloist playing against a pre-recorded tape of themselves. In Electric Counterpoint the soloist pre-records as many as 10 guitars and 2 electric bass parts and then plays the final 11th guitar part live against the tape.

It’s in three movements (fast-slow-fast) and the first borrows ideas from central African horn music.

But the **Variations** (1979) and **Three Movements** (1986) were both commissions from major orchestras. The first (in Reich’s words) is a single movement “somewhat in the manner of a chaconne”, with three extended variations, composed for some (if not all) of the San Francisco Symphony. The second – written for the St Louis Symphony – draws (according to Reich) on Bartók and *The Desert Music* in the way it divides the strings in two. It also echoes Reich’s earlier *Sextet* (the entire second movement) and inspirations as diverse as Schoenberg and West African music in its harmonic movement (like “the changing light as clouds move slowly across the sky”, says Reich) and rhythmic energy.

And **The Four Sections** (1987) – another commission from the San Francisco Symphony under its dynamic and adventurous chef conductor Michael Tilson Thomas – well, Reich has never come closer to embracing the classical orchestra on its own terms, as well as his own. As he puts it:

The Four Sections *refers to the four sections of the orchestra: strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. It also refers to the four movements of the piece: slow for strings (with woodwinds and brass); slow for percussion; moderate for woodwinds and brass (with strings); and fast for the full orchestra. The title also refers to the four harmonic sections each of the movements is divided into.*

Since each of the movements focuses on one or two of the orchestral sections, one might be tempted to thing of it as a concerto for orchestra. However, the focus here is on the interlocking of voices within the sections rather than displaying their virtuosity against the rest of the orchestra. Those familiar with other

pieces of mine will recognise this interlocking of similar instruments to produce a contrapuntal web filled with resulting melodic patterns.

In contrast to all other pieces of mine, The Four Sections begins slowly and gradually increases tempo as it goes along…

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.

Bryce Dessner

Bryce Dessner is a vital and rare force in new music. He has won Grammy Awards as a classical composer, with his band The National, and for his work in film music. He is regularly commissioned to write for the world's leading ensembles, from Orchestre de Paris to Los Angeles Philharmonic, and is in demand as composer in residence. He is also a high-profile, Oscar-nominated presence in film score composition, with credits including Clint Bentley's *Train Dreams,* Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant* with the late Ryuichi Sakamoto and Fernando Meirelles's *The Two Popes*.

The 2025/26 season included composer residencies at Konzerthaus Berlin and with Czech Philharmonic; world premieres of his works at Carnegie Hall, Dublin's National Concert Hall and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; plus the soundtrack release to *Train Dreams* (Netflix).

Autumn 2025 saw Dessner receive the Samuel Beckett Gold Medal from Trinity College Dublin, recognising his outstanding contribution to public discourse through the arts. Previous recipients include Joan Baez, Patti Smith and George Martin.

In August 2024, Bryce Dessner released *Solos (Sony Classical),* showcasing his collection of solo instrumental pieces in collaboration with some of the world's leading musicians, including Katia Labèque, Anastasia Kobekina, Pekka Kuusisto, Nadia Sirota, Colin Currie and Lavinia Meijer. Dessner's recordings also include *El Chan*; *St. Carolyn by the Sea* (both on Deutsche Grammophon); *Aheym*, commissioned by Kronos Quartet; *Tenebre*, an album of his works for string orchestra recorded by Germany's Ensemble Resonanz and which won a 2019 Opus Klassik award and a Diapason d'Or; *When we are inhuman* with Bonnie 'Prince' Billy and Eighth Blackbird (2019) and *Impermanence* (2021) with Australian String Quartet and which won the Libera award.

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

As Scotland's national broadcasting orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra has been performing for audiences across Scotland, the UK and internationally since 1935. From Oban to Aldeburgh and London to Seoul (as part of BBC Proms Korea), the 2024/25 Season has been no exception. The orchestra's live performances are regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Radio Scotland and Sounds, as well as BBC Television and iPlayer.

Opening eyes and ears with ambitious repertoire beyond any benchmark, the BBC SSO is Scotland's leading champion of new music. Over nine decades the BBC SSO has commissioned orchestral music by eminent contemporary composers and has championed new and experimental music through Tectonics, its festival with Creative Partner Ilan Volkov, since 2013.

With Associate Artist Lucy Drever the orchestra runs projects that inspire creativity and connection with families, schools and communities across Scotland. And through a close association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the orchestra mentors the next generation of conductors, composers and instrumentalists. The orchestra supports young musical talent in BBC Radio Scotland's *Young Classical Musician* competition.

Ryan Wigglesworth began his tenure as Chief Conductor in September 2022. One of the foremost composer-conductors of his generation, he has directed a wide range of repertoire with the BBC SSO including the ballets of Stravinsky, major works of Elgar, and UK premieres by György Kurtág and Composer-in-Association Hans Abrahamsen. Regularly performing at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh International Festival, the orchestra is a recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and four Gramophone Awards.

Delyana Lazarova took up the role of Principal Guest Conductor in September 2025. In June 2026, Antony Hermus was announced as Chief Conductor Designate, succeeding Ryan Wigglesworth from September 2027