

Third Coast Percussion

Start time: 8pm

Running time: 1 hour 45 minutes – including interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Ruth Kilpatrick delves into tonight's programme, and the ensemble's passion for collaborative new composition.

Chicago's Third Coast Percussion is a Grammy Award winning ensemble, world renowned for their impressive arrangements of classic works, powerful new pieces and always inspiring performances. This concert sees them at the Barbican for the first time, with a programme celebrating the wealth of possibility that comes from open, honest collaboration.

Featuring four UK premieres, the evening begins with Philip Glass's *Madeira River*, re-named after the Amazon River and its tributaries by Brazilian group Uakti for their own custom-made instruments back in 1999. For their 2017 album *Paddle To The Sea*, Third Coast Percussion took inspiration from both the original piano works and the Uakti arrangement, to create their own six-minute piece.

Perhaps their most well-known work to date, the classically trained quartet released an album of Steve Reich's works in celebration of his 80th birthday in 2016, on Cedille Records, winning the Grammy for Best Chamber Music / Small Ensemble Performance. Reich's influence on modern composition is vast; with *Mallet Quartet* offering a more melodic take on his perhaps more minimalist past. Scored for two marimbas and two vibraphones, the three movements over fifteen-minutes offer rhythmic energy and room for reflection all at once.

The last piece of the first half is *Perpetuum*; composed for and in collaboration with Third Coast Percussion by Philip Glass. Glass of course is an incredibly influential composer, not just in the world of classical and contemporary music, but throughout wider pop culture as a whole. In the realm of percussion ensembles, there are many who excel, in the opinion of Philip Glass however, not enough are performing original works. At 81 years of age this piece for Third Coast Percussion is Glass's first composed specifically for percussion.

Speaking to the ensemble member Robert Dillon ahead of their performance, we asked about the upcoming tour and what audiences can expect:

'We're ecstatic about our Barbican show! It will be Third Coast Percussion's first time performing in the UK, and this is a program that represents a nice blend of American and British composers, with works written for TCP by Gavin Bryars and Devonté Hynes, as well as the big names in American minimalism - Philip Glass and Steve Reich - and music written by my colleague David Skidmore.'

When speaking about favourite pieces to play, Robert explained:

'Two moments in this program that are especially satisfying to perform are the cadenza of Philip Glass's new work *Perpetuum*, and David's piece *Torched and Wrecked*. They are both athletic and energising blends of the musical voice that our ensemble has formed for itself with the classic minimalist aesthetic that has been in our ears since we were students.'

Post intermission you'll find another premiere, *Perfectly Voiceless*, from a collaborative work with Devonté Hynes, best known in the UK as Lightspeed Champion and most notably worldwide as Blood Orange. Hynes has worked with Solange Knowles, Sky Ferreira and countless other pop culture figures as writer, producer, performer or artist in his own right. *Perfectly Voiceless* is an interlude from a larger piece, a full-length 75-minute programme in tandem with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, for which Hynes composed the music. Using samples and largely synthesised sounds, Hynes would send pieces to Third Coast Percussion, who then created live instrumentation interpretations. TCP are wholly committed to widening the access to percussive music and the subsequent joy it can bring, funding new works and perhaps more importantly, running their Emerging Composer programme.

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‘One of the big changes that we’ve noticed in the fourteen years since our ensemble began is a much greater awareness of, and enthusiasm for, percussion music among presenters and audiences.’ Robert explained. He continued:

‘We began our quartet at a time when student percussion ensembles were giving exciting performances at their conservatories and universities, but we wanted to see this music reaching more audiences outside of academia. It seems to us that it is becoming more common now to see a percussion ensemble on a large festival or performing arts series, and we’re thrilled to be part of that emergence of our art form on to the stage before the general public.’

When asked just how vital their investment in new talent is, Robert continued:

‘Giving composers the opportunity to experiment with musical ideas and setting aside the time for them to be in the room with us exploring our instrument collection means that they can develop their own unique voice in writing for percussion, which will affect them not just as they write this piece of us, but throughout their whole career.’

The last two pieces feature another UK premiere in *The Other Side of the River* with British composer and renowned bassist Gavin Bryars, featured as the closing track of the *Perpetuum* album, followed by ensemble member David Skidmore’s own work *Torched and Wrecked*. While the former marks a move to subtler, more reflective sounds for Bryars, the latter is one of the most energetic of their work to date.

As 2019 heads to a close, Robert explained what he’d like to see in the future when it comes to creating new works:

‘Our most successful commissioning projects have come from thorough collaboration with the composers, and the four of us in the ensemble have also started engaging in projects where we compose works together as a quartet. Learning to work in this collaborative way allows the artists to draw on each other’s expertise and perspectives in a way that can really allow for new possibilities and effective creations.’

Performers

Sean Connors

David Skidmore

Robert Dillon

Peter Martin

Programme

Philip Glass Madeira River (UK premiere)

Steve Reich Mallet Quartet

Philip Glass Perpetuum (UK premiere)

Devonté Hynes Perfectly Voiceless (UK premiere)

Gavin Bryars The Other Side of the River (UK premiere)

David Skidmore Take Anything You Want

David Skidmore Torched and Wrecked



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