



LINN

kuniko plays reich II



SUPER AUDIO CD

MENU

TRACKLIST

ENGLISH



kuniko plays reich II

Steve Reich (b. 1936)

KUNIKO marimba, vibraphone, organ & maracas

1. **Four Organs (1970)** 16:32
2. **Piano Phase version for vibraphone (1967/2021)** 18:29
3. **Nagoya Marimbas (1994)** 4:57
4. **Mallet Quartet (2009)** 15:15

All original music by Steve Reich, arranged, performed and produced by Kuniko in consultation with Steve Reich. *Piano Phase* version for vibraphone © 2024 Hendon Music, Inc. This arrangement was made by permission of Boosey & Hawkes.

Total Running Time 55:13

Steve Reich has often referred to a ‘Eureka moment’ in the mid-1960s when, while working with tape loops in the electronic studio, he stumbled upon the discovery that identical loops that (accidentally) started running out of synchronization actually sounded amazing. This chance discovery was to become the trigger for him to systematically explore the possibilities of manipulating the combination of identical tape loops. Soon, this resulted in the technique Reich called phase shifting (or phasing), in which two or more loops would start in unison and then gradually move apart by very subtly changing the speed of one of the loops. The result is a series of canons in which the loops’ starting points gradually and systematically move further and further apart (until, eventually, if the process is carried out completely, they arrive back at the original unison). Phase shifting became Reich’s trademark composition technique for almost all his compositions between 1965 and 1971, initially working with loops of recorded speech (*It’s Gonna Rain, Come Out*), then moving on to musical instruments playing identically repeated patterns and phasing them against prerecorded material on tape (*Violin Phase*) or with multiple musicians phasing against each other live (*Piano Phase, Phase Patterns, Drumming*). It led Reich to the observation that playing as if imitating a machine (the tape loop) involved ‘a new and extremely satisfying way of playing that was both completely worked out beforehand and yet free of actually reading notation, allowing me to become totally absorbed in listening while playing’. To Reich, the fundamental issue in these early works was a notion of a ‘gradual process’, in which the unfolding of the process is perfectly obvious and audible, and yet compelling.

Piano Phase (1967) requires two pianists to behave as if they are two tape recorders: both playing the same repeated loop, starting in unison, with one pianist keeping strict and unwavering tempo and the other pianist gradually accelerating until they are one beat apart, then two beats and so on until after several stages of phasing they arrive back at their initial unison. The piece is in three sections that are seamlessly connected: the first section on a 12-beat pattern, the second one on an 8-beat pattern (with the two pianos given slightly different pitch material) and the final one on a concise 4-beat pattern. With each next pattern being a shortened version of the previous one, the overall impression of *Piano Phase* is also one of a process of becoming more and more concise: at each stage because of the shrinking length of the patterns, the phase shifting process obviously takes less time to move from unison over diverging canons to unison again. Although written for two pianos, Reich also made a version for two marimbas (in which case the same piece became renamed as *Marimba Phase*), which undoubtedly nicely suited the percussion-centered lineup of his own ensemble. For this version, Kuniko received permission from Reich to arrange *Piano Phase* for two vibraphones. The more sustained and metallic sound of the vibraphones turns out to be very effective in bringing out the shimmering harmonic play of overtones that was also a characteristic of the piano version, but is not possible with the shorter, dry sound of the marimba.

The only piece in Reich's work list before 1972 which does not involve phase shifting is *Four Organs* (1970), in which four electric organs (against a metronome-like pulse played by the maracas) incrementally hold individual notes from an otherwise unchanging dominant eleventh chord for longer and longer durations. Also here, one can discern a gradual process as the chord evolves from short percussive bursts of a single beat into a complex of stretched-out tones of up

to 156 beats. However, there is still an indirect relation between *Four Organs* and phase shifting. In 1968, spurred on by research on different ways of further exploring his phase shifting process, Reich collaborated with Larry Owens and David Flooke of Bell Laboratories to build an electronic device called the Phase Shifting Pulse Gate. While the phase shifting works up to then had involved loops of entire patterns canonically moving out of phase with each other, the Phase Shifting Pulse Gate would allow for shifting individual tones (instead of the entire pattern) with minute detail. This way, it became possible to transform a chord into a melodic pattern and back again. The two compositions Reich made for this electronic device, *Pulse Music* and *Four Log Drums* (1969) explored this possibility. But dissatisfied with the results, Reich withdrew the compositions and eventually turned away from electronic technology all together (until he discovered the sampler in the late 1980s – but that is a different story).

In *Four Organs*, the gradual lengthening of the chord is spread out in an uneven way, so that the texture gradually starts thinning out until only one or two tones remain, after which the entire chord emerges again. This process allows for the exploration of the harmony. The dominant eleventh chord on E is a rather dense chord with lots of potential for internal dissonance. So, the movement at each repetition from dense and dissonant to sparse and consonant adds to the experience. Instead of the impression of listening to a single chord, the ear is led to explore internal harmonic combinations as at each repeated section the chords become longer and individual notes drop out one by one. The voicing of the chord adds to that process: with the fundamental E firmly in the bass and the A as top note, the dominant chord carries its own resolution (the ‘tonic’ A) so that in places where the E drops out and the texture thins out towards the A, some suggestion of harmonic resolution within otherwise unchanging pitch material can be implied.

The major impact of Reich's experience with phase shifting, was arguably a lasting obsession with canons. Devising intricate ways of building interlocking patterns in canonic combinations has remained a feature of his music ever since, as the two more recent pieces on this album testify. *Nagoya Marimbas* (1994) is a series of a rather quick succession of patterns (each pattern is only repeated a handful of times before moving on to the next pattern), always played as a unison canon between the two marimbas. The patterns are longer and more melodically developed than in his early works, granting this piece a more expressive and openly virtuoso feel than the austere process music of the early days.

Mallet Quartet (2009) for two vibraphones and two marimbas is cast (as very often in Reich's work, see for instance the *Counterpoint* series) in three seamlessly connected movements (fast-slow-fast). The outer movements show a clear division of labour: the marimbas lay down the basic harmonic background in jagged rhythmic patterns (interlocking in canon), while the vibraphones take on a predominantly melodic role. In the slow middle movement, the four instruments are treated more similarly in a remarkably transparent texture. Here, Reich takes full advantage of the low register of the five-octave marimbas which adds to the colourful sonorous quality of the delicate instrumental combination. While the rigour and gradual process character of the early works has been (largely, but not entirely) abandoned, these recent percussion pieces show a more melodically expansive side of Reich, but still build on the tight rhythmic drive and canonic textures that are so recognizably his.

Composer Notes

Four Organs is composed exclusively of the gradual augmentation (lengthening) of individual tones within a single (dominant 11th) chord. The tones within the chord gradually extend out like a sort of horizontal bar graph in time. As the chord stretches out, slowly resolving to the tonic A and then gradually changing back to the dominant E, a sort of slow-motion music is created. The maracas lay down a steady time grid of even eighth-notes throughout, enabling the performers to play together while mentally counting up to as much as 256 beats on a given cycle of sustained tones.

Four Organs is the only piece I am aware of that is composed exclusively of the gradual augmentation of individual tones within a single chord. From the beginning to the end there are no changes of pitch or timbre; all changes are rhythmic and simply consist of gradually increasing durations. This process of augmentation was suggested by the enormous elongation of individual tenor notes in Organum as composed by Perotin and others in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Paris at Notre-Dame Cathedral. Tenor notes that in the original chant may have been equivalent to our quarter- or half-notes can take several pages of tied whole-notes when augmented by Perotin or Leonin.

Four Organs was composed in January 1970. It was first performed at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City by myself and members of my own ensemble later that same year. It also turned out to be one of my first pieces to be heard by a large concert-going public when Michael Tilson Thomas invited me to perform it with him and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Boston in 1971 and at Carnegie Hall in 1973, where it provoked a riot.

Shortly after completing *Come Out* I began to think about writing live instrumental music. Unfortunately, it seemed to me at the time impossible for two human beings to perform that gradual phase-shifting process since the process was discovered with, and seemed indigenous to, tape recorders. On the other hand I could think of nothing else to do with live musicians that would be as interesting as the phasing process. Finally, late in 1966, I recorded a short repeating melodic pattern played on the piano, made a tape loop of it, and then tried to play against that loop myself, exactly as if I were a second tape recorder. To my surprise, I found that while I lacked the perfection of the machine, I could give a good approximation of it while enjoying a new and extremely satisfying way of playing that was both completely worked out beforehand and yet free of reading notation, allowing me to become completely absorbed in listening while I played.

Piano Phase was later completely written out in musical notation with dotted lines between one bar and the next to indicate the gradual phase shifting. The score shows that two musicians begin in unison playing the same pattern over and over again and that while one of them stays put, the other gradually increases his or her tempo so as to slowly move one beat ahead of the other. This process is repeated until both players are back in unison, at which point the pattern is changed and the phasing process begins again. Everything is worked out, there is no improvisation, but the psychology of performance, what really happens when you play, is total involvement with the sound, total sensuous intellectual involvement.

Nagoya Marimbas is somewhat similar to my pieces from the 1960s and 1970s in that there are repeating patterns played on both marimbas, one or more beats out of phase, creating a series of two part unison canons. However, these patterns are more melodically developed, change frequently and each is usually repeated no more than three times, similar to my more recent work. The piece

is also considerably more difficult to play than my earlier ones and requires two virtuosic performers.

Mallet Quartet is scored for two vibraphones and two five octave marimbas. I had never written for five octave marimbas extending down to cello C. On the one hand I was delighted to have the possibility of a low bass and on the other hand apprehensive since just slightly too hard a mallet that low can produce noise instead of pitch. Eventually, after a bit of experimentation, this was well worked out.

The piece is in three movements, fast, slow, fast. In the two outer fast movements the marimbas set the harmonic background which remains rather static compared to recent pieces of mine like *Double Sextet* (2007). The marimbas interlock in canon, also a procedure I have used in many other works. The vibes present the melodic material first solo and then in canon. However, in the central slow movement the texture changes into a thinner more transparent one with very spare use of notes, particularly in the marimbas. I was originally concerned this movement might just be 'too thin', but I think it ends up being the most striking, and certainly the least expected, of the piece.

Mallet Quartet is about 15 minutes in duration. It was co-commissioned by the Amadinda Percussion Group in Budapest, on the occasion of its 25th anniversary, Nexus Ensemble in Toronto, Sō Percussion in New York, Synergy Percussion in Australia and Soundstreams in Canada. The world premiere was given by the Amadinda Percussion Group in Bela Bartók National Concert Hall on 6 December 2009. The American premiere was given by Sō Percussion at Stanford University Lively Arts in California on 9 January 2010.



Kuniko Kato is one of the world's leading percussion virtuosos from Japan. Her astonishing virtuosity, exquisite musical insight and expressive yet elegant performance style continues to attract not only audiences, but established conductors and composers too. She is renowned for her flawless technique when playing both keyboard and percussion instruments, which blends seamlessly with her profound musical intelligence.

After the 2011 initial release of *kuniko plays reich* on Linn, the concert presented at Kyoto Art Center in 2012 received the prestigious twelfth Keizo Saji Prize from the Suntory Foundation for the Arts. In 2013 her eagerly awaited second album for Linn was released, featuring the premiere percussion arrangements of four of the great Estonian composer Arvo Pärt's signature works. The album is entitled *Cantus* and was in the UK's Top 10 Specialist Classical Chart. It also received the 'Best Recording' Award at Japan's Music Pen Club's twenty-sixth Music Awards.

In 2015 Kuniko released the major percussion works *Pléïades* and *Rebonds* by the great twentieth-century composer Iannis Xenakis. The album was double-nominated in the 'Best Contemporary Music' and 'Best Recording' categories at the Japan Record Academy Awards. The 2017 release *Bach: Solo Works for Marimba* saw Kuniko turn to the cello suites and violin sonatas of J. S. Bach. This album debuted at number 2 on Japan's Classical Billboard Chart, received the Grand Prize at the tenth Japan's CD Shop Awards 2018 and was Linn's best-selling album of the year.

In 2019 Kuniko won an Excellence Award for her live performance of Steve Reich's *Drumming* at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, in November 2018. The prestigious award was given by the 73rd National Arts Festival (Agency for Cultural Affairs). Her home town, the City of Toyohashi, appointed her as its special ambassador. Kuniko is the only Japanese artist signed to Linn. She is endorsed globally by Pearl and ADAMS (NL). She currently resides in USA.

**With special thanks to Adams, Pearl, Neumann Berlin,
Synthax, Inc., Synthax Japan, Sennheiser Japan,
Naxos Japan, Masaki Furukawa, Linn and Outhere.**

Recorded at Kanagawa Art Hall, Yokohama, Japan,
on 25–26 May and 5–6 June 2022,
and Wisteria Hall, Toyohashi, Japan, on 1–4 June 2023

Recording & Mixing Engineer

Yuji Sagae

Mastering

Jared Sacks

Executive Producer

Philip Hobbs

Label Manager

Timothée van der Stegen

Design

Valérie Lagarde

Photos

© Michiyuki Ohba

© Jeffrey Herman (p. 2)





LINN

*out*here
M U S I C

FOR EVEN MORE GREAT MUSIC VISIT LINNRECORDS.COM