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# GLASS: A PORTRAIT OF PHILLIP IN 12 PARTS

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**Director: Scott Hicks**

**2007, Australia/USA, Runtime: 1 hr 55 mins**

## **Synopsis**

When notable narrative director Scott Hicks (*Shine*, *Snow Falling on Cedars*) picked up an HD camera to shoot some footage of celebrated composer Philip Glass, he had no intention of turning it into a feature-length documentary. Yet after capturing so much insightful footage and realizing that Glass and his family and friends were up to the task, that is exactly what happened. With *Glass: A Portrait of Philip in Twelve Parts*, Hicks has delivered an intimate, illuminating glimpse into the life of one of America's most fascinating artists. The film's present-day footage follows Glass as he works on his Eighth Symphony and also prepares to present the operatic spectacle *Barbarians At The Gate*. But his current duties don't stop there. He's also busy scoring Woody Allen's *Cassandra's Dream* in addition to several more films.

Glass is an obsessive workaholic who takes his work with him even when he goes on vacation (to the disappointment of his third wife, Holly, who expresses her feelings in one of the film's most unexpectedly revealing moments). Meanwhile, Hicks visits close friends and family members, who recount Glass's life story with clarity and humour. But the film really belongs to Glass himself, whose pragmatic approach to creation is daunting and inspiring. To him, one must show up every single day and put in the time to create work that is worthy of preservation. To remain focused, he performs many different spiritual and physical acts of meditation and exercise. GLASS often feels more like a home movie than an outright documentary, proving that Hicks is as adept at shooting real life as he is at filming screenplays

## **Review, New York Times**

Planned as a tribute to this work-obsessed musician, "Glass" proceeds genteelly through an intellectually inquisitive and deeply spiritual life. Balancing prodigious musical commitments with qigong and Taoism, Mr. Glass, who turned 71 in January, maintains a rigorous daily schedule that would daunt any man half his age. Somewhere on the fringes his current wife, Holly Critchlow, and two infant children provide the sounds and comforts of family.

Yet whether chatting about his aversion to music theory or appreciation of negative reviews, Mr. Glass — like his music — remains frustratingly distant. Interviews with friends, siblings and artistic collaborators like the artist Chuck Close and the filmmaker Errol Morris ("Philip does existential dread better than anyone") only bolster the film's admiring and self-satisfied tone.

Not until the final minutes does this veneer crack as Mr. Hicks, almost in spite of himself, becomes hypnotized by Ms. Critchlow's sudden confession of emotional pain. While the camera clings to her massive brown eyes, the film falls awkwardly silent: like a lightning bolt on a gloomy day, her unexpected outburst is more harshly illuminating than anything that has gone before

## About Phillip Glass (edited from Wikipedia)

Philip Glass is considered one of the most influential composers of the late-20th century and is widely acknowledged as a composer who has brought art music to the public (along with precursors such as Richard Strauss, Kurt Weill and Leonard Bernstein). Although his music is described as minimalist, he wishes to distance himself from this label, describing himself instead as a composer of "music with repetitive structures".

Glass is a prolific composer: he has written works for his own musical group which he founded, the Philip Glass Ensemble (of which he still performs on keyboards), operas, music-theatre works, eight symphonies, eight concertos, solo works, string quartets, and film scores, and has been nominated for three Academy Awards. Glass counts many visual artists, writers, musicians, and directors among his friends, including many who have collaborated with him. He has influenced many popular musicians including Linda Ronstadt, Paul Simon, David Bowie, Brian Eno, Patti Smith and Leonard Cohen. He describes himself as "a Jewish-Taoist-Hindu-Toltec-Buddhist", and a supporter of the Tibetan cause.

He studied at the Juilliard School of Music where the keyboard became his main instrument and fellow students included Steve Reich. Glass then went to Paris, where he studied with the eminent composition teacher Nadia Boulanger analyzing scores of Bach and Mozart. Glass later stated that the new music performed at Pierre Boulez concerts in Paris lacked any excitement for him (with the notable exceptions of music by John Cage and Morton Feldman) but he was deeply impressed by performances of new plays and the revolutionary films of the French New Wave, which ignored the rules set by an older generation of artists.

Glass also worked as a music director and composer on a film score with Ravi Shankar, which added another important influence on Glass' musical thinking. His distinctive style arose from his work with Shankar and his perception of rhythm in Indian music as being entirely additive. When he returned home he renounced all his compositions in a moderately modern style (resembling Aaron Copland's or Samuel Barber's) and began writing pieces based on repetitive structures of Indian music and a sense of time influenced by Beckett.

Back in New York City in 1967, Glass attended a performance of works by Steve Reich (including the ground-breaking minimalist piece Piano Phase), which left a deep impression on him; he simplified his style and turned to a radical "consonant vocabulary". Glass eventually formed an ensemble with Reich, Jon Gibson and others and began performing mainly in art galleries. Early performances included Music in the Shape of a Square for two flutes and Strung Out (1967) for amplified solo violin. The musical scores were tacked on the wall, and the performers had to move while playing.

At first his works continued to be rigorously minimalist, diatonic and repetitively structured, such as Two Pages, Contrary Motion, or Music in Fifths but eventually Glass's music grew less austere, becoming more complex and dramatic, with pieces such as Music in Similar Motion (1969), and with Music with Changing Parts (1970). After certain differences of opinion with Steve Reich in 1971, Glass formed the Philip Glass Ensemble (while Reich formed Steve Reich and Musicians), an amplified ensemble including keyboards, wind instruments (saxophones, flutes), and soprano voices. Glass' music for his ensemble culminated in the four-hour-long Music in Twelve Parts (1971–1974), which began as a sole piece with twelve instrumental parts but developed into a cycle that summed up Glass's musical achievement since 1967, and even transcended it—the last part features a twelve-tone theme, sung by the soprano voice of the ensemble. Though he finds the term minimalist inaccurate to describe his later work, Glass does accept this term for pieces up to and including Music in 12 Parts, excepting this last part which "was the end of minimalism" for Glass, as he pointed out: "I had worked eight or nine years creating a system, and now I'd written through it come out the other end"