

COLIN
CURRIE
RECORDS

STEVE REICH
MUSIC FOR 18 MUSICIANS

COLIN CURRIE GROUP
SYNERGY VOCALS





Steve Reich Music for 18 Musicians

1	Pulses	05:10
2	Section I	04:30
3	Section II	05:15
4	Section IIIA	05:00
5	Section IIIB	04:00
6	Section IV	04:50
7	Section V	05:36
8	Section VI	05:29
9	Section VII	04:31
10	Section VIII	04:07
11	Section IX	04:53
12	Section X	01:26
13	Section XI	04:25
14	Pulses II	04:42
	Total	63:54

Hybrid-SACD compatible with all CD players.

Super Audio layer includes 2.0 stereo and 5.1 multi-channel mixes.

Colin Currie

Colin Currie is a solo and chamber artist who champions new music at the highest level, hailed as being “at the summit of percussion performance today” (*Gramophone*). Currie is the soloist of choice for many of today’s foremost composers, conductors and orchestras and is recognised for his commitment to new music, having premiered and commissioned numerous pieces by composers of significance. Colin Currie launched Colin Currie Records in October 2017, in collaboration with LSO Live, as a platform for recording his diverse projects.

www.colincurrie.com

Colin Currie Group

Colin Currie Group, formed by Colin in 2006, is a virtuosic ensemble that specialises in the music of Steve Reich. Their performances of Reich’s music have been hailed by the composer as “the best I’ve ever heard”. **www.colincurriegrup.com**

Synergy Vocals

Synergy Vocals have performed and recorded with many of the world’s top orchestras and composers. The group’s close association with Steve Reich stems from their first ever concert in 1996, performing *Tehillim*. **www.synergyvocals.com**

Performers

Colin Currie Group

Colin Currie *Artistic Director & Percussion*

Owen Gunnell *Percussion*

Adrian Spillett *Percussion*

Sam Walton *Percussion*

Richard Benjafield *Percussion & Piano*

Catherine Ring *Percussion & Piano*

Philip Moore *Piano*

Siwan Rhys *Piano*

Dave Maric *Piano & Percussion*

James Young *Piano & Percussion*

Emma Burgess *Clarinet & Bass Clarinet*

Timothy Lines *Clarinet & Bass Clarinet*

Jonathan Morton *Violin*

Robin Michael *Cello*

Synergy Vocals

Micaela Haslam *Artistic Director & Vocals*

Caroline Jaya-Ratnam *Vocals & Piano*

Amanda Morrison *Vocals*

Heather Cairncross *Vocals*





MUSIC'S MOST MAGICAL SUM OF PARTS

If my very first encounter with Steve Reich was perhaps the single page of music required to perform his *Clapping Music*, then the first composition of his I actually heard would have been *Music for 18 Musicians*. These early interactions occurred in the 1980s with a very different socio-technological backdrop – the internet, streaming and downloads all looming somewhat in the future. I would save up for each new Steve Reich release as it became available, with pocket money duly deployed as I built up my library. But *Music for 18 Musicians* was the prime mover, it captured my imagination and I have been held in its epic grasp ever since.

I would wait until 2006 to hear the work performed live for the first time, when Steve came to London with his Musicians (I still recall a minor delay whilst the two clarinetists were located backstage!) to celebrate his 70th birthday. This was also the

inaugural year of my own group: early days, but days in which, having performed *Drumming* once, we were already eyeing the Holy Grail of *Music for 18*. In 2013, hosted by the Southbank Centre at their festival 'The Rest Is Noise' and in the presence of the composer, the dream burst into a sonic reality that vastly overwhelmed my already celestial expectations.

At the time of writing, and nearly a decade later, we have just returned from a tour of the USA with concerts in California and New York. As well as a new work written for us entitled *Traveler's Prayer* and *Tehillim*, the programme featured *Music for 18 Musicians*. Steve is now 86 years old (or, I would say, 86 years young, having spent time with him there) and the privilege of bringing this music to his home audience at Carnegie Hall will remain one of the most extraordinary experiences of my entire life. We have now played the work countless times and, after the recording sessions at Abbey Road Studios this week, it's 'next stop Tokyo' for a double bill at the majestic Opera City.

Yet regardless of where and when we play this music, the same utterly unclassifiable atmosphere works its magic. In performance, it's the perfect musical beehive, with each musician purposefully at work to tease the material along, every section

living in the moment as patterns are built and pulses rise and fall. The sheer symphonic splendour of the sonority has become an iconic gift to all music, and rightly so since I have never known what's not to like about four grand pianos, multiple mallet percussion, amplified bass clarinets, a choir of voices, strings and of course... the famous maracas.

When you 'plug in' to your role in this music, perhaps a humble offbeat for an entire section, or something more soloistic that needs to shine, there is an astonishing feeling of elevation that approaches levitation. I frequently find myself standing at the marimba but floating somewhere over Piano 4 or perhaps the cello, or transported who-knows-where by a flock of passing singers. It's actually often impossible to say exactly what sound is coming from where, the critical mass of this work far exceeding its brilliantly contained constituent parts.

The team assembled here represent my closest musical colleagues and companions. Some date back to my childhood, some to music college, others are fabulous and more recent additions to our line-up. They all feel this music the same way. Very little is said in rehearsal – I guess it's hard to feel loquacious in the company of such miraculous material. My gratitude to them, like the music itself, cannot be effectively expressed, but I feel I have

the best band in the world and cherish every minute with them. Without Steve of course, there would be no band at all, and so to celebrate and cherish his creative genius, I invite you to wrap yourselves up in this album and immerse yourself in our collective passion for this music.

Colin Currie, November 2022





MUSIC FOR 18 MUSICIANS (1974–1976) FOR VOICES AND ENSEMBLE

Composer Notes

The first sketches for *Music for 18 Musicians* were made in May 1974 and it was completed in March 1976. Although its steady pulse and rhythmic energy related to many of my earlier works, its instrumentation, harmony, and structure are new.

As to instrumentation, *Music for 18 Musicians* is new in the number and distribution of instruments: violin, cello, two clarinets doubling bass clarinet, four women's voices, four pianos, three marimbas, two xylophones, and vibraphone (with no motor). All instruments are acoustic. The use of electronics is limited to microphones for the voices and some of the instruments.

There is more harmonic movement in the first five minutes of *Music for 18 Musicians* than in any other work of mine prior to 1976. The movement from chord to chord is often a re-voicing, inversion, or

relative minor or major of a previous chord—staying within the key signatures of three or four sharps throughout. Nevertheless, within these limits, harmonic movement plays a more important role in this 1976 piece than in any earlier work of mine. It opened the door to further harmonic development in the more than 45 years since.

Rhythmically, there are basically two different kinds of time occurring simultaneously in *Music for 18 Musicians*. The first is that of a regular rhythmic pulse in the pianos and mallet instruments that continues throughout the piece. The second is the rhythm of the human breath in the voices and wind instruments. The entire opening and closing sections, plus part of all the sections in between, contain pulses by the voices and winds. They take a full breath and sing or play pulses of particular notes for as long as their breath will comfortably sustain them. The breath is the measure of the duration of their pulsing. This combination of one breath after another, gradually washing up like waves against the constant rhythm of the pianos and mallet instruments, is something I have not heard before and would like to investigate further.

The structure of *Music for 18 Musicians* is based on a cycle of 11 chords played at the very beginning of the piece and repeated at the end. All the

instruments and voices play or sing pulsing notes within each chord. Instruments (like the strings) that do not have to breathe nevertheless follow the rise and fall of the breath by following the breath patterns of the bass clarinet. Each chord is held for the duration of two breaths, and the next chord is gradually introduced, and so on, until all 11 are played and the ensemble returns to the first chord. This first pulsing chord is then maintained by two pianos and two marimbas. While this pulsing chord is held for about five minutes, a small piece is constructed on it. When this piece is completed, there is a sudden change to the second chord, and a second small piece or section is constructed. This means that each chord that might have taken 15 or 20 seconds to play in the opening section is then stretched out as the basic pulsing harmony for a five-minute piece—very much as a single note in a cantus firmus, or chant melody of 12th-century organum by Perotin, might be stretched out for several minutes as the harmonic center for a section of the organum. The opening 11-chord cycle of *Music for 18 Musicians* is a kind of pulsing cantus for the entire piece.

On each pulsing chord, one, or, on the third chord, two, small pieces are built. These pieces or sections are basically either in the form of an arch (ABCDCBA), or in the form of a musical process (like that of

substituting beats for rests), working itself out from beginning to end. Elements appearing in one section will appear in another but surrounded by different harmony and instrumentation. For instance, the pulse in pianos and marimbas in sections I and II changes to marimbas and xylophone in section IIIA, and to xylophones and maracas in sections VI and VII. The low piano pulsing harmonies of section IIIA reappear in section VI, supporting a different melody played by different instruments. The process of building up a canon, or phase relation, between two xylophones and two pianos—which first occurs in section II—occurs again in section IX but building up to another overall pattern in different harmonic context. The relationship between the different sections is thus best understood in terms of resemblances between members of a family. Certain characteristics will be shared but others will be unique.

One of the basic means of change or development in many sections of this piece is to be found in the rhythmic relationship of harmony to melody. Specifically, a melodic pattern may be repeated over and over again, but by introducing a two- or four-chord cadence underneath it—first beginning on one beat of the pattern, and then beginning on a different beat—a sense of changing accent in the melody will be heard. This play of changing

harmonic rhythm against constant melodic pattern is one of the basic techniques of this piece, and one I have never used before. Its effect, by change of accent, is to vary that which is in fact unchanging.

Changes from one section to the next, as well as changes within each section, are cued by the vibraphone whose patterns are played once only to call for movements to the next bar—much as in a Balinese Gamelan, a drummer will audibly call for

changes of pattern, or as the master drummer will call for changes of pattern in West African music. This is in contrast to the visual nods of the head used in earlier pieces of mine to call for changes and in contrast also to the general Western practice of having a non-performing conductor for large ensembles. Audible cues become part of the music and allow the musicians to keep listening.

Steve Reich, 1976 (revised September 2022)



With considerable thanks to Two River Associates, and to Janet and David Heffernan, my sister and brother-in-law, for their support in the making of this album, and in loving memory of my parents Iain and Elizabeth Currie.

Colin Currie Group would like to thank Steinway & Sons, and Gunnell Brothers Percussion Hire for their generous assistance with percussion instruments. Colin Currie Group also thanks Marimba One for their continued support.



STEINWAY & SONS



Marimba One

Recorded 16 November 2022 at Abbey Road Studios, London, at 24bit 96kHz PCM

Producer Ian Dearden

Co-production Colin Currie

Additional production Micaela Haslam

Engineer Daniel Halford

Mixing & Mastering Daniel Halford & Ian Dearden for Sound Intermedia

SACD Mastering Jonathan Stokes for Classic Sound Ltd

Piano Technician John Elliott

Executive Producers Andy Doe & Maebh Lehane with Intermusica Artists' Management Ltd

Reich *Music for 18 Musicians* © 1974–1976 Hendon Music, Inc., a Boosey & Hawkes Company

Cover design Andy Doe **Artwork layout** David Millinger

Photography Andy Doe



