

scottish
ensemble



AMERICAN LIFE

MARK STEWART
PHILIP GLASS
NICO MUHLY
JOHN ADAMS

To Whom It May Concern, Thank You
Company
Motion
Shaker Loops
interval

JAMES MANSON
COPLAND

Meeting at Nisqueunia
Appalachian Spring

CAIRD HALL, DUNDEE 7.30PM

Wed 7 Sep

EDEN COURT, INVERNESS 7.30PM

Thu 8 Sep

THEATRE ROYAL, DUMFRIES 7.30PM

Sat 10 Sep

GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALLS, 3.30PM

Sun 11 Sep

Welcome to American Life

North America is a fascinatingly multi-faceted continent. From its huge, buzzing cities to its vast swathes of empty landscapes, it is host to a plethora of people, beliefs and cultures - and cannot be defined by any one of them.

The pieces in this programme have been chosen not only because they were written by American composers, but also because of the varied palette of landscapes, beliefs and cultural phenomena that they represent. Philip Glass' string quartet was written in the heart of New York City for a production of a Samuel Beckett play. Meanwhile John Adams' *Shaker Loops*, written just up the road, depicts an entirely different side of American life, taking its inspiration from glimpses of a Shaker colony near his childhood home.

Copland's *Appalachian Spring* depicts an America made familiar through history textbooks. Originally written for a ballet in which a couple of young American Pioneers build a new home in Pennsylvania, it depicts both the pagan and religious spring celebrations of the new settlement. It has become a cornerstone of the 20th-century American canon.

We are also proud to perform a new Scottish Ensemble commission by James Manson - a friend of and regular musician and arranger for SE, who took inspiration from a Shaker text from 1781. As with Copland's ballet, it incorporates melodies which would have been sung at the time.

So please, sit back and relax as we take you on an unforgettable road trip through a North American landscape rich with fervour, passion, belief and, of course, music...

<i>Leader</i>	Jonathan Morton
<i>Violin</i>	Cheryl Crockett, Daniel Pioro, Laura Ghiro
<i>Viola</i>	Catherine Marwood, Andrew Berridge
<i>Cello</i>	Alison Lawrance, Naomi Pavri
<i>Bass</i>	Diane Clark
<i>Flute</i>	Jo Shaw
<i>Clarinet</i>	Scott Lygate
<i>Bassoon</i>	Paul Boyes
<i>Piano</i>	Julia Lynch

MARK STEWART

To Whom It May Concern, Thank You

The inspiration for this piece came from one of the most American of traditions - saying grace. Stewart's father is an episcopalian priest, and his mother an atheist who, one Thanksgiving, came to a rather brilliant solution for the tricky problem of how to say grace at family dinners by standing up and simply announcing: "To whom it may concern, thank you."

Raised in Wisconsin, Stewart is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer and instrument designer. Throughout a varied and impressive career, he has been a member of Steve Reich's *Steve Reich and Musicians* ensemble and Arnold Dreyblatt's *Orchestra of Excited Strings* and has worked with musicians from Philip Glass to Bruce Springsteen and Paul McCartney. He has been Musical Director for Simon & Garfunkel since 1998. In his own words, as a composer and musician he makes a living from "a little bit of popular music, quite a bit of semi-popular music and an enormous amount of unpopular music - the last being all the music you probably haven't heard." As a music teacher, he believes the word 'musician' is used too often to discourage people from participating in their "birth right as sound-makers". [Rosie Davies]

PHILIP GLASS (1937 -)

Company (String Quartet No. 2) (1983)

Composed in 1983, Philip Glass' *String Quartet No. 2* followed nearly two decades during which Glass had not written for the medium. His first was written in 1963 and, even though it had been published, Glass withdrew this initial attempt. By the time he wrote his second, his characteristic harmonic progressions and signature rhythmic gestures had become well established.

It was not, however, initially conceived as chamber music, but for the theatre. In Paris in the 1960s, Glass had collaborated with what would later become the Mabou Mines Theater Group (and married one of its members, JoAnne Akalaitis). After the ensemble established itself under that name in New York a decade later, Glass worked with the group once again and provided music for more than a dozen of its productions. For the group's production of Samuel Beckett's *Company*, Glass looked to extract the music from the action by writing a score that could stand entirely on its own as a concert work. In fact, upon perusing the score, Beckett was pleased at the space the music left for the drama. "Oh, very good," he remarked to Glass. "It will appear in the interstices, as it were."

The work is cast in four brief and closely related movements. The first presents a series of variations on a simple harmonic scheme consisting of a more or less static tonal centre ornamented by moving inner lines. Covering similar harmonic terrain, the second movement engages in faster and more aggressive figurations; the steady undercurrent finds resistance from the lurching rhythms in the upper lines. The third movement revisits the contours of the first, with only slight harmonic alteration and textural elaboration. Likewise, the fourth movement revisits the tension between triple and duple meter that characterized the second, but assumes a more somber tone that fades to a whisper by the work's close. [Jeremy Grimshaw]

NICO MUHLY (1981 -)

Motion (2010)

Orlando Gibbons's verse anthem *See, see the Word is incarnate* is one of my favorite pieces of text setting: Gibbons divides up Godfrey Goodman's verses into solo bits for solo or coupled countertenors, who weave in and out of a texture of viols. Then, the chorus comes in at the end of each verse, like a 1960s girl group, echoing the soloist: "*let us welcome such a guest!*", and "*good will towards men!*"

Knowing when to come in was always an adventure for me as a chorister; I memorized everything and then would get entranced by the soloists (how can you not get drawn into a line like "*See, O see the fresh wounds, the gored blood, the prick of thorns, the print of nails?*") and miss my entrance. This piece, *Motion*, tries to capture the nervous energy of obsessive counting. The piece is built on little repeated fragments from the Gibbons, as well as an extended quotation and ornamentation of one of the verses, where the viola and the cello criss-cross one another and the other instruments create a messy grid of anxious quavers. The piece ends ecstatically, using as its primary cell Gibbons' melody: "*in the sight of multitudes a glorious ascension.*"

The title comes from a vision of Christ's reign - "*the blind have sight and cripples have their motion*" - with the word 'motion', both in Gibbons' setting and my appropriation, comprising three syllables.
[Nico Muhly]

JOHN ADAMS (1947 -)

Shaker Loops (1978)

- 1 Shaking and Trembling
- 2 Hymning Sews
- 3 Loops and Verses
- 4 A Final Shaking

Shaker Loops is perhaps John Adams' most regularly performed score and, hearing it even for the first time, it is not hard to see why. Like Adams himself, it has life, wit and charm in equal measure to its seriousness, cleverness and discipline. A lot of Adams' work has this dual nature. While seduced by the dynamism of minimalism, he has never signed up to its austerity. He has a pleasing sense of harmony and ear for alluring textures which often tempts listeners to dismiss him as an 'easy' composer. Yet the richness of his scores can be enjoyed only by an alert and informed listener. He is a master marketer. He has an excellent instinct for titles (*Shaker Loops*: who wouldn't be intrigued?) and can 'sell' his own music better than anyone else; but his willingness to communicate clearly and well should never be mistaken for glib commercialism. His seriousness is as much a key to the humanity of all his work as his humour. He remains one of the very few composers today who can make great jokes without derailing his musical thought.

Shaker Loops is an early work and - as he tells it - a key piece in his own development. It began as a 'minimalist' string quartet which bombed at its premiere. While revising and rewriting it for septet, Adams was able to try out new ideas on a student ensemble. He worked like a sculptor on the physical sound. He had time to analyse why his take on minimalism had failed. He retained the good and sloughed away the bad ideas.

The essence of the piece is its oscillating patterns - the repeating 'loops' of the title. That word makes overt reference to Steve Reich's seminal minimal tape pieces in which a short fragment of speech is looped over and over again. But, stepping beyond Reich's ambit, Adams built a "structure that could embrace much more variety and emotional range." In particular he wanted to express an "almost electrically-charged element, so out of place in the orderly mechanistic universe of Minimalism." This ecstatic inspiration he evokes is what suggested the 'Shaker' pun of the title. On the one hand it is a straight reference to the tremolando technique he demands of his string players; on the other, it "summons up the vision of these otherwise pious and industrious souls [the Shakers] caught up in the ecstatic frenzy of a dance that culminated in an epiphany of physical and spiritual transcendence." At times the rhythms surge like a runaway train; in softer moments you sense Adams' more distant American heritage - the musical land of Samuel Barber and Aaron Copland with their wide open translucent textures, their edge of lyrical melancholy tempering those ecstatic rhythms and spectacular landscapes. [Svend Brown]

interval
approx. 20 mins

JAMES MANSON

Meeting at Nisqueunia (2016)

The first Shaker settlement in America was in a small town near Albany in the state of New York called Nisqueunia [Nis-kuh-yoo-nuh]. It was here in 1776 that a small group from Manchester, England, led by Mother Ann Lee, began their work to establish Shakerism in America.

In 1781 Valentine Rathbun, a Baptist minister from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, published a book which was highly critical of the sect. He and several members of his family had initially embraced the shaker gospel but later rejected its doctrine. His book was called *Some brief hints of a religious scheme, taught and propogated by a number of Europeans, living in a place called Nisqueunia, in the state of New York.*

Inside, he describes in detail a worship meeting which he'd attended:

"The manner and form of their worship is entirely new, and different from all others: It differs but little on the Sabbath from any other day: They begin by sitting down and shaking their heads in a violent manner, turning their heads half round, so that their face looks over each shoulder, their eyes being shut; while they are thus shaking, one will begin to sing some odd tune, without words or rule; after a while another will strike in; and then another; and after a while they all fall in and make a strange charm: Some singing without words, and some with an unknown tongue, or mutter, and some with a mixture of English: The Mother, so called, minds to strike such notes as makes a concord, and so form the charm. When they leave off singing, they drop off, one by one, as oddly as they come on."

Meeting at Nisqueunia takes its inspiration from this account. It includes melodies chosen from several 19th century Shaker hymn books. The three main tunes used are *Let Zion Move*, *My Carnal Life I Will Lay Down* (celebracy was a highly prized quality of Shakerism) and *Come Life, Shaker Life*.
[James Manson]

AARON COPLAND (1900 - 1990) *Appalachian Spring* (1944)

Many historians call the 20th century the American century. This is truer for music than almost anything. In these hundred years, America grew from far-flung European musical colony to discovering its own voice and ultimately producing composers like Reich and Adams who influence European musicians of every genre.

None was more important than Copland. Interestingly, he only set out to write 'American' music for a relatively short time. As a young man, he established his modernist credentials by studying in Paris, and composed in a tough, experimental idiom to which he would later return. But for 15 years or so in his middle years, he composed music inspired by jazz, folksong, spirituals, hymns, ragtime and blues, and gave America some of her most enduring popular classics. Three of the greatest are ballets: *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942) and, finally, *Appalachian Spring* (1944).

Copland was brought in to write this score by Martha Graham, who was commissioned to create a ballet by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge and the Library of Congress. Her scenario was simple: "This has to do with living in a new town, some place where the first fence has just gone up," said Graham. "Spring was celebrated by a man and a woman building a house with joy and love and prayer; by a revivalist and his followers in their shouts of exaltation; by a pioneering woman with her dreams of the Promised Land."

The title 'Appalachian Spring' seems perfect for those scenarios, yet it was a late addition. "When Aaron first presented me with the music, its title was *Ballet for Martha* – simple, and as direct as the Shaker theme that runs through it," Graham explained. "I took some words from the poetry of Hart Crane and retitled it *Appalachian Spring*. When Aaron appeared in Washington for a rehearsal...he said to me, 'Martha, what have you named the ballet?' And when I told him, he asked, 'Does it have anything to do with the ballet?'. 'No,' I said. 'I just like the title.'"

The poem really does have little to do with Graham's scenario. It comes from *The Dance*, a section of Hart Crane's epic poem *The River*.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge;
Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends
And northward reaches in that violet wedge
Of Adirondacks!

But Copland's score both serves Graham's ideas superbly and captures Crane's epic wonder. He and Crane had been friends, and when Crane committed suicide, Copland wrote him an elegy. Graham knew none of this. What special intuition drew her to this poem?

In purely musical terms, the score is a marvel. It opens and closes with nebulous chords and ringing sounds. Between them, Copland takes the listener on a journey toward, and then away from, radiant, full statements of the Shaker song *Simple Gifts*, whose tune permeates every single bar. Copland's delicate balance of simplicity, economy and beauty truly embraces the Shaker spirit. [Svend Brown]

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