

## Acceptance speech

16 June of 2022

### Philip Glass, awardee in the Music and Opera category (14th Edition)

It is a great honor for me to receive the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Music and Opera.

When I was learning to write music, I was using some of the same skills that I used when I was studying physics or mathematics. I found that almost anything I did could be expressed in music.

As is often the case with composers, I began my training at an early age. For me, that meant my early training began a few months before my eighth year at the Peabody Music Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland. I began with flute lessons and music history lessons as well as 'private' piano lessons. Early training is very common in the music world. And that is just the beginning! My professional music training began with four years at the University of Chicago, followed by five years at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City. After that (and 2 years on a Ford Foundation assignment to compose music for the Public Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), I went to Paris on a Fulbright to study with Nadia Boulanger. This last was, for me, the most formative and profound of all my music school studies.

Of course, as anyone who has spent his life as a musician would point out, our music training is never actually concluded.

I returned to New York City from Paris by way of a 'side trip' to India. I had met (and worked as an assistant) for Ravi Shankar and didn't want to miss a chance of learning more about Indian music that would be made possible by the visit.

I was just 30 years old after quite a long and deep music education, but I also wanted to begin my own 'professional' music.

I never took a 'teaching' job. In fact, I never even looked for an opportunity to do so. My music school days were over for me and I was ready and anxious to begin my professional life.

For me that meant establishing the Philip Glass Ensemble—a group of some 6 to 8 soloists playing as an ensemble. Michael Riesman came along a few years

later and became the leader of the ensemble.

When I got involved with working in opera, I saw that opera combines all the visual arts, the movement arts, the playing of music arts: everything that happens in the arts happens in opera. What I was interested in is how the languages of the arts flow into each other.

My opera composing actually started quite late—in my mid-thirties.

It began with “Einstein on the Beach”. This was a collaboration with the author and theater director/designer Robert Wilson. This, along with “Satyagraha” and “Akhnaten”, became my first operatic trilogy. Over the next forty years I completed and saw the premiere of 25 other operas.

Currently I am at work on a new vocal/orchestra work that is being composed for a solo baritone and full symphonic accompaniment. Probably it will be 50 to 60 pages of full score composing. Probably it will be my Symphony #15. The text itself is completely based on the writings and spoken texts of Abraham Lincoln. It will be close to one hour in length and will have its premiere at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. this October. It was intended to be a ‘concert’ work but it also has many qualities of an opera. Truthfully, I am at this moment unsure of its category. Symphony? Opera? We will likely know soon.

In making operas, I was interested in people like Einstein or Gandhi or Akhnaten who were very radical in their ways of life. Every one of them changed the world that they lived in. I’ve been able to take events from our lifetime, or that happened long ago, and that have become important parts of today’s culture, and I’ve been able to make them part of the artistic form of opera.

The contribution that any artist makes is the work he or she creates. In my case, I made the work for myself, but when the audience sees it, it’s not mine anymore. It belongs to them. There is a profound satisfaction to making art and to have the ability to visualize work and then bring it to a state where it can be communicated. The joy of creation is totally satisfying. That’s why I wake up in the morning. There should be a kind of commitment to bring some joy into the world, hopefully for yourself as well.

The significance of receiving this award is that it recognizes people who are alive and working and writing about the world we live in. The work we’re doing is becoming part of the culture of today.

Thank you.