When Steve Reich was asked what he gleaned from a short study trip to West Africa in 1970 he responded with one word: “Confirmation.” The simplicity of that answer – that what was learned in Africa reinforced that which was already there – is refreshing in today’s climate where composers sometimes scour the ends of the earth – or even the nearest junkyard – for inspiration and material before they examine and hone their own musical language. The frailties of artistic tourism are best skewered by Peter Carey who writes derisively in the opening pages of Illywhacker about his character Annette Davidson, an author who lived twenty-eight years in Australia and a few months in Paris, but wrote about Paris.

After his few months in Africa, Steve Reich didn’t “write about Africa.” He didn’t return to the United States with a backpack full of African rhythms or agogo bells, and while others may have tried to package his rhythmic pieces from the 1970s as deriving from his studies in Africa, he never has. In fact, one might claim that he came back with nothing new at all except the sense that he had already embarked on an interesting path, one that he felt resonated with the musical practices of West Africa. Of course for anyone paying attention to the history of popular music in the United States, this resonance will come as no surprise. Listening to African-American music in any of its many forms, from jazz to rock to country to hip-hop, establishes a deep and intimate rapport with West Africa whether a listener knows it or not. Reich has told me that Africa inspired a profound self-awareness in him; it was like a word he already knew but had never heard.
After he returned from Africa, Reich took several critical steps. Realizing that he needed a community of like-minded musicians he expanded “Steve Reich and Musicians” from the trio it had been in the mid-1960s to eighteen musicians by the mid-1970s. And, he began to write music for this ensemble in a way that capitalized on a collective creative mechanism. This is the meaning of “confirmation”: his experiences in Africa, and their application both to his musical language and to the communal working methodology within his ensemble, led to his most fertile creative period. *Drumming*, his masterpiece for percussion, voices, and piccolos, was written the year after he returned from Africa, and the *ne plus ultra* of the Reich opus, *Music for 18 Musicians*, was begun a few years later in 1974.

In tonight’s concert we present three examples of just this kind of confirmation. We’ll start with the interlocking rhythms of his *Clapping Music*, played here in a doubled instrumentation for four clappers instead of the usual two. The rhythm is Reich’s re-invention of an African bell pattern, however its application to the composition is all-Reich. In what would become a trademark strategy of rhythms phasing against one another, everyone begins with a unison reading of the rhythm. On a cue half the group shifts the pattern “to the left” by leaving out an eighth-note. Hearing the same rhythm played out-of-phase with itself causes fascinating composite rhythmic structures, as you’ll hear. The phasing group leaves out yet another note and a new composite pattern emerges. Another move produces another pattern and so on until all the options are exhausted and the two sides re-unite in unison.

*Electric Counterpoint* is perhaps the best known of Reich’s “counterpoint” pieces, scored for live soloist and pre-recorded
multi-track accompaniment. It will be played tonight in an alternate version for an ensemble of electric guitars led by David Tanenbaum, a long-time Reich collaborator who has released a solo recording of the piece on New Albion Records.

If Clapping Music is a variation on a rhythm, and Electric Counterpoint a study of multiple lines and textures, Music for 18 Musicians is an essay in harmony. One might even think of it as a Reichean chorale built on a cycle of eleven chords, which open and close the piece. The speed and complexity of the shifting harmonies, especially as the piece opens and all of those different chords are crowded together, makes Music for 18 Musicians the most dense and complex of all large-scale Reich instrumental works and creates several dramatic, harmonically driven points of arrival. This is not only unlike anything we had heard to this point in the Reich output, it is also unlike any music we’ve ever heard.

So what is being confirmed in Music for 18 Musicians? Perhaps it is an alternative view of authorship whereby the music is driven not by a single point of authority – a conductor or a completely fixed score – but by a communal process in which basic decisions are of group concern. Shared decision-making controls the precise number of repetitions of each phrase and by extension the formal shape that arises and by extension of that the emotional aura of the entire performance. Perhaps that which is being confirmed here is a social view in which shared leadership means that at one moment or another every person on stage has the control of the piece in his or her hands. Everyone is indispensable. We could learn something from that. Perhaps there is also the confirmation of something more basic: that playing together is a source of joy, that after nearly an hour of non-stop playing where the reins of the piece have been passed to everyone on stage at least once, where no one has soloed and where everyone has belonged, there is bliss to be found in arriving fresh, alive, and together.

–Steven Schick
BLUEPRINT New Music Ensemble | Nicole Paiement artistic director
Tandy’s Tango
Dicke Grand Central (Hoefer Prize winner, world premiere)
Harrison Tandy’s Tango; Brouwer String Quartet No. 4
León Indigena; Catán Encantamiento
Saturday, March 2, 8 p.m. (Pre-concert talk at 7:15 p.m.)

HOT AIR MUSIC FESTIVAL A marathon of modern classical music
Featuring Dancing on the Brink of the World by Loren Jones
Performances by Friction Quartet, Wild Rumpus,
Mobius Trio, the Conservatory Guitar Ensemble and others
Sunday, March 3, 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES
Thomas Conroy composition | Friday, February 8, 8 p.m.
David Conte composition | Sunday, March 17, 5 p.m.
David Garner composition | Monday, April 22, 8 p.m.
San Francisco Contemporary Music Players  
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

Confirmation  
Monday, January 28, 2013 • 8:00 pm  
San Francisco Conservatory of Music Concert Hall

STEVE REICH

Clapping Music (1972)  
Approximate duration: 5 minutes

Electric Counterpoint (1987)  
I. Fast  II. Slow  III. Fast  
Approximate duration: 15 minutes

Pause  
10 minutes

Music for 18 Musicians (1976)  
Pulses - Section I - Section II - Section III A - Section III B -  
Section IV - Section V - Section VI - Section VII - Section VIII -  
Section IX - Section X - Section XI - Pulses  
Approximate duration: 55 minutes
The Performers

Steven Schick, conductor/percussion
  Jeff Anderle, clarinet
  Peter Josheff, clarinet
  William Winant, percussion
  Daniel Kennedy, percussion
  Chris Froh, percussion
  Kate Campbell, piano
  Jeffrey LaDeur, piano
  Roy Malan, violin
  Stephen Harrison, cello

Conservatory Percussion Ensemble:
  Elizabeth Hall
  Mckenzie Camp
  Collin Boltz
  Matt Dodson
  Justin Sun

Conservatory Student Ensemble:
  Xin Zhao, piano
  Chengcheng Zhao, piano
  Sara Hagenbuch, voice
  Anneka Quellhorst, voice
  Emma Lacenski, voice
  Amber Johnson, voice

Conservatory Guitar Ensemble:
  David Tanenbaum, conductor
  Travis Andrews, solo electric guitar
  Guitar: Renaud Cote Giguere, Tatiana Senderowicz,
  Tim Sherren, Matt Bacon, Alexandra Iranfar, Matthew Lyons,
  Paul Morton, Christopher Hague, John Zientek, Sarah Stallings,
  J.C. de Luna, and Kyle Sampson
  Bass: Adam Cockerham and Nahuel Bronzini
Steve Reich has been called “our greatest living composer” (The New York Times), and “…the most original musical thinker of our time” (The New Yorker). From early taped speech pieces It’s Gonna Rain (1965) and Come Out (1966) to his and Beryl Korot’s digital video opera Three Tales (2002), Reich’s path has coupled Western Classical music with the structures, harmonies, and rhythms of non-Western and American vernacular music, particularly jazz.

Born in New York and raised there and in California, Reich graduated with honors in philosophy from Cornell University in 1957. He then studied composition with Hall Overton, and from 1958 to 1961, at Juilliard. He received his M.A., Music from Mills College in 1963, where he worked with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud.

Since 1966, in various formats, Steve Reich and Musicians have presented groundbreaking works in music and intermedia arts. Accolades include a 1990 Grammy for Different Trains, prizes from the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, the Franz Liszt Academy, election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, and being named French Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres. In 2009 he was awarded the Pulitzer prize in Music for Double Sextet.

Steve Reich’s music has been performed by major orchestras and ensembles worldwide. Commissions include the Barbican, Holland Festival, San Francisco Symphony, the Rothko Chapel, Vienna Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Spoleto Festival USA, Settembre Musica of Torino, the Fromm Music Foundation, Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, and the Festival d’Automne, Paris — for the French Revolution bicentennial.

In 2006, his 70th-birthday year, special concerts were held everywhere from Carnegie Hall to Lincoln Center, and in European cultural capitals from Amsterdam to Vilnius. He was also awarded Tokyo’s Premium Imperial Award in Music, an important international award for arts disciplines not recognized by the Nobel Prize. Past recipients include Boulez, Berio, Ligeti, Sondheim, and visual artists Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns and Richard Serra.
Words from the Composer

Clapping Music

In 1972, I composed Clapping Music out of a desire to create a piece of music that would need no instruments at all beyond the human body. At first I thought it would be a phase piece, but this turned out to be rather inappropriate, since it introduces a difficulty in musical process (phasing) that is out of place with such a simple way of producing sound. The solution was to have one performer remain fixed, repeating the same basic pattern throughout, while the second moves abruptly, after a number of repeats, from unison to one beat ahead, and so on, until he is back in unison with the first performer. The basic difference between these sudden changes and the gradual changes of phase in other pieces is that, when phasing, one can hear the same pattern moving away from itself with the downbeats of both parts separating further and further apart, while the sudden changes here create the sensation of a series of variations of two different patterns with their downbeats coinciding. In Clapping Music, it can be difficult to hear that the second performer is in fact always playing the same original pattern as the first performer, although starting in different places.

Clapping Music marks the end of my use of the gradual phase shifting process. First discovered in It’s Gonna Rain in 1965, this process was then used in every piece from 1965 through Drumming in 1971, with the exception of Four Organs. Starting with Clapping Music, I felt a need to find new techniques. Six Pianos, Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ, and Music for Pieces of Wood, all composed in 1973, use the process of rhythmic construction, or substitution of beats for rests, first used in Drumming, as well as the process of augmentation similar to that in Four Organs.
The gradual phase shifting process was extremely useful from 1965 through 1971, but I do not have thoughts of ever using it again. By late 1972, it was time for something new.

**Electric Counterpoint**

*Electric Counterpoint* was commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival for the guitarist Pat Metheny. It was composed during the summer of 1987. The duration is about 15 minutes. It is the third in a series of pieces (preceded by *Vermont Counterpoint* and *New York Counterpoint*) all dealing with a soloist playing against a prerecorded tape of themselves. In *Electric Counterpoint*, the soloist prerecords as many as 10 guitars and two electric bass parts and then plays the final eleventh guitar part live against the tape. I would like to thank Pat Metheny for showing me how to improve the piece in terms of making it more idiomatic for the guitar.
The work is in three movements – fast, slow, fast – played one after the other without pause. The first movement, after an introductory pulsing section where the harmonies of the movement are stated, uses a theme derived from Central African horn music that I became aware of through the ethnomusicologist Simha Arom. That theme is built up in eight voice canon and, while the remaining two guitars and bass play pulsing harmonies, the soloist plays melodic patterns that result from the contrapuntal interlocking of those eight prerecorded guitars.

The second movement cuts the tempo in half, changes key and introduces a new theme, which is then slowly built up in nine guitars in canon. Once again, two other guitars and bass supply harmony, while the soloist brings out melodic patterns that result from the overall contrapuntal web.

The third movement returns to the original tempo and key and introduces a new pattern in triple meter. After building up a four-guitar canon, two bass guitars enter suddenly to further stress the triple meter. The soloist then introduces a new series of strummed chords that are built up in three-guitar canon. When these are complete, the soloist returns to melodic patterns that result from the overall counterpoint, suddenly, the basses begin to change both key and meter back and forth between E minor and C minor, and between 32 and 128, so that one hears first three groups of four eighth-notes and then four groups of three-eighth notes. These rhythmic and tonal changes speed up more and more rapidly until at the end the basses slowly fade out and the ambiguities are finally resolved in 128 and E minor.

**Music for 18 Musicians**

*Music for 18 Musicians* is approximately 55 minutes long. The first sketches were made for it in May 1975 and it was completed in March 1976. Although its steady pulse and rhythmic energy
relate 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 metallophone (vibraphone with no motor). All instruments are acoustical. The use of electronics is limited to microphones for the voices and some of the instruments, in order to obtain a balance in the overall sound.

There is more harmonic movement in the first five minutes of *Music for 18 Musicians* than in any other complex work of mine to this date. Although the movement from chord to chord is often just a revoicing, inversion, or relative minor or major of a previous chord, usually staying within the key signature of three sharps at all times, nevertheless, within these limits, harmonic movement plays a more important role here than in any of my earlier pieces.

Rhythmically, there are two basically 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 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 comfortable 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 a twelfth-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 1 and 2 changes to marimbas and xylophones and two pianos in section 3A, and to xylophones and maracas in sections 6 and 7. The low piano pulsing harmonies of section 3A reappear in section 6 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 2, occurs again in section 9, but
building up to another overall pattern in a different harmonic context. The relationship between the different sections is thus best understood in terms of resemblance 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 that I had 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 metallophone, 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 nonperforming conductor for large ensembles. Audible cues become a part of the music and allow the musicians to keep listening.

The Players on Reich

SFCMP clarinetist Jeff Anderle shares his perspective on playing Music for 18 Musicians — the piece named the favorite of the past century by classical station WQXR’s listener poll.

Q: As a performer dealing with some of the most technically demanding repertoire in the new music canon, how do you approach a piece like this, which requires a virtuosity of a different nature?

JA: Performing any type of minimalist music requires a special kind of focus and concentration, because when the material is so repetitive you can’t really hide even small mistakes. This piece in particular has additional challenges because it’s so long, and because the notation is open and allows for some choice to be determined during the performance. You need to be vigilant at all times and listening to how other people are performing the piece on a given day. The only way to approach learning it is to understand how the piece is structured, and know when you need to concentrate and when you can relax and listen.

Q: In Music for 18 it seems the priority is to blend into the larger instrumental texture, but certainly in the many contemporary pieces you’ve performed this hasn’t always been the case. What are some of your favorite things to see in writing for the clarinet, and what features of a piece make it a favorite for you to perform?

JA: I love when composers take advantage of the range of timbral options and extended techniques available to the clarinet, because usually they’re really fun to play. A lot of clarinet music from the middle of the 1900s was very pointy and spiky, with big leaps and often showing off the clarinet’s ability to play high and soft, so it’s great when more recent composers allow the clarinetist to really let loose and play some funky/groovy parts.
Q: Could you talk a bit about the physical experience of performing this piece?

JA: One of the physical challenges of performing Music for 18 is the amount of control needed to play the repeated notes well, making sure that the dynamic fading is smooth and even, and that none of the notes pop out of the texture. In other types of music, and especially in traditional classical music, one often strives to play repeated notes differently to add musical emphasis, but that isn’t the case with Reich at all.

David Tannenbaum has played with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since 2008, but for this concert, he will conduct a conservatory guitar ensemble in Steve Reich’s seminal piece for the guitar, Electric Counterpoint. We sat down with him to talk about the piece, and the place of the guitar in modern music.

Q: The guitar enjoys a very interesting sort of double life in the contemporary music scene, being on the one hand an extremely old instrument while at the same time existing as one of the greatest defining features of modern popular music of the last sixty years. Having played such a wide variety of guitar repertoire, how do you engage this sort of schizophrenia the instrument seems to have developed due to its "dual-personality?"

DT: The guitar is the most popular instrument on the planet today, and while we don’t have a great, weighty nineteenth century repertoire, there are many other gravitational pulls. Perhaps you’re right that the strongest of those now is towards popular music; guitarists in my classical world always seem to be heading towards crossover. For me, much of this joining of styles has gotten pretty routine, and the results can be sometimes unsatisfying. But Electric Counterpoint, which is 25
years old this year, has material that grooves within a sturdy and well-controlled structure, and it still sounds fresh. It’s interesting that this came from Steve Reich, who had not written for the instrument before, and who needed to consult with a few of us during the writing process. Perhaps it is this outsider approach, with the imagination at first removed from fingerboard considerations, that brings a new perspective to the instrument.

The most surprising thing about the schizophrenia you mention is how much this quiet, simple instrument can contain — there is room for it all. For a player, it’s a thrill to go where fine composers like Reich want to take the instrument.

Q: Steve Reich himself occupies this space as a composer who brought popular styles into contact with the traditional legacy of which he is now a part. As a performer, how do you engage with this intersection of new and old?

DT: As a kind of symbol of the essence of your question, *Electric Counterpoint* exists in versions for different members of the guitar family: Pat Metheny’s original recording was done on electric and steel string guitars, and our SFCMP performances will feature mostly classical. And though it was written for a soloist to play with a pre-recorded tape, many guitar ensembles do the piece now with a conductor and little or no amplification.

Reich music is informed by popular styles, but he always writes for western instruments in a controlled, classical way. As performers, we need to respond to both sides. So we worked on this piece from the ground up, studying every detail and interaction, just as we would a Bach fugue. And these excellent young guitarists [the San Francisco Conservatory Guitar Ensemble], who mostly go home and listen to anything but classical at night, can play with both precision and groove.

Q: One of the most interesting aspects of the upcoming concert is that every piece featured is amplified. As a guitarist how do
you approach the switch between playing an instrument which is completely self-sustaining and one which produces signals to be shaped and delivered by an external intermediary?

DT: Mostly unhappily. Call me traditional, but I fell in love with the natural sound of the nylon string guitar at an Andres Segovia concert, and forty years of my own concerts later, I’m still there. But the good news is that technology is much better, meaning that it’s more unobtrusive. And one simply has to get educated now and invest in making a good amplified sound — guitar concertos, for example, just don’t work without some amplification. That said, most of this performance will be acoustic. We’ll just have light amplification on the two acoustic/electric basses, and for the soloist.

Q: With new music’s constant embrace of experimentation and innovation, it’s not hard to see the horizon already broadening for an instrument, such as guitar, which is not “typical” for the concert hall. Are there any pieces that you’ve found particularly encouraging for the future of the guitar? Have any surprised you in terms of revealing capabilities or qualities you’d not already discovered?

I am constantly surprised by both the guitar’s range and the new things that composers find in it. I think that, economics aside, the guitar is in great artistic shape. When I started my career I had to help create fine new music to play, now one cannot possibly keep up. SFCMP has found fine new chamber pieces with guitar, for example, especially from Europe, that have been thrilling to play. One example is Luca Francesconi’s A Fuoco, where the guitar is the centerpiece in an ever-tightening spiral of sound. No other piece sounds quite like that one.

It would take a long time to fully answer your last question, but I’ll point to one great composer who just left us — Hans Werner Henze. (Has there ever been a month like December 2012, when we have lost so many world-class musicians? Henze,
Carter, Brubeck, Shankar...) Henze wrote hours of wonderful, groundbreaking and yes, surprising guitar music, where the guitarist is either a soloist or is featured in ensembles. This music is mostly programmatic and always very personal, and each of his major pieces for guitar is unique.

Even Henze’s writing about the guitar is illuminating. On composing for the instrument, he said that the guitar has “many limitations but also many unexplored spaces and depths within those limits. It possesses a richness of sound capable of embracing everything one might find in a gigantic contemporary orchestra; but one has to start from silence in order to notice this: one has to pause, and completely exclude noise.”

At another time he said that “the guitar was for me like a gate through which one can reach the beginnings of music, a remnant from a bygone age that still lives on, deep in the consciousness of the people.” In his music for the guitar, Henze incorporated both the old and the very new, the personal and the universal, and this instrument could contain it all.

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