

With 'Glass Works' BMOP celebrates Philip Glass' 80th birthday

Wednesday

Posted Feb 15, 2017 at 5:20 PM

Updated Feb 15, 2017 at 5:20 PM

By Keith Powers, Daily News Correspondent

Prolific, engaged in every genre, and restlessly exploring ideas and collaborations - that's composer Philip Glass. Choosing one concert's worth of music to celebrate his 80th birthday was no easy task.

"We tried to pick a program that would be representative of Phil, and something that he would like to hear," says Gil Rose.

Rose's Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the area's foremost explorers on Boston's terrific new music scene, joins many organizations internationally in recognizing this milestone birthday (Jan. 31). The concert Rose chose, taking place this Saturday in Jordan Hall, includes Glass' Symphony No. 2, his "Tirol Concerto" for piano, and a work by the winner of BMOP's annual composition competition, New England Conservatory student Benjamin Park's "The Dwarf Planets."

Choosing selections from the Glass catalog must be exhausting. His Symphony No. 11 was just premiered last month. He has many other orchestral works—song cycle symphonies, soloist symphonies, symphonies based on poems.

His concertos are equally wide-ranging: symphonic works for harpsichord, timpani, violin, cello, saxophone quartet, piano (and two pianos). Operatic scores are everywhere, centered around the riveting "Einstein on the Beach." Film scores, and music for theater. We haven't even discussed the chamber music.

"The Second was the symphony I wanted," Rose admits. "I was drawn to picking it, I guess because it's the least stereotypical of the symphonies. It definitely doesn't have what you'd expect; it's more nutty and gnarly, more connected to the American symphonic tradition than the others."

Programming the "Tirol Concerto" certainly fights stereotypes of Glass' music as well. Composed during a stay in the Tyrol, a section of western Austria, with inspiration taken from local folk music, "Tyrol Concerto" was premiered in 2000. It abandons the usual perception—one that Glass himself disdains—that the composer relies on minimalist techniques entirely for expression.

Anton Batagov, the piano soloist for the "Tirol Concerto," comes to Boston with an enormous reputation—mainly in his native Russia. A composer as well as a pianist, Batagov has more than 30 recordings, numerous film scores, and has made many cross-genre collaborations.

"Phil's really high on this pianist," Rose says of Batagov, who has championed not only Glass' work but that of composers as diverse as John Cage, Morton Feldman and Bach.

Benjamin Park's new work, "The Dwarf Planets," is a kind of "flip the premise" composition akin to Holst's "The Planets." Taking its impetus after Pluto was recategorized as a "dwarf planet" (there are others), Park weaves quotes from Holst into his own larger work.

"In this competition I'm always looking for someone who knows inherently how to write for orchestra," Rose says. "Park seems to be all over it. It's a nice piece; he's really talented. It's much more than just borrowed ideas. He written his own music, and it's up to us to bring it to life."

Glass himself might just make an appearance at Saturday evening's performance.

"That's the plan right now," Rose says. "He's a busy guy this year though—incredibly busy during this birthday year."

BMOP in Concert: "Glass Works"

WHEN: Saturday, Feb. 18, 8 p.m.

WHERE: Jordan Hall, 30 Gainsborough St., Boston

TICKETS: \$20-\$50. \$10 students

INFO: 781-324-0396; www.bmop.org

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