

## Repetitive Truths.

There was once a time in which I believed that labeling a work of art, as “minimalist” was the cruelest insult imaginable. But the moment Philip Glass’ austere, repetitive consonance reached my ears; ages of disdain for minimalist melodies vanished altogether. Regrettably, after witnessing the disturbing travesty that is one of his operas: *Satyagraha*, I think I ought to reconsider.

Over the course of his career, Glass has achieved notoriety as well as controversial acclaim in spite of the occasional laconic nature of his signature style. While the style itself relies heavily on the reiteration of musical phrases, some of his sequences rapidly fluctuate between languid slurs and terse figurations without warning or reprieve. Still, barring logical adaptations, Glass’ modern technique has thrived for nearly 50 years.

However it was in the late 1970s, after several early years of activity, that Glass began work on *Satyagraha*; an opera partially adapted from the *Bhagavad Gita* and partially from segments of Mahatma Gandhi’s life. Unfortunately, it seems to me that Glass tried to establish too much within the performance boundaries. A typical narrative structure for an opera is both straightforward and irrelevant. The former to ensure everyone understands, and the latter because no one goes to the opera for top tier acting performances. *Satyagraha* does neither. Its fragmented text adds to a “spiritual ambiance” that refuses to explain what’s happening on stage, forcing an already bored audience to work while they are supposedly being entertained. Additionally, while it’s an interesting choice to make the libretto excerpts of the original Sanskrit text, the language sounds awkward and lacks an operatic quality found in many Romance languages.

When compared as to prominent Italian operas, such as *Tosca* or *Nabucco*, Glass' *Satyagraha* comes across as a striking yet exhausting event. I will never forget glancing at the seats around me just to find that most were filled with sleeping patrons. In retrospect, it wasn't really their fault. Because the opera was written for an orchestra consisting of only strings and woodwinds, the lack of any thunderous brass or percussion timbre resulted in lulling strains that Glass' usual cell repetition exacerbated. Although restricting instruments does result in an interesting final product, alongside *Satyagraha*'s detached narrative people simply didn't care enough about the music to stay awake.

I have found that one of the greatest struggles in appreciating any form of classical art is how most of the talented and influential artists are dead. In contrast, modern artists remain among the living where they all slowly ruin themselves. Philip Glass for example, has released a lot of good work; particularly those in which he utilizes his method of adding and removing note cells from harmonic motifs to tie everything together forming an easy ebb and flow for the piece as a whole. With his pleasant releases also come his painful compositions, much like *Satyagraha* if not worse. I no longer believe "minimalist" to be an insult, and frankly I'd much rather spend my time waiting and searching for the next artists that'll ruin themselves.