



Scottish Chamber Orchestra

# SCO MASTERWORKS 2018

## *American Minimalism*

### Teachers' Resource Pack

*REICH – Clapping Music*

*ADAMS – Shaker Loops Movement 1. Shaking and Trembling*

*ADAMS – The Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra*

Our 2018 project is kindly supported by The Misses Barrie Charitable Trust, The Plum Trust, The Hugh Fraser Foundation, PF Charitable Trust, The McGlashan Charitable Trust, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust, The JTH Charitable Trust, Miss E C Hendry's Charitable Trust and Sir Iain Stewart Foundation. Masterworks 2018 is delivered in partnership with Drake Music Scotland, Glasgow City Council CREATE and Glasgow Life.



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## Introduction

This pack is designed to help you and your class prepare for the SCO Masterworks concert featuring three classic works of *American Minimalism*. During the concert we will explore John Adams' early masterpiece *Shaker Loops* and his enduring classic *The Chairman Dances*. Alongside this we'll hear, and then have a go at, Steve Reich's genre-defining *Clapping Music*. We'll also find out how these pieces work and get to grips with some essential minimalist techniques.

It is recommended that if your pupils are attending an SCO workshop, or if you intend to use these resources with your pupils, you don't listen to the selected pieces by Adams and Reich until afterwards.

## Minimalism

Minimalism was a radical musical movement which originated in the USA in the 1960s. Pieces are constructed from a small number of short melodic ideas, which are repeated many times to generate music that gradually changes over a long period of time. Pioneered by Steve Reich, minimalist music was initially made from short rhythmic 'cells' that were repeated a lot and put through a number of processes allowing the music to very, very gradually develop and transform.

### Minimalist techniques include –

- **Interlocking** – staggering two cells so the rhythms interlock to create a more complex pattern
- **Gradual Transformation** – after many repeats the cell changes by just one note or duration
- **Phasing** – the same cell is played by two people. One slowly moves out of synch with the other by very slightly altering the speed or length of the cell, and each mismatch creates new rhythms and harmonies
- **Shifting** – another form of phasing. One pattern shifts its emphasis by placing the last note at the beginning or vice versa thus creating new a pattern

## The Music

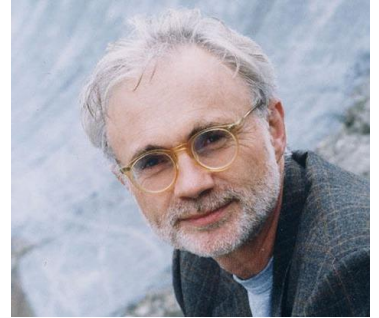
**Steve REICH (1936 - )** is one of the most famous and well respected composers alive today. Born in New York and a former student of the Julliard School, he began his musical life as a percussionist, until his fascination with repeated rhythm led him to start experimenting with electronic music and music for percussion. In the 1970s he was at the forefront of the minimalist movement and has continued working within the genre ever since.





**Clapping Music** (1972) is arguably Reich's most famous piece. Fed up with touring with loads of equipment, Reich decided to write a piece that uses only the human body. He took a rhythm very similar to the Ghanaian bell pattern and using a variant on the phasing technique (shifting), created one long transforming piece that is clapped by two performers. One performer stays on the original rhythm throughout, the other shifts the rhythm by one quaver after an agreed number of repetitions until eventually, the patterns line up again.

**John ADAMS (b. 1947)** once said he was "a minimalist who is bored with minimalism"! Despite this, he has also become one of the most famous composers working today. It is estimated that his piece *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* is performed somewhere in the world at least once every day and that fact alone makes him a very rich man! Adams began his composing career in the 1970s after becoming interested in the minimalist music of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Adams is a second-generation minimalist as his music develops the original ideas of his older contemporaries and features greater harmonic development and structure.



**Shaker Loops** (1983) was written for string orchestra. Its name gives us a clue as to what is going on in the music. Many of the motifs and ideas Adams uses feature little trembles, trills or shakes, hence 'shaker' and much of the material is looped or repeated as in Reich's pieces, hence 'loops'. But the name also refers to a religious group called 'The Shakers' who lived near Adams and despite being gentle and quiet people were known for dancing and trembling during their worship. We will explore just Movement 1 of *Shaking and Trembling*, which is scored for the string section split into 7 parts (3 vlins, vla, 2 vcels DB) and lasts roughly 8 minutes.

**The Chairman Dances** (1987). In 1985 John Adams wrote the piece that was going to make him famous forever, an opera called *Nixon in China* that tells the story of President Nixon's controversial visit to China to meet Chairman Mao. Whilst composing this epic work, Adams wrote a *Foxtrot for Orchestra* to be included in the third act, but it was later cut. This 'outtake', known as *The Chairman Dances*, has become a very famous stand-alone piece and one of the pinnacles of Adams' new minimalist style. Similar to *Shaker Loops*, this piece features an almost constant 'chugging' sound made up from a quick quaver pulse, but then Adams moves minimalism forward by dividing his music up into sections with contrasting tempo (speed), harmony and mood. The piece is pure minimalist though in that it is completely based on a very simple idea - two notes alternating.

### Minimalism in the Classroom – Creative Tasks

*The following tasks are designed to help your students understand minimalism from a hands-on perspective. These tasks will be the basis of your SCO player visit. If you are not receiving a visit, please adapt the tasks to suit the resources you have available.*



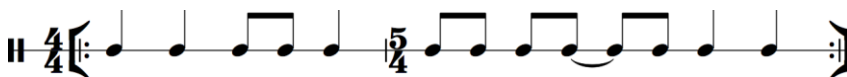
## A Classic Minimalist Warm-up

Before beginning creative composition with your students, a fun warm-up can help to get the creative juices flowing. This one explores a very important minimalist technique – **phasing**.

- Clear your classroom and ask your students to stand in a circle
- Teach them the following ('football') rhythm and as a class, clap it four times around



- Explain that you're going to change the rhythm very slightly by adding a whole beat onto the end like this –



*Note that you must add a full crotchet beat onto the end and therefore augment the rhythm from 8 beats to 9. It might help at first if this extra beat is a stamp or a shout rather than another clap*

- Practise clapping this and repeating around four times
- Now split your circle in half. One side will clap the original (8 beat) pattern, the other side will clap the new (9 beat) pattern. They must clap their patterns round and around. Point out that the patterns are going to go out of sync and it will be hard to keep going, but that eventually the patterns will fit together again.
- When this is achieved, explain that they have just performed a **phase** – one of the most important of all minimalist techniques!

## Task 1 Pure Minimalism: 1<sup>st</sup> Generation – Steve Reich

(limited scales, ostinato, motivic development)

- Split your class into groups of about 6. Ask each student to choose an instrument and make sure that each group has at least two pitched instruments in it (the more pitched instruments used in this task, the better)
- Ask each group to choose a limited number of pitches to work with – 5 is the maximum number of pitches that they need. They may want to choose a pentatonic scale (the black notes of the piano) or 5 random pitches.



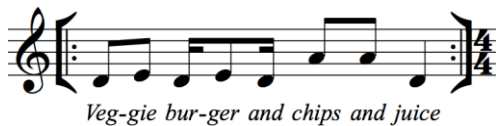
*At the beginning of The Chairman Dances, Adams focuses on just A, C#, D, E and F#*



If you envisage putting all the groups together at the end to make one piece, decide on the pitches as a class so that everyone is working with the same limited scale

- Ask each group to invent three ostinatos and practise playing them over and over on their instruments

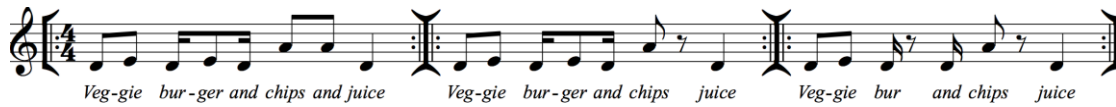
*An ostinato is a repeated rhythmic pattern. One quick way to invent a new ostinato is to ask a simple question such as 'what did you have for lunch?' Encourage your students to answer with a full sentence then simply speak this sentence to a pulse. Next trying to clap each syllable, then finally transfer the clapped pattern onto instruments, sticking within your chosen pitches*



- Ask each group to make a piece that features –
  - Up to three ostinatos pitched within their limited scale, or unpitched
  - A neat beginning and ending – ideally everyone starting and stopping completely together
- When this is achieved, hear each group and comment
- Minimalist music sounds much less predictable if the ostinatos start on different beats of the bar, rather than all starting at the beginning of the bar. At this stage you may want to tweak some of the pieces by encouraging at least one ostinato in each group to begin on beat 2, 3 or 4 of the bar (this just means the player waiting a couple of beats before beginning). Explain that this is called **staggering**
- Next, explain the following 'processes' to your class –



1. **Subtraction** – over many, many repetitions notes are gradually removed from the ostinato until nothing is left. This can be done in two ways, either by replacing the note with a rest...



...or by squashing the notes up instead of adding a rest (much harder, although using the words does help!)



2. **Addition** – over many, many repetitions notes are added to the ostinato to either create it from silence



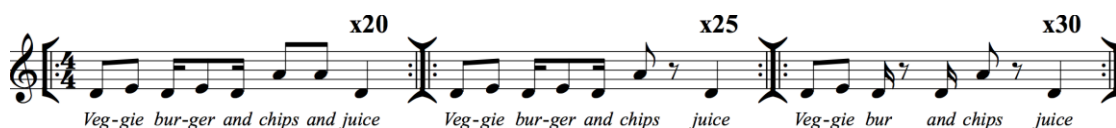
...or to transform it into something else



3. **Phasing** – one ostinato is lengthened by **one whole beat** to create a mismatch with the others and therefore create a phase. Refer your students back to the 'football chant' warm-up above



- Stress to your class that these processes are designed to create a **gradual** change in the music and therefore take place gradually over many, many repeats. For example, if using subtraction, notes are subtracted slowly one note per several repeats, not one note each repeat







- Split your class back into its working groups and ask each group to choose at least one process from those outlined above to apply it to their piece
- When this is achieved, listen to all the pieces and comment. Are the transformations gradual enough? Are they successfully executed?
- At this stage you may want to put all the groups together to make one big minimalist piece. Decide as a class how to structure the groups – do they all play at the same time, or is there any structure to their entrances/exits? Can two or three processes be lined up, or is it more effective if they stay separate? The effect you are aiming for is gradual transformation of ideas and a lot of repetition, but be careful that all your lines can be heard and you don't just create a big minimalist 'fog'

## Task 2 Taking Minimalism further: 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation - John Adams

(sections, structure, melody and bassline)

To change your piece into music more closely resembling that of John Adams, you may want to encourage your class to think about the following techniques. These are perhaps much easier to achieve if you work as a full class group.

- **Bassline** – consider adding a pounding quaver bassline. Stick with notes from your limited scale but encourage the bassline players to create a shifting line that moves pitch very slowly. For example –



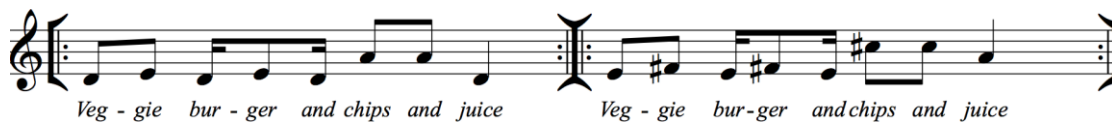
Ask the new bassline group to experiment with the effect this produces on the overall piece – i.e. moving down in pitch will 'feel' really different to moving up

- **"Sparkles"** – select several students on handheld percussion to provide a new layer of interest by adding a 'sparkle' to the music on a triangle, finger-cymbal or high piano note. These should come very infrequently and could perhaps be co-ordinated by a sub-group. In *The Chairman Dances* Adams always places his 'sparkles' on off-beats, whereas in *Shaker Loops* each 'sparkle player' counts for a different number of beats' silence between sparkles - so that the sparkles sound random but are actually phasing with each other
- Slow down one ostinato by lengthening the durations of the notes and thereby create a simple **melody** to 'float' above the piece

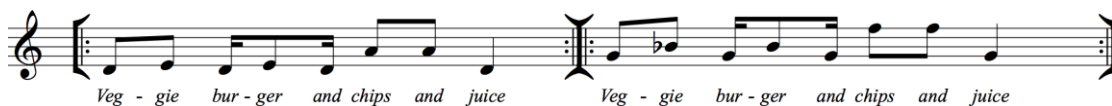


- **Transposition** – after many, many repetitions, ostinatos are transposed up or down and remain at their new pitch for many, many repetitions before transposing again. (This is particularly effective if all the ostinatos move at the same time and in the same direction).

You can transpose within the limited scale...



... or onto completely new notes –



- Co-ordinate your **processes**. Can you co-ordinate your music so that everyone transposes at the same time for example, or so that there is one big phase that can be clearly heard within the texture?
- Finally, encourage your class to think about –
  - **Texture** – both Reich and Adams use a technique called **saturation** whereby the texture gradually fills up from very sparse and empty to full as more ideas are added. Encourage your students to think carefully about their texture - too much too soon means that ideas get lost within the 'fog'
  - **Orchestration** - should everyone always play all the time?
  - **Structure** – Adams creates different sections within his music by changing the tempo and mood of the music





**Curriculum Links - Areas of the SQA Unit Specification covered by this scheme of work**

**National 5**

Learners will create original music by –

- understanding how a range of compositional methods and music concepts are used by composers and the influences on their work
- experimenting with music concepts and compositional methods in create ways to develop, refine and create original music
- developing musical ideas which make musical sense and realise their creative intentions
- self-reflecting on their music and their creative choices and decisions

Learners will be able to recognise and identify music concepts and styles by -

- Identifying and understanding the meaning of music signs, symbols and terms

Specific concepts relevant to this concert include –

Tritone, cluster, time changes, irregular time signatures, interval, augmentation, chromatic, glissando, trill, cross rhythms, coda, arco, pizzicato, rondo



## Higher

### Skills, knowledge and understanding

Learners will

- Critically reflect on and evaluate their musical and creative skills
- Develop applied understanding of the creative process and composers' approaches when composing or improvising music
- Create original music using compositional methods and selected music concepts in creative ways that make musical sense and realise their creative intentions
- Recognise and distinguish between a range of level-specific music concepts and styles of music

### Music: Composing Skills

Learners will

- Experiment with, and use compositional methods and music concepts in creative ways to realise their intentions when creating original music
- Critically reflect on and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their choices and decisions on their music
- Analyse how musicians and composers create music in different ways and the influences on their music

### Understanding Music

Learners will

- Develop detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of level specific music concepts, and music literacy
- Identify level-specific music concepts in excerpts of music
- Create original music using compositional methods and music concepts creatively when composing, arranging or improvising
- Broaden knowledge and understanding of music and musical literacy by listening to music and identifying a range of music concepts



## Advanced Higher

### Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

Learners will

- Experiment with and using a variety of compositional techniques in creating compositions and/or improvisations
- Develop in-depth knowledge of music concepts and music styles
- Analyse musical works
- Analyse composers' use of music concepts and factors influencing the development of their music
- Plan, develop and produce original music
- Demonstrate aural perception and discrimination

### Music: Composing Skills

Learners will

- Analyse the impact of composers' creative choices and the contexts which have influenced their work and approach
- Critically reflect on their developing ideas
- Use a range of compositional techniques and devices in creative ways to produce musically coherent and original music

### Understanding and Analysing Music

Learners will

- Expand their breadth of knowledge and understanding of music and music concepts
- Analyse sections of musical movements or works, demonstrating detailed understanding of the music



## Further Listening and Research

<b>Terry Riley</b>	<i>In C</i>	(the first piece of minimalism, written by Steve Reich's friend)
<b>Steve Reich</b>	<i>Drumming</i> <i>Six pianos</i> <i>The four sections</i>	(features the saturation technique)  (minimalism fully orchestrated and providing a great introduction to the different sections of the symphony orchestra)
	<i>Vermont Counterpoint</i> <i>Desert Music</i>	(for solo instrument and tape) (with added voices)
<b>John Adams</b>	<i>Nixon in China</i> <i>Short Ride in a Fast Machine</i>	(pioneering minimalist opera) (the most performed piece of orchestral music in the world!)
<b>Louis Andriessen</b>	<i>de snelheid</i>	(European minimalism with an amazing shifting pulse)
<b>Philip Glass</b>	<i>The Hours</i> <i>The Truman Show</i>	(Film Music) (Film Music)

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SCO Connect [connect@sco.org.uk](mailto:connect@sco.org.uk) 0131 478 8353

Scottish Chamber Orchestra, 4 Royal Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5AB

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