



## Narek Arutyunian, *clarinetist*

The Millbrook Independent

VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

### Steve Reich and Two Concerts

Stephen Kaye | *The Millbrook Independent* | March 30, 2017

In two recent concerts, it was Steve Reich at the end of the programs that made a lasting impression, edging out other esteemed composers through his singular language. At 80, performers and programmers are honoring a living composer whose music has a secure place in the galaxy of concert music.

On Friday, March 24, the American Composers Orchestra performed Reich's "Tehillim" of 1981 at the end of their program. Tehillim is the Hebrew word for Psalms. There are four voices and a small orchestra with two electric organs. The texts are from the Psalms but the words are not the subject. It is about sounds, canons, and voice. The effect is powerfully liturgical. In Steve Reich's words, quoted in the program: "The chamber version is scored for four women's voices (one high soprano, two lyric sopranos, and one alto)... It begins with a solo with drum and clapping...it is repeated with clarinet doubling the voice with a second drum and clap in canon with the first... then a two voice canon...the strings enter...then four voices supported with a single maraca, doubled by two electric organs and harmonized by the strings..." and so it goes. "The effect is that of a melodic line growing longer and more ornate." The canons are intricate, the voices powerful, at times soaring, the music surges and subsides, crescendos are drawn out. The electronics play an important part, magnifying the voices, the clarinet, and select strings. We spoke with the mixer after the program and he was intimately familiar with the score and each player. While sounds were magnified, they were not obviously so. The blending was artful.

I came away from this performance with a sense of awe and respect for Steve Reich. This was memorable music.

On Wednesday, Young Concert Artists featured the Armenian-born Narek Arutyunian, a clarinetist (who is a star in the making) at its noon concert at the Morgan Library. He played in all four pieces on the program plus an encore, over an hour-and-a-quarter without intermission.

Unlike many young players we have heard recently, he projects not just the music, but personality – a warm, big persona. He is capable of a big, rich sound and of many gradations of loudness. He was so familiar with the score he seldom looked at it, but looked at his fellow players. He started with a duo sonata by Poulenc op.184 (1962) where his pianist, Yun-Chin Zhou, excelled as accompanist. Zhou is also a Young Concert Artist, showing himself to be an exceptionally sensitive and fluent pianist. This was a fine opener.

Poulenc was followed by a trio for clarinet, violin and piano by a fellow Armenian, Alexander Arutiunian (1920-2012). Hahnsol Kim, a Masters candidate at Julliard, played a clear, balanced violin. This started as an essay in loneliness with each instrument making separate statements on that theme. In the third section, called "Dialog," they broke into a heated conversation that ended in agreeable exultation.



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Steve Reich's "New York Counterpoint" is scored for 11 clarinets. Arutyunian played the solo to a background recording he had made of the other ten parts. It worked. We heard an exuberant Arutyunian give warmth and drama to Reich's repetitive forms, adding that element of immediacy that comes from a live performance. The effect was rewarding. We liked the music and we liked the performer.

Carnegie Hall is celebrating Steve Reich's 80th birthday with a series of concerts, the last of which, on April 6, will join Reich with two contemporaries, Philip Glass and Arvo Part. These pillars of contemporary music stand in contrast to the abstract tradition of Stockhausen, Xenakis, Nono, Berio, Ligeti, and Boulez. Reich, Glass, and Part brought order to what seemed like chaos through the ordering medium of rhythm and repetition. Alec Ross paid homage to Reich on the occasion of his 70th birthday in the New Yorker. He pretty much said it all; there is no better commentator on music, so I simply give the link.