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## Review: Terrific, intimate opening for Philip Glass' Days and Nights Festival in Carmel Valley

By Richard Scheinin

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CARMEL VALLEY -- Having composed umpteen operas, along with Hollywood scores and songs for Mick Jagger and Rufus Wainwright, Philip Glass apparently needed a new challenge. At age 74, he now has unveiled his own festival of the arts: music, theater, dance and film. For Glass, the word "retirement" doesn't ring a bell.

His new endeavor is called the Days and Nights Festival and the terrific opening event of its inaugural season happened Friday night in a cozy redwood theater here, with a couple hundred folks in attendance, including families and even babies, all wholly attentive for a program of works by Schubert, Shostakovich, and, of course, Glass.

The New York-based composer fell in love with this stretch of the Central Coast four years ago when he came out to perform a benefit concert at the Henry Miller Library in Big Sur. A year ago, he and his staff went into high gear to make Days and Nights a reality. The results were on display Friday, as an exceptional group of chamber musicians -- pianist Jon Klibonoff, violinists Tim Fain and Maria Bachmann, violist David Harding and cellist Matt Haimovitz -- gave a series of sonically rich and passionate performances.

Glass capped the night by playing a couple of his solo piano pieces. But before going into the specifics of the concert at the Hidden Valley Theatre (on the rustic campus of Hidden Valley Music Seminars), a word about the appealing informality of the presentation: This was not a classical-music-for-snobs event.



Violinist Maria Bachmann and pianist Jon Klibonoff perform Philip Glass's Sonata for Violin and Piano at the opening night concert on Aug. 19, 2011 of the Days and Nights Festival in Carmel Valley. (Photo by Patrice Ward)

The dress was casual. Listeners who purchased wine out on the patio were allowed to bring their drinks into the concert. No one sneered at the presence of young children, and the performers just smiled in thanks whenever the audience applauded between movements of pieces. (Clapping between movements is a no-no, according to classical music protocol.)

The program began with Klibonoff performing Schubert's Impromptus, Op. 90, No. 3 in G-flat Major and No. 4 in A-flat Major.

His playing was wondrously clear in detail, lush in total effect. And what a great idea, beginning the festival with a piece as comforting as No. 3, almost a lullaby. It was a starlit performance of starlit music -- and the mood was heightened by the floor-to-ceiling

backdrop, a black expanse with lights twinkling through. (New York lighting designer David Moodey, on a working vacation at the festival, gets the credit.)

Only a few days ago, the publisher W.W. Norton & Co. announced that Glass has contracted to write his memoir, including memories of working in his father's record store in Baltimore. One imagines young Glass sitting in the store with stacks of LPs and a turntable, listening to Schubert's piano music, putting him into a reverie. (His own music has been known to induce dark reveries.) Or getting blasted by Shostakovich.

Friday's performance of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor was beautifully harrowing: dark-as-night distended hymns, thrashed air-raid attacks and flaming dances, in which entire folk traditions seem to be immolated. The performance by Fain, Bachmann, Harding and Haimovitz -- collectively, the musicians are known as the Days and Nights Festival Players -- was burning and burnished. In particular, Haimovitz's brief arias felt like songs of mourning.

After some cooling down at intermission, Bachmann returned with Klibonoff to perform Glass's Sonata for Violin and Piano, composed in 2008. At its best, the work's oscillating rhythm-melodies and waves of arpeggios have a Romantic sweep, while embodying Glass's minimalist methods -- his constant repetition and morphing of musical bits. And there were Baroque echoes in the score's watch-work craftsmanship: The first movement's conclusion was reminiscent of Vivaldi's sparkle and windswept motion.



Composer Philip Glass performs at the opening night concert on Aug. 19, 2011 of his new Days and Nights Festival in Carmel Valley. (Photo by Patrice Ward)

But, mercy, it's one rough piece to play. Faced with nearly 30 minutes of nonstop scales and arpeggios, double-stops and wrist-bending shifts, Bachmann wasn't perfect enough. The most beautiful effects came at the very end, when she and Klibonoff created passages of intense longing and nostalgia. The music sounded like a train in the night.

Glass closed the program by playing two brief piano works, the second and fourth parts of his five-part "Metamorphosis," inspired by a play based on Franz Kafka's short story. He took off his sport jacket, draped it over the back of a chair and sat down at the keyboard. I loved his informality, but this performance wasn't Glass at his best. His playing was clunky: clobbered chords, noodling melodies. A pianist like Klibonoff was needed to bring out the detail -- to clarify the watch-work complexity that's at the heart of pretty much everything Glass assembles.

You know what? The audience rose and cheered, anyway. And Glass deserved the applause. He has assembled quite a festival here, so come on down to Carmel Valley for a few hours of music or dance -- or popcorn and a drive-in movie. In a field outside the theater next week, the Days and Nights folks will erect a movie screen that's 55 feet wide and three stories high. Check the festival's website for details.

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**Philip Glass Presents: Days and Nights Festival**

**When:** Through Sept. 4

**Where:** Most events at Hidden Valley Theatre, 88 W. Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley

**Tickets:** \$20-\$45; [www.daysandnightsfestival.com](http://www.daysandnightsfestival.com)

**Also:** Some events are at the Henry Miller Library, Highway 1, Big Sur. Check online schedule for details.