

WTC 9/11 (2010)

Program Note

In 2009 the Kronos Quartet asked me for a piece using pre-recorded voices. My first idea was to elongate the speaker's final vowels or consonants. Stop Action sound. Impossible in 1973 when I first thought of it. Possible in 2001 when 'Dolly' was begun. In this piece it was to be, and is, the means of connecting one person to another - harmonically.

I had no idea who was speaking. No subject matter. After several months I finally remembered the obvious. For 25 years we lived 4 blocks from the World Trade Center. On 9/11 we were in Vermont, but our son, grand daughter and daughter in law were all in our apartment. Our phone connection stayed open for 6 hours and our next door neighbors were finally able to drive north out of the city with their family and ours. For us, 9/11 was not a media event.

By January 2010, several months after Kronos asked me for the piece, I realized the pre-recorded voices would be from 9/11. Specifically, they would start from the Public Domain: NORAD, FDNY, and then from interviews with friends and neighbors who lived or worked in lower Manhattan.

WTC is also an abbreviation for World to Come, as my friend composer David Lang pointed out. After 9/11 the bodies and parts of bodies were taken to the Medical Examiner's office on the east side of Manhattan. In Jewish tradition there is an obligation to guard the body from the time of death until burial. The practice, called Shmira*, consists of sitting near the body and reciting Psalms or Biblical passages. The roots of the practice are, on one level, to protect the body from animals or insects, and on another, to keep the neshama or soul company while it hovers over the body until burial. Because of the difficulties in DNA identification this went on for seven months 24/7. Two of the women who sat and recited Psalms are heard in the third movement. You will also hear a cellist (who has sat Shmira elsewhere) and a cantor from a major New York City synagogue sing parts of Psalms and the Torah.

* "Stretching a Jewish Vigil for the Sept. 11 Dead ", NY Times, 11/6/01)

WTC 9/11 is in three movements (though the tempo remains unchanged throughout):

I. 9/11/01

II. II. 2010

III. III. WTC

The piece begins and ends with the first violin doubling the loud warning beep (actually an F) your phone makes when it is left off the hook. In the first movement there are archive

voices from NORAD air traffic controllers alarmed that American flight 11 was off course. This was the first plane to deliberately crash into the World Trade Center. The movement then shifts to the New York City Fire Department archives of that day telling what happened on the ground.

The second movement uses recordings I made in 2010 of neighborhood residents, an officer of the Fire Department and the first ambulance driver (from Hatzalah volunteers) to arrive at the scene, remembering what happened nine years earlier.

The third and last movement uses the voices of a neighborhood resident, two volunteers who took shifts sitting near the bodies, and the cellist/singer and cantor mentioned above.

Throughout WTC 9/11 the strings double and harmonize the speech melodies and prolonged vowels or consonants of the recorded voices. You will hear a total of three string quartets, one live, and two pre-recorded. The piece can also be played by three live quartets and pre-recorded voices .

WTC 9/11 is only 15 and a half minutes long. While composing it I often tried to make it longer and each time it felt that extending its length reduced its impact. The piece wanted to be terse.

–Steve Reich 2012

Spoken Text

I. 9/11

NORAD:

They came from Boston -
Goin' to L A -
and they're headed South -
They're goin' the wrong
They're goin' the wrong way -
Boston -
L A -
headed South -
goin' the wrong
goin' the wrong way -
no contact -
no contact with the pilot -
no contact with the pilot whatsoever -

No
contact
with the pilot
whatsoever

FDNY:

go ahead
Plane just crashed -
Plane just crashed into the World Trade -
every available
every available ambulance -
the plane was aiming
the plane was aiming towards the building -
there's been a major
there's been a major collapse -
May-day! May-day! Liberty and West, I'm trapped
I'm trapped in the rubble -
the second plane
the second plane
a second plane! -
May-day! May-day, may-day!
I can't breathe
I can't breathe much longer
Other tower just collapsed

II. 2010

Neighborhood residents, Fire Dept. Officer, 1st Ambulance driver to arrive at World Trade Center:

I was sitting in class-
four blocks
four blocks north of Ground Zero -
I was taking my kids to school -
the first plane -
went straight
went straight over our heads -
went straight over our heads and into the
building -
My eyes just kind of shot up
flames
one of the towers
one of the towers just in flames
but we all thought
but we all thought it was an accident
accident
I knew it wasn't an accident
I knew it wasn't an accident right away
Everyone was running
running
Everyone was running and screaming
Then -
Then
The second plane hit -
The second plane hit
It was not an accident
It was not
It was not an accident

People -
People
jumping from the building -
jumping from the building
people

The first ambulance
the first ambulance to get there
It was chaos
chaos
nobody knew
nobody knew what to do
nobody
The ground -
The ground started shaking -
The ground started shaking
You could feel it
The building came down
came down
Run
Run for your lives
Run
Suddenly
Suddenly it was black outside -
Suddenly it was black outside
You could not see in front of you
You could not
Debris engulfed everybody
Debris engulfed everybody that was there
Everybody
Everybody thought we were dead
Everybody thought we were dead
Totally silent
silent
just dust in the street
just dust
Three thousand people
Three thousand people were murdered
What's gonna happen here?
What's gonna happen here next?

III. WTC

Neighborhood resident, women who sat with 9/11 bodies saying Psalms 24/7 until burial, a cellist with a good voice, a cantor:

The bodies

The bodies were moved to large tents

On the east side of Manhattan

I would sit there

I would sit there and recite Psalms all night

recite Psalms all night

Simply sitting

sitting

Hashem yishmor tzaytcha uvoecha may atah va-ahd olahm*

Hashem yishmor tzaytcha uvoecha may atah va-ahd olahm

Hashem yishmor tzaytcha uvoecha may atah va-ahd olahm

The world to come

I don't really know what that means

Hiney ahnochí sholayach malach lephaneycha lishmorcha badarech valahaviahcha el-hamahkom asher hakinoti**

Hiney ahnochí sholayach malach lephaneycha lishmorcha badarech valahaviahcha el-hamahkom asher hakinoti -

and there's the world

and there's the world right here

* Psalm 121:8 - The Eternal will guard your departure and your arrival from now till the end of time.

** from The Wayfarer's Prayer (Exodus 23:20) - Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Triple Quartet (1999)

Program Note

Triple Quartet is for string quartet plus two pre-recorded quartets. Alternately, the piece can be played live by three string quartets with no pre-recording. The piece is in three movements, fast-slow-fast, and is organized harmonically on four dominant chords in minor keys a minor third apart: E minor, G minor, Bb minor, C# minor and then returning to E minor to form a cycle. The first movement goes through this harmonic cycle twice with a section about one minute long on each of the four dominant chords. The result is a kind of variation form. Rhythmically the first movement has the second and third quartet playing interlocking chords while the first quartet plays longer melodies in canon between the first violin and viola against the second violin and cello. The slow movement is more completely contrapuntal with a long slow melody in canon eventually in all 12 voices. It stays in E minor throughout. The third movement resumes the original fast tempo, maintains the harmonic chord cycle but modulates back and forth between keys more rapidly. The final section of the movement is in the initial key of E minor and there the piece finally cadences.

—Steve Reich
1999

Note by the Composer

Different Trains (1988), for String Quartet and pre-recorded performance tape, begins a new way of composing that has its roots in my early tape pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). The basic idea is that carefully chosen speech recordings generate the musical materials for musical instruments.

The idea for the piece comes from my childhood. When I was one year old my parents separated. My mother moved to Los Angeles and my father stayed in New York. Since they arranged divided custody, I traveled back and forth by train frequently between New York and Los Angeles from 1939 to 1942 accompanied by my governess. While these trips were exciting and romantic at the time I now look back and think that, if I had been in Europe during this period, as a Jew I would have had to ride very different trains. With this in mind I wanted to make a piece that would accurately reflect the whole situation. In order to prepare the tape I did the following:

1. Record my governess Virginia, then in her seventies, reminiscing about our train trips together.
2. Record a retired Pullman porter, Lawrence Davis, then in his eighties, who used to ride lines between New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about his life.
3. Collect recordings of Holocaust survivors Rachella, Paul and Rachel, all about my age and then living in America – speaking of their experiences.
4. Collect recorded American and European train sounds of the '30s and '40s.

In order to combine the taped speech with the string instruments I selected small speech samples that are more or less clearly pitched and then notated them as accurately as possible in musical notation. For example:



The strings then literally imitate that speech melody. The speech samples as well as the train sounds were transferred to tape with the use of sampling keyboards and a computer. Three separate string quartets are also added to the pre-recorded tape and the final live quartet part is added in performance.

Different Trains is in three movements (played without pause), although that term is stretched here since tempos change frequently in each movement. They are:

1. America – Before the war
2. Europe – During the war
3. After the war

The piece thus presents both a documentary and a musical reality and begins a new musical direction. It is a direction that I expect will lead to a new kind of documentary music video theater in the not too distant future.

Steve Reich
August 1988

Transcript of Speech Recordings

I: America – Before the war

"from Chicago to New York" (Virginia)
"one of the fastest trains"
"The crack train from New York" (Mr. Davis)
"from New York to Los Angeles"
"different trains every time" (Virginia)
"from Chicago to New York"
"in 1939"
"1939" (Mr. Davis)
"1940"
"1941"
"1941 I guess it must've been" (Virginia)

II: Europe – During the war

"1940" (Rachella)
"on my birthday"
"The Germans walked in"
"walked into Holland"
"Germans invaded Hungary" (Paul)
"I was in second grade"
"I had a teacher"
"a very tall man, his hair was concretely plastered smooth"
"He said, 'Black Crows invaded our country many years ago' "
"and he pointed right at me"
"No more school" (Rachel)
"You must go away"
"and she said 'Quick, go!'" (Rachella)
"and he said, 'Don't breathe!' "
"into those cattle wagons" (Rachella)
"for 4 days and 4 nights"
"and then we went through these strange sounding names"
"Polish names"
"Lots of cattle wagons there"
"They were loaded with people"
"They shaved us"
"They tattooed a number on our arm"
"Flames going up to the sky – it was smoking"

III: After the war

"and the war was over" (Paul)
"Are you sure?" (Rachella)
"The war is over"
"going to America"
"to Los Angeles"
"to New York"
"from New York to Los Angeles" (Mr. Davis)
"one of the fastest trains" (Virginia)
"but today, they're all gone" (Mr. Davis)
"There was one girl, who had a beautiful voice" (Rachella)
"and they loved to listen to the singing, the Germans"
"and when she stopped singing they said, 'More, more' and they applauded"

* "Crack" in the older sense of "best"