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— a collection of six short pieces that are deeply emotional — continue to sell well.

You can read about it in bookstores, where *Music By Philip Glass* provides an informative and witty description by the artist of the staging of his first three major operas.

Or you can go to the Reitz Union Auditorium this Sunday at 2 p.m. to hear him speak on the music theater and attend a performance by his ensemble later that same day in the Gainesville High School Auditorium. The show begins at 8:15 p.m. Tickets are \$10, and are available at the University Box Office (392-1653).

Assuredly, though there are those who still argue about the artistic merits of his work, it has become quite clear that Philip Glass will be seen as one of the most important and influential composers of his time.

He first made his mark in the '60s as a brash proponent of a style that was tagged minimalism. It was marked by rhythmic, driving pieces influenced by rock and, more importantly, Eastern music. Proponents used the phrase in reference to its direct, emotional appeal, but opponents saw the name as a good indication of its limitations.

One cannot underestimate the resistance it met. Certainly its primitive beginnings were somewhat limited, but Glass and others soon expanded upon their voices, growing rich in creative ideas and romantic in sound.

But the dominant school of thought at the time was serialism, a philosophy of composition based on rigorous mathematical formulas. While Glass recognizes the ingenious work that has been done in this area, he skewers the whole movement early on in his book by describing concerts after which people would remark, "You know, it's really *much* better than it sounds."

In a telephone interview, Glass commented on those remarks by saying, "To ordinary people like you and myself, that's an incredible thing to say, but people actually said stuff like that."

As for serialism's standing today, he says, "It's taught in schools. It was always an academic pursuit. It's like, I don't know, theoretical law or something . . . theoretical politics . . . it doesn't have a place in the music world we live in."

During the '60s, however, serialism was firmly ensconced. Musicians would refuse to play Glass' works, and audiences would hoot in derision.

But that's behind him now.

"I do so many concerts around the country and, I must say, it's unusual to get real violent reactions anymore," he said. "It does happen, but it's unusual."

Even more unusual is to find contemporary operas that create widespread excitement. Before Glass, this century had created few works that were considered significant: *Lulu*, *Wozzeck*, a few by Britten and a handful of others.

But since the premiere of *Einstein on the Beach* in 1976 — a collaboration between Glass and avant-garde director Robert Wilson — there has been an explosion of pieces, though none has enjoyed the commercial success or critical jousting of his work.



When one suggests Glass might be one of the most important operatic composers of the 20th century, if only by default, he laughs heartily.

"I'll accept that, what the hell," he says. But he is quick to add, "Work is getting produced. It's just not so well known yet. Anthony Davis did a wonderful opera based on the life of Malcolm X, and that was really interesting. There's a musical on Broadway now called *The Gospel at Colonus* (which is heavily influenced by this movement). John Adams just did a piece called *Nixon in China*."

"I think there's a whole generation getting interested in this business of theater, and that's very encouraging."

Even more encouraging is to find works being commissioned by companies in America. The Metropolitan Opera has set him to work on *The Voyage* for 1992, in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus discovering America (well, the Bahamas, but why split hairs?). Furthermore, his latest opera, *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*, will have its world premiere in Houston on July 7.

That's a far cry from years past, when Glass spent his days working under the cash-rich cultural arms of various European countries.

"I do like working in America," he said. "I love being at home. You know, I've worked in Europe a lot and it's nice, there's a lot of support there, but I feel my work is made for American culture, and it's nice to see it entering the culture in that way at this point."

Glass has always found a more receptive creative environment in Europe. After whisking through

the University of Chicago with a major in philosophy and mathematics, he attended the Juilliard School of Music. He paused, decided his education was incomplete, and headed for Paris armed with a fellowship and the chance to work under the stern tutelage of Nadia Boulanger, a famed instructor living in France.

That, and an exposure to Eastern music through an association with Indian musician Ravi Shankar, changed him completely. Glass returned to America with practical musical knowledge and the beginnings of his own musical voice.

It is a credit to that musical voice that critics are so divided on which of his pieces is the best. *Newsweek's* Alan Rich hails *Einstein on the Beach* as one of "the truly pivotal artworks of our time."

But Michael Walsh of *Time* sees *Akhmaten*, "a musically luminous treatment of the rise and fall of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh some consider history's first monotheist," as Glass' "most accomplished work to date."

And Annalyn Swan of *The New Republic* sees his score for *Koyaanisqatsi* as proof of his continuing evolution, employing a new richness that makes it "classical Glass."

Certainly, for the novice, the place to begin is *Glassworks*, a modest collection of six pieces recorded by his ensemble in 1982 that is of uncommon beauty.

"The idea of that was to write a piece that would be an introduction to the general public . . . and I think it was very successful from that point of view," he explained. Indeed, it took on a life of its own, being incorporated in dance pieces and other art projects.