

PHIL KLINE

Phil Kline is a New York-based composer who makes music in many genres and contexts, from electronica and sound installations to songs, choral, theater, chamber and orchestral music. His work has been hailed for its originality, beauty, subversive subtext, and wry humor. Anne Midgette, in *The New York Times*, says his songs “communicate with a direct vernacular eloquence,” while composer Martin Bresnick praises his “uniquely persuasive and personal sense of lyricism.” Sizing up his recent work, David Patrick Stearns of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* writes: “Kline has graduated from ‘experimental’ to ‘original’—he’s one of America’s most important compositional voices, thanks to his burning urge to communicate, and not things that can be reduced to a charismatic sentence. His pieces become part of your inner life no matter how little you understand them.”

Raised in Akron, Ohio, Kline came to New York to study English Literature at Columbia, where his interest in writing led him to study with poets Kenneth Koch and David Shapiro. While a student, he made many forays downtown to encounter the emergent lively art that was not being taught in school: the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, the theater of Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman. It left an indelible impression.

After graduation, Kline became part of the downtown New York arts scene: he founded the rock band The Del-Byzanteens with Jim Jarmusch and James Nares, collaborated with Nan Goldin on the soundtrack to *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, and played guitar in the notorious Glenn Branca Ensemble.

His earliest solo compositions grew out of his work as a performance artist and used audio tape as a medium, often employing tape loops, after the examples of Brian Eno and Steve Reich. In 1992 he made his debut at the Bang on a Can Marathon, performing *Bachman’s Warbler* for harmonicas and 12 live tape-loop cassettes. Composer and Bang on a Can co-founder David Lang called it “the ultimate honest piece,” and the live recording of the performance was included on the CD *Bang on a Can Live Volume 2*.

Later in 1992 Kline created the Christmas piece *Unsilent Night*, which was in part inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen’s pronouncement that one of the potentials of electronic music is a sonic plasticity to be achieved by “transporting loudspeakers through space.” The 44-minute electro-acoustic composition was recorded on four tracks and then copied onto cassettes, with each tape containing one of the four tracks. Several dozen friends were invited to carry boomboxes through the streets of Greenwich Village, where the loosely synchronized parts were continuously remixed by the city’s topography. The event has been repeated in New York every year since, and is now performed annually in dozens of cities around the world.

In 1997, a commission by the Bang on a Can All-Stars led to his first fully scored work, *Exquisite Corpses*, which became a touring piece for the group and was included on the first Cantaloupe CD, *Renegade Heaven*. From that point, Kline turned more and more to through-composed works for acoustic or electro-acoustic instruments with the *String Quartet No. 1* (2000), the song cycle *When I Had a Voice* (2000), and a second quartet, *The Blue Room and Other Stories* (2002) following in quick succession.

He also became more devoted to composing vocal music and theater, with the semi-staged *Rumsfeld Songs* (2003)—based on utterances of the erstwhile American Secretary of Defense—and *Zippo Songs* (2003), a song cycle based on poems Vietnam vets inscribed on their Zippo lighters. These two works, often performed together, achieved instant notoriety. Alex Ross, in *The New Yorker*, called *Zippo Songs* “one of the most brutally frank song cycles ever penned,” while Secretary Rumsfeld, when asked about the settings of his words, said “What is the world coming to?”

John the Revelator, a mass for six voices and string quartet, was written for vocal group Lionheart, commissioned by WNYC and premiered at the World Financial Center Winter Garden in 2006. It is a complete setting and contextualization of the mass, with original propers based on the Old Testament, Samuel Beckett and American shape-note hymns. Joshua Kosman, writing in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, said: “This ravishing new setting of the Mass by New York composer Phil Kline is as bold and exciting in its conception as in the execution. The result is a gritty, mysterious and wholly American recasting of an ancient tradition, done with such assurance and harmonic facility that the listener is constantly taken by surprise.”

Other recent works include *Locus Solus* (2005), a music theater piece based on the proto-surrealist novel of Raymond

Roussel, which was presented at the Ryer's Mansion Museum on the outskirts of Philadelphia in 2006, and scores for three evening-length dance pieces by Wally Cardona: *Everywhere*, *Site*, and *Really Real*. The sound installation *World on a String* opened the season at the Krannert Center in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, in September 2007.

SPACE for amplified string quartet, written for Ethel, was one of the works chosen for the official reopening of Alice Tully Hall in April 2009, and *The Long Winter*, a piano sonata commissioned by Sarah Cahill, was premiered at Merkin Hall later that month. *Canzona in Two Hearts* was commissioned by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and will receive its premiere in 2011.

Upcoming projects include *A Dream and Its Opposite*, a triple concerto for the Real Quiet Trio with the La Jolla Symphony; *Wing and a Prayer*, a large organ work for the Kotschmar Organ of Portland, Maine; a solo violin sonata for Jennifer Koh; and the opera *Tesla*, a collaboration with director Jim Jarmusch.

Kline and his projects have been awarded numerous major grants, including four from Meet the Composer's Commissioning USA (2000, 2003, 2006, 2010); a Meet the Composer Global Connections grant to present a new work at the Winter Olympics in Torino (2006); and grants from the Rockefeller MAP Fund (2010), the Rockefeller-NY State Music Fund (2007), the Aaron Copland Fund (2005), the Mary Flagler Cary Trust (1999, 2002), the Jerome Foundation (2000), and NYSCA (2002, 2005, 2008). His first solo CD, *Glow in the Dark* (1998) on CRI, was made possible by grants from the Virgil Thomson Foundation and the Alice M. Ditson Fund.

In addition to *Glow in the Dark*, Kline has three solo CDs on the Cantaloupe label: *Unsilent Night* (2001), *Zippo Songs* (2004) and *John the Revelator* (2009). A full-length 5.1 surround sound audio DVD, *Around the World in a Daze*, was commissioned by Starkland and released in 2009.

September 2010