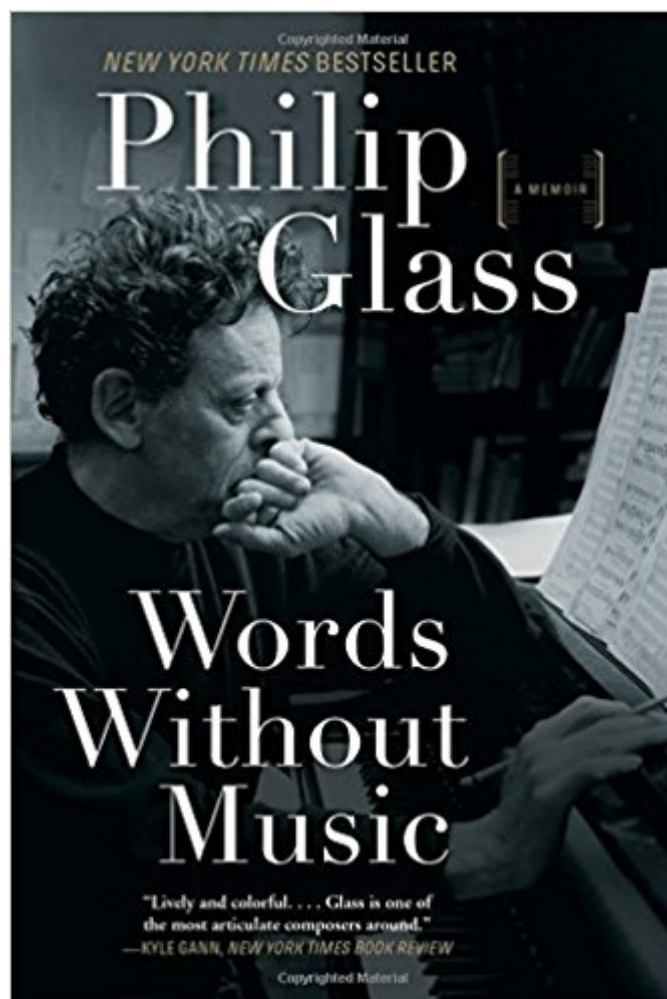


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Words Without Music: A Memoir



Synopsis

New York Times Bestseller "Reads the way Mr. Glass's compositions sound at their best: propulsive, with a surreptitious emotional undertow." —Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, New York Times

Philip Glass has, almost single-handedly, crafted the dominant sound of late-twentieth-century classical music. Yet in *Words Without Music*, his critically acclaimed memoir, he creates an entirely new and unexpected voice, that of a born storyteller and an acutely insightful chronicler, whose behind-the-scenes recollections allow readers to experience those moments of creative fusion when life so magically merged with art. From his childhood in Baltimore to his student days in Chicago and at Juilliard, to his first journey to Paris and a life-changing trip to India, Glass movingly recalls his early mentors, while reconstructing the places that helped shape his creative consciousness. Whether describing working as an unlicensed plumber in gritty 1970s New York or composing *Satyagraha*, Glass breaks across genres and re-creates, here in words, the thrill that results from artistic creation. *Words Without Music* ultimately affirms the power of music to change the world. 32 pages of photographs

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Customer Reviews

I make no bones about that I'm proud to say that I'm a huge Philip Glass fan, and this book is as wonderful, quirky, and enjoyable as his amazing music is! His music has been a huge part of my life since I first heard "Rubric" from *Glassworks* on the radio in the early to mid-80's. Since then I have attended close to 80 Glass concerts/operas over the years and have had the opportunity to chat with him briefly a few times. You will not find a harder working person in music, even now at age 78.

PG just won the 2015 Glenn Gould Award and nobody is more deserving. I've had an absolute ball being a Glass fan all these years; for just one example, back in 2008 in Atlanta, Emory University performed his opera "Akhnaten". PG came down to Atlanta to give some talks and be a spectator, and he sat next to my friend and I (not by accident) during the performance- I was practically hyperventilating the whole time. PG is so cool and laid back and nothing fazes him! Could you imagine attending a concert of Brahms with Brahms himself enjoying it right next to you? There's lots of other great memories I could write about, but this is supposed to be a review of his new book. I'm just a regular fan of his, but there have been many perks and surprises along the way in my years of attending Glass concerts. This book is insightful, enigmatic, entertaining, humorous, and moving- just like PG's music.

In this book, Glass tells about his life growing up in Baltimore, his experiences as a 15-year old at college, his life in downtown New York, and his music. Glass has had an interesting life, but, unfortunately, he's no writer. This book is the story of a musician, a well-known and successful composer, as he makes his own path with a new style of music. Glass takes a fair amount of time to describe his life growing up in Baltimore, and his experiences as a very young college student. But then, when he talks about his time in Paris, and his years in downtown New York, it seems like he's just name-dropping, as the pages are full of lists of all the famous people he knew and met. He gets into travel writing, describing in too much detail some of his trips to India and other places, but Glass is no travel writer; these sections are uninteresting. Finally, about two-thirds of the way through the book, he starts talking about the music. It's around then that *Einstein on the Beach*, the work that catapulted him to fame, shows up. It was interesting to read about how *Einstein* was created and produced, and the oddity of Glass going back to driving a cab, after a long tour of Europe and two sold-out performances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. But, then, he describes the rest of his musical career briefly and succinctly, as if for liner notes, giving little attention to the rest of the music he wrote. There are longish sections about some of his major works – "Satyagraha, Akhnaten, Koyaanisqatsi, and others" – but he curiously ignores his symphonies (other than to liken himself to Bruckner), gives no insight into the other music he's written, such as his solo piano music, string quartets, etc.

What is interesting about this uneven autobiography about today's superstar classical composer is that it is not just about his then avant-garde music but rather the entire avant-garde world of art, theater, dance, music, and their combinations in Europe and America during the experimental

1960s and 1970s. Glass says that he is foremost a theatrical composer, and his life has developed within and around all these related arts. His atypical operas -- and he has now 25 -- are fundamentally "performance art" with music; and as cinema is a derivative of live theater, his many soundtracks further the connection. His chums are artists, as Richard Serra and Chuck Close, and beginning from his days at Julliard, his pieces have been used in dance. While John Adams depended on conservatory teaching to survive, Glass had a large variety of part-time jobs, from steel plant crane operating to taxi cab driving, from furniture moving to plumbing. Perhaps the most worthwhile details in the book are his experience in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, the advanced instructor of so many noted composers, whose arduous training techniques developed in Glass a new way to regard music; the least valuable details were his method of preparing galvanized plumbing pipe. His interaction with Ravi Shankar on the film Chappaqua and especially with tabla master Allah Rakha in the structure of Hindustani rhythms, tals, laid the groundwork for Glass's trademark style, where small changes and variations in modal process are emphasized over harmony and counterpoint. Einstein on The Beach was the revolutionary work that brought Glass into the spotlight and how it was developed and presented is well described.

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