

USA / UK

DRAMA

MUSIC

# TAO OF GLASS

BY PHILIP GLASS & PHELMIC McDERMOTT

## EDUCATION RESOURCE

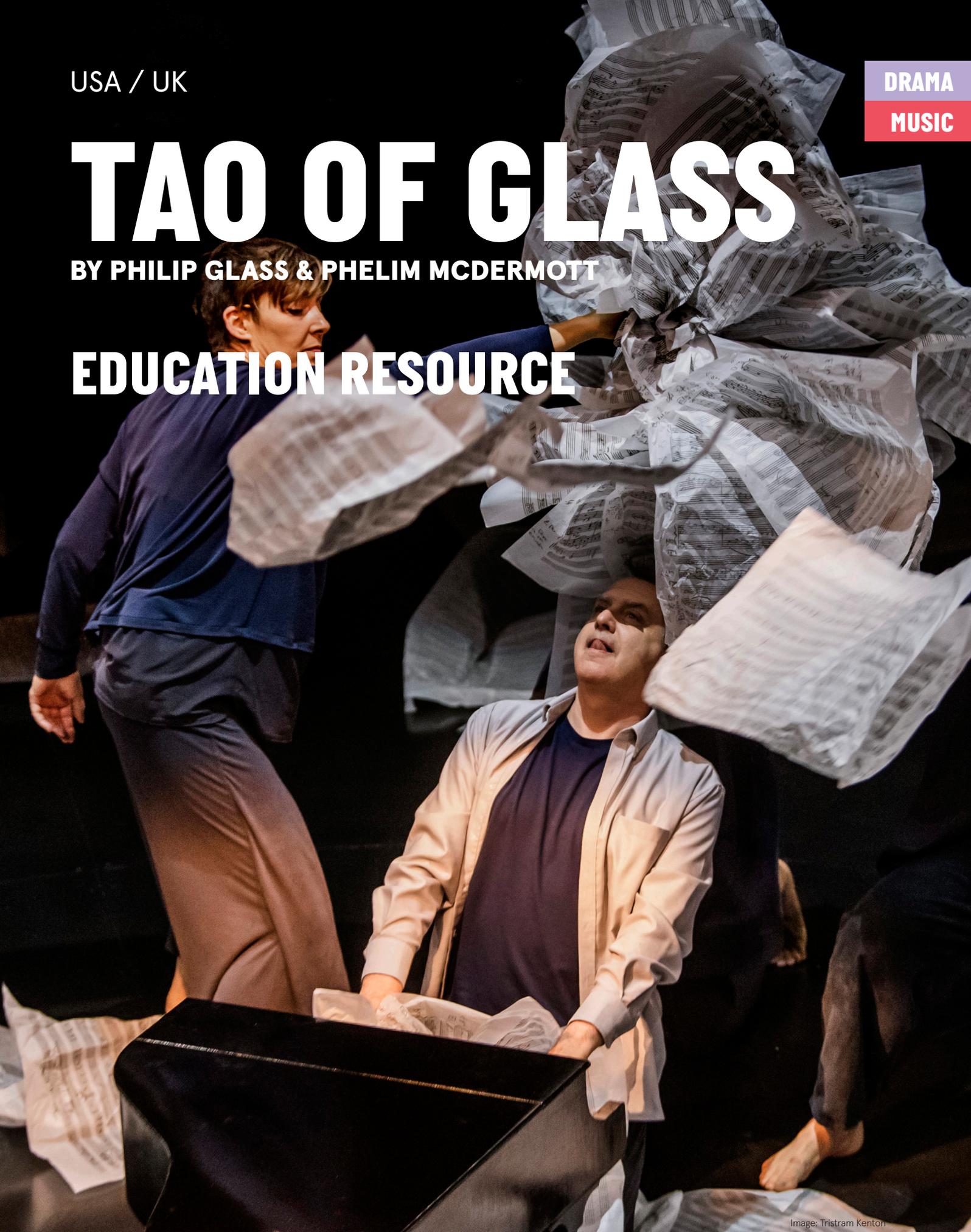


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# CREDITS

**Composer** Philip Glass

**Writer & Co-Director** Phelim McDermott

**Co-Director** Kirsty Housley

**Designer** Fly Davis

**Lighting Designer** Colin Grenfell

**Sound Designer** Giles Thomas

**Collaborator** Ragnar Freidank

**Musical Director** Chris Vatalaro

**Associate Director** Peter Relton

**Puppet Designer & Puppet Maker** Lyndie Wright

**Design Associate** Camille Etchart

**Sound Associate** Sorcha Steele

**Puppeteers** David Emmings, Janet Etuk, Rachel Leonard

**Performer** Phelim McDermott

**Clarinet** Jack McNeill

**Violin** Rakhi Singh

**Piano** Katherine Tinker

**Percussion** Chris Vatalaro

## Music

Billy's Wonderful Kettle

Maurice

Kintsugi

Flotation

Lao Tsu

Opening

Paper

Glass Coffee Table

Rigveda

The River

Coma

I Ching

Closing



Image: Tristram Kenton

# BIOGRAPHIES

## PHILIP GLASS

### COMPOSER

Through his operas, his symphonies, his compositions for his own ensemble and his wide-ranging collaborations with artists ranging from Twyla Tharp to Allen Ginsberg, Woody Allen to David Bowie, Philip Glass has had an extraordinary and unprecedented impact upon the musical and intellectual life of his times.

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, Glass is a graduate of the University of Chicago and the Juilliard School. By 1974 Glass had created a large collection of music for the Philip Glass Ensemble, a period that culminated in the landmark opera *Einstein on the Beach*. Since *Einstein*, Glass's repertoire has grown to include music for opera, dance, theatre, orchestra and film. His scores have received Academy Award nominations (*Kundun*, *The Hours*, *Notes on a Scandal*) and a Golden Globe (*The Truman Show*). Recent works include an opera on Walt Disney, *The Perfect American*; Glass's memoir, *Words Without Music*, by Liveright Books; *Symphony No.12*, based on David Bowie's 'Lodger'; and music for *King Lear* on Broadway.

Glass received the US National Medal of the Arts from President Barack Obama in 2016 and the 41st Kennedy Center Honors in December 2018. He presents lectures, workshops and solo keyboard performances around the world.

## KIRSTY HOUSLEY

### CO-DIRECTOR

Kirsty Housley is a director, writer and dramaturg. Current and future work includes *Rich Kids: A History of Shopping Malls in Tehran* (cocreated with Javaad Alipoor; Traverse, Edinburgh); *Avalanche: A Love Story* (dramaturg; Sydney Theatre); and *Mephisto [Rhapsodie]* (Gate). Other theatre includes *The Encounter* (co-director with Simon McBurney; Complicité); *I'm a Phoenix, Bitch* (with Bryony Kimmings); *Philip Pullman's Grimm Tales* (Unicorn); *Misty* (dramaturg; Bush & West End); *The Distance* (Roundhouse); *The Believers Are But Brothers* (co-director; Bush, Ovalhouse, West Yorkshire Playhouse & Northern Stage Edinburgh); *Myth* (co-writer; RSC); *A Pacifist's Guide to the War on Cancer* (dramaturg for Complicité at the National & HOME; director for international tour); *Wanted and 9* (both Chris Goode & Company, Transform & West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Walking the Tightrope* (Offstage & Theatre Uncut); *All I Want* (Live Theatre, Leeds Libraries & Jackson's Lane); *Mass* (Bristol Old Vic & Camden People's Theatre); *The Beauty Project* (Theatre Uncut & Young Vic); *How to Be Immortal* (Penny Dreadful at Soho & tour); *Bandages* (Corn Exchange Newbury & tour); and *Thirsty* (Paper Birds & Blue Jam for Etcetera). She has won the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Trust Award and the Title Pending Award for Innovation at Northern Stage. In 2017, she won The Stage Award for Innovation for *The Encounter* and was nominated again in 2018 for *The Believers Are But Brothers*.

## PHELIM MCDERMOTT

### WRITER, CO-DIRECTOR & PERFORMER

Phelim McDermott is a founding member and co-artistic director of Improbable. He has been directing and performing since 1984, when he co-founded *derek derek* with Julia Bardsley. Productions with Improbable include the multi-award-winning *70 Hill Lane*, *Lifegame*, *Animo*, *Coma*, *Spirit*, *Sticky*, *Cinderella*, *The Hanging Man*, *Theatre of Blood* and *Lost Without Words* (both collaborations with the National Theatre) and *The Tempest*. He directed the acclaimed Philip Glass operas *Satyagraha*, *The Perfect American* and the Olivier Award-winning *Akhmaten*. Recently McDermott has directed Verdi's *Aida* in collaboration with English National Opera; *Bambino*, an opera for babies co-produced with MIF and Scottish Opera; and the critically lauded revival of *Satyagraha* with LA Opera. His other productions as director include the Olivier Award-winning *Shockheaded Peter*; *Alex* (Arts); *The Ghost Downstairs* (Leicester Haymarket); *Dr Faustus* and *Improbable Tales* (both Nottingham Playhouse); and *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Government Inspector* (all West Yorkshire Playhouse). He was also the Artistic Collaborator on *She's Leaving Home*, produced by 20 Stories High. In 2003, McDermott was awarded a National Endowment for Science, Technology & the Arts (NESTA) fellowship to research new ways of rehearsing and creating theatre using improvisation and process-oriented conflict facilitation techniques. As part of this work, he has facilitated many Open Space Technology events. He was made an Honorary Doctor of Middlesex University in 2007.

# ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Theatre maker Phelim McDermott with renowned composer Phillip Glass and an ensemble of gifted puppeteers present *Tao of Glass*. This is a mesmerising performance that weaves music, poetry and puppetry to create an evocative visual experience for the audience. It is an experimental piece of theatre that asks the big question: Where does true inspiration come from?

This is a must-see performance for schools and, in particular, drama and music students. Phillip Glass is renowned for his exquisite operas including, *Einstein on the Beach*, working alongside Robert Wilson (experimental practitioner covered in the Year 12 ATAR Drama Course).

Phelim McDermott is the founder of the English theatre company, Improbable. "At the heart of all the work that Improbable creates is the philosophy of improvisation". The Company use innovative process work to breathe life into their shows.

This is the perfect way to expose students to experimental theatre approaches, storytelling, puppetry, image theatre and composing for performance.

## MAJOR THEMES

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DREAMING

*Tao of Glass* is autobiographical. The show explores Phelim McDermott's aspirations and dreams of a successful Broadway career. Dreams are sometimes dashed or develop, grow and flourish. Consider how powerful images are created on stage? How do the images or movement physicalise the subconscious mind on stage?

### JOURNEY

Tao (Chinese Philosophy) literally means "way", or one of its synonyms, but was extended to mean "the way". McDermott says "it's called the *Tao of Glass* – and one of the ideas of Taoism is that there are times when you may notice that you're following nature, and what nature is asking of you or revealing to you, or you're working against that. That's very good as a creative process metaphor."

What is McDermott trying to articulate about the creative process? How does the music composition compliment and inform the action on stage? What messages can you take from this when devising your own work?

### THE EVOLUTION OF IDEAS

"On one level the show will be about the creation of the show ... And on another level it's about the disappearance of another project." McDermott says. How does the play explore the initial spark of an idea? How does the play explore the journey of an idea?

## RESOURCES

<https://www.improbable.co.uk/what-inspires-us/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TrYu9aH9Wo>

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jul/15/tao-of-glass-review-royal-exchange-manchester-philip-glass-phelim-mcdermott>

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jul/20/tao-of-philip-glass-manchester-international-festival-luka-okros-la-belle-helene-offenbach>



Image: Tristram Kenton

# PHILIP GLASS, PHELIM MCDERMOTT AND KIRSTY HOUSLEY DISCUSS THE MAKING OF TAO OF GLASS

## BEGINNINGS

**Phelim McDermott (PM):** I don't really know when I first heard Philip's music – but I bought his album, *Glassworks*, and that was my first introduction. When I was at college, I thought, I've got to find out about this man. I ended up in the Middlesex Polytechnic Library watching old VHS videos of the original productions of *Einstein on the Beach* and *Satyagraha* [Philip Glass operas].

**Kirsty Housley (KH):** This is what I find interesting: you grew up with Philip Glass and I did too, but I wasn't aware that I had. My introduction was also through film, but I didn't know that it was Philip Glass. *The Truman Show* was probably the first time I heard his music, then someone recommended *Koyaanisqatsi* [scored by Glass]. I watched it and just thought: 'Wow – this music.'

**PM:** He's a very humble man: very approachable and human. They say don't meet your heroes, because you'll be disappointed. I haven't been disappointed with Philip.

## LOSS

**Philip Glass (PG):** Phelim and I spent some time together visiting Maurice Sendak [illustrator and children's author, most famous for *Where the Wild Things Are*], and we were talking with him about [adapting] *In the Night Kitchen*. Before we got to do the piece, Sendak passed away – so that came to an end. Phelim asked if I would like to work with him on a new piece that would be a kind of replacement, and that turned out to be the *Tao of Glass*.

**PM:** The show became about the stories and conversation between me and Philip, and whether anything grew from that. Actually, Philip was interested in the fact that there was nothing there. *Tao of Glass* is about what emerges from the space where there is nothing.

**KH:** I think when we first spoke about the show, what I was most interested in was the idea of absence. The idea that a show hasn't happened and an empty space has been left. And that feels like a kind of grief, but actually in that space there's hope, and possibility. Nobody knows what's going to happen and therefore anything is possible.

**PM:** On one level, this show is about a number of dreams not happening. There was one point where Philip said, 'You know, this show's about loss, isn't it?'

## COLLABORATION

**KH:** We've got a sign on our wall that says 'Be prepared to be surprised', and I feel like Philip is the epitome of that. Some composers want you to do your bit first and then they know what they're doing – but Philip wasn't sat opposite Phelim saying, 'Tell me what it's about, Phelim, otherwise I can't bring anything'. There was this really genuine collaboration.

**PG:** Of course, it didn't happen the way he wanted it to, but that's just life in the theatre world.

**PM:** I told Philip stories, he improvised, I responded to his music, and then he responded to me. He has the David Bowie cut-up mentality: let's put these pieces in this order and it's going to do something to your brain. It will do something to how you listen, how you perceive this piece of theatre.

**KH:** The show is a bit of a collage, I think – it comes from lots of different places. There are echoes thematically across all the different stories, and when you glue them together, the whole is transformed.

## KINTSUGI

**PM:** Kintsugi is a form of Japanese art where you take pieces of a broken vase and fix them together with golden glue, and it becomes more beautiful because it highlights its flaws. I would say that, on some level, the show is like a piece of kintsugi.

It's not even like the pieces of the same pot – it's pieces from about eight different pots.

**KH:** Every day we make good discoveries, then we hit a brick wall and have to rethink how we're working. The stories existed when I came in and the process has been to discover how they will evolve and fit together – in a way, the meaning reveals itself through how they've been collated. It's in the form as much as in the content.

## QUESTIONS

**PM:** One idea of what the show was going to be was that I might ask Philip eight important questions – about creativity, life and mortality.

**PG:** I don't remember Phelim sharing that idea with me. So he may have asked me the questions without telling me there were eight questions.

During the workshops, he may have asked all the questions and got the answers, but I was not privy to the system.

**PM:** It's not what ended up happening, because it didn't feel right. Philip did say, 'It's hard being the sage, isn't it?'

**KH:** That feels like a really important element of the show, though: that there are just some things that are impossible to articulate with words. Philip can't give Phelim the key to successful creativity or living a brilliant life any more than anyone else can. But he can give you extraordinary music.

## TAOISM

**PM:** It's called the *Tao of Glass* – and one of the ideas of Taoism is that there are times when you may notice that you're following nature, and what nature is asking of you or revealing to you, or you're working against that. That's very good as a creative process metaphor.

**KM:** It's an incredibly difficult thing to do – I definitely can't do it – and so there's also something impossible about the Tao, which I really like. You can't win it and you can't know it. It's about the journey of it.

**PG:** I've read the same books as everyone else has, but the books about Taoism make a point of telling you that they're not going to explain Taoism.

And they don't!

**KM:** I'm interested in the humanity of trying to follow Taoism, and failing – the attempt is fascinating, but human nature can often get in the way.

**PM:** That's the beauty of the Taoist version of dreaming. Maybe you will follow the Tao, which says to believe in your dreams – just don't expect them to be manifested in the way you think they will.

There's another way of dreaming that we're interested in with this show, which is more meditative: it's about being connected to reality and listening to your instincts.

## DREAMING

**KH:** I feel like there are almost two different types of dreaming. One is really prevalent at the moment: sorry to be political, but it's a very capitalist way of dreaming. It never allows you to be in the present. There's always something that you want, so you're spending your whole life trying to get that thing, which is always in the future.

But there's another way of dreaming that we're interested in with this show, which is more meditative: it's about being connected to reality and listening to your instincts. It's really the difference between daydreaming and having a life plan.

**PM:** The show is about a different kind of understanding of dreamland and where dreams originate. There's a model in the show, Arny Mindell's Deep Democracy model: if you go further down the cone of consciousness, there's a kind of dreaming that happens pre-image, pre-words, that's very easily marginalised within ourselves.

This dreaming is much more like a big, connected, unbroken wholeness where we are not separate people, or separate from nature. This whole show has grown from that place.

**KH:** *Tao of Glass* has been our dream in this room, but when it meets an audience, it will become a new dream that involves them too.

## REALITY

**PM:** *Tao of Glass* will mean different things to people in different places. I like to think that if we create something that does continue, it will be open enough to unfold new stories that might get told.

**PG:** There are some interesting things involving my presence in the piece. Besides being the composer, I kind of have a 'ghost' presence: I will be with the piece at the performances, but I won't be on the stage.

**KH:** *Tao of Glass* will continue evolving throughout its run in Manchester, and beyond. When everyone comes into the Royal Exchange module for the first preview, we will discover in the moment what we've actually made.

**PM:** You don't really find out what you've done until an audience is sitting there – and that's what theatre is. Dreaming together.

# BEFORE THE SHOW

## DISCUSSION: MUSIC

<https://philipglass.com/biography/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqJ10fkzrv4&list=RDvgEmc53y078&index=4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g2E6ABvBjE&list=RDvgEmc53y078&index=3>

Direct students to Philip Glass's websites (above). Get them to examine his biography.

- Name three operas that Philip Glass has worked on?
- What other areas has Glass worked in apart from theatre?
- Define the stylistic characteristics of his work. How does Phillip Glass describe his style?
- How many people came to his first performance?
- Why does Glass compose for theatre?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgEmc53y078>

Above is an old video interview with Philip Glass. He is being interviewed by young students. Get your students to view the video and answer the following questions:

- How long has Glass been composing?
- What does Glass say it takes to compose a piece?
- How does Glass play with rhythm?
- What is the function of music when working on a film? How does Glass compose for film (his strategies)?

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jul/09/philip-glass-einstein-on-the-beach- tao-superfan-in-manchester>

Read the interview with Philip Glass by *The Guardian*. Where does Philip Glass get his inspiration to compose?

## PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY: THEATRE

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the form of puppetry and storytelling. Through observing Gyre and Gimble Masterclasses, students will learn to construct a simple puppet. They will focus on the principles of breath, focus and weight to bring life to the puppet. Finally, they will integrate actor and puppet, creating a clearly structured (linear) improvisation.

### ACTIVITY

*Tao of Glass* focuses on storytelling through integrating puppet and actor. Put students into groups of 3 or 4.

- Using a large roll of brown paper and some masking tape. Get the students to make their own puppet. See instructions below from the National Theatre London: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFEnZfS5lXQ>
  - Now work on getting your students to bring their puppet to life focusing on three principles: breath, focus and weight. Watch the following clip from Gyre and Gimble Masterclass: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXT3gPef8zo>
  - Next move to the storytelling process, integrating actor playing character and puppet. The focus is on creating clear structure, working as an ensemble and bringing truth to the movement. Consider providing students with a stimulus for their story such as:
    - The exam
    - The interview
    - The picnic
    - The romance
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o85UyC1lZjU>
- What was the effect of using puppets in storytelling? What skills can you identify as important when working with puppets? What are the challenges for an ensemble operating the one puppet?

# PERFORMANCE PROTOCOLS

## MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THE PERFORMANCE

These activities are intended to maximise the theatre experience for all audience members. These activities guide students through a series of engagements intended to get them thinking about how and why they should behave in particular ways and what their behaviour means in this context.

### OBJECTIVES

Students will develop their awareness and understanding of:

- Theatre etiquette
- Appropriate behaviour for an audience
- Relationship between performers and the audience

### DISCUSSION POINTS

Live performance involves performers acting and interacting in real time, before your eyes. The audience is active in the way they view the performance. The performers on stage can hear and see you; your reactions and your behaviour can contribute to, disrupt or disturb their performance. The audience can have a big influence on the energy, pace and vibe of the actors and the performance as a whole.

### ACTIVITY

Talk to your students about whether they have been to the theatre before. Use the following questions to guide their discussion:

- What show did you see?
- Who did you go with?
- Where did you see it?
- What was the show about?
- Were the performers professional or amateur?
- What did it make you think about?

Split the class into small groups and ask them to create a list of behaviour they consider appropriate and inappropriate for different settings. Assign the groups the following settings:

- Footy match
- School assembly
- Cinema
- Rock concert
- Theatre

Come back together as a whole group and ask groups to feed their thoughts back to the group. Create a matrix that compares different kinds of behaviour across each setting. For example:

	Footy Match	Assembly	Cinema	Rock Concert	Theatre
Talking	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Eating					
Walking in and out					
Laughing / crying					
Booing / shouting					
Using your mobile phone					

Based on the above, discuss the conclusions students have come to about attending a live performance and compile a series of protocols to guide their behaviour. Ensure elements in the appendix at the end of this document are included.

# AFTER THE SHOW

## OBJECTIVE

Inspired by *Tao of Glass*, students use movement, objects, space, tempo, shape and levels to create evocative images that express an abstract idea or feeling. Students focus on symbol and metaphor, mood and atmosphere to create the desired impact.

## ACTIVITY

The ensemble in *Tao of Glass* often use objects to express a feeling or an idea. They rely on movement, imaginative transformation of objects and technology (lighting and sound) to create impact.

- Put students into small groups and give them a newspaper each.
- Provide them with one of the following feelings or ideas:
  - Overwhelmed
  - A spark of creativity
  - An idea that gets away
  - Terrified
  - Love
  - Chaos
- Get the students to transform these abstract ideas into visual images using the newspaper to form the ideas / feelings. Consider how you can use space, shape, pattern, tempo, levels to create a powerful image. Consider using some of Phillip Glass's music to underscore this exercise. Remember you don't need to be literal, instead, work with symbol and metaphor, mood and atmosphere to create the images.
- Reflect on the impact of each performance. What images were effective? What made it effective? Were they able to convey the feeling or idea to the audience?



# REVIEWING LIVE PERFORMANCE

There are many different ways to write a review, as reviews express an individual's thoughts and feelings about a show.

Traditional reviews will often:

## Give the reader brief background information about a production

- Title of show (mention playwright or choreographer if relevant)
- Is it an adaptation of another text? An original work?
- Identify the company presenting or performing the show
- Where is this show being performed?

## Briefly outline plot and themes

- Make sure not to include any spoilers
- Were the themes/issues effectively conveyed to the audience?
- How do the characters and relationships communicate these?
- Does the design (e.g. set, costumes, lighting, sound and filmic elements) contribute to the conveyance of themes/issues? Consider symbols and metaphors.
- How do style and form play a part in communicating these?

## Provide an idea of what the design elements are

- Think about set, lighting, costume, filmic elements and sound
- How did the design choices convey place, time and situation (dramatic meaning or context)?
- What atmosphere and mood were the creative team aiming for?
- How successful were they in achieving their goals?

## Evaluate the writing, production and performances

- You might consider things like: Were there any stand out performances or design elements? Why? What were the technical aspects of the production that stood out?

Reviews should reflect how you felt about a show, not what you think you should have felt.

In the digital age, the act of reviewing has changed immensely. It has enabled platforms for a broad range of voices to participate in the reviewing process that previously would not have been heard.

Have a go at writing a 140-character Twitter review of the work.



Image: Tristram Kenton

# SPECIFIC LINKS TO CURRICULUM

## DRAMA

Connections to Year 7 – 10 Drama: Spaces of performance

- imaginary spaces manipulated by stage components and properties, the elements of drama and audience. (Year 10 Drama)

Connections to Year 7 – 10 Drama: Self-management and group management skills and processes.

- effective group work processes in drama.

Connections to Year 11 AEDRA, Unit 2: Drama processes and the elements of drama

- the elements of drama shaped through viewpoints in improvisation to create dramatic meaning that challenges and questions forces
- directing theory that shapes the application of the elements of drama in

Connections to Year 11 AEDRA, Unit 2: Drama forms and styles

- relationships between presentational, non-realist drama and non-linear narrative structures

Connections to Year 12 ATDRA: Drama conventions

- techniques in presentational, non-realist drama for connecting with an audience through imaginative, political or polemical engagement
- juxtaposition and transition in role, character, space, time, forms and/or styles, including leaps of time, flashback and flash forward, fragmented and cyclical structures
- dynamic relationships between existing and emerging drama conventions

## MUSIC

Connections to Year 9 and 10 Music: Analysis and context

- identification, comparison and evaluation of a variety of music with an understanding of cultural and historical features, stylistic characteristics and associated conventions and music practices. (Year 9 Music)
- identification, analysis and evaluation of connections between social, cultural and historical influences and musical developments; and analysis of how the use and combination of the elements of music define stylistic characteristics and cultural and historical features. (Year 10 Music)

Connections to Year 11 ATAR Music: Composers

- influences upon prominent composers
- contributions made by composers to the development of the genre over an appropriate range of eras (minimum of two).

Connections to Year 11 ATAR Music: Musical characteristics appropriate to the era, genre and works studied

- form / structure and use of thematic material
- instrumentation and orchestration – score order, all terms, instrumental techniques and timbres relating to the designated works
- use of tonality, melody, rhythm, harmony, phrasing, tempo and texture
- use of dynamics and expressive elements compositional devices.

# APPENDIX

## Latecomers

The show will start promptly and latecomers will not be admitted until an appropriate break in the show. Be aware that for many shows, you will not be admitted if you arrive late.

## Lock out

If you leave your seat during the performance, you may not be allowed back in. Make sure you go to the toilet and have a drink of water before the performance and/or during the intervals.

## Noise

Food wrappers and plastic packets make a lot of noise. It is generally accepted that the audience does not eat during a performance. If you absolutely have to have lollies (such as a cough lolly), ensure it is out of the wrapper prior to the performance.

## Mobile phones

Please ensure mobile phones are turned off. If your phone rings during a performance, it can be very embarrassing for you and very distracting for the performers. It is inappropriate to receive a text during a performance.

## Talking

Allow everyone – performers and the audience – to focus on the performance by not talking. Talking is annoying for other audience members and can be very distracting for performers.

## Photographs

Taking photos, videos or audio recordings is not allowed.



Image: Tristram Kenton

This Education Resource was prepared in collaboration with Donna Hughes.