

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Víkingur Ólafsson Premieres Edmund Finnis

**Saturday 24 September 2022, 5pm & 9.30pm**  
**Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall**

Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2022/23. This new edition, the first under my curatorship since arriving as Head of Classical Music, celebrates classical music in all its forms with artists and ensembles from the UK and around the world.

Having spent the majority of my life immersed in classical music, it is a tremendous honour to be leading the programme at the Southbank Centre, and flying the flag for this incredible art form.

We look forward to welcoming you to our spaces.

**Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre**

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### Repertoire

#### Philip Glass (b 1937)

Opening from Glassworks 8'  
Etudes Nos.9, 2, 3, 5 and 6 25'

#### Edmund Finnis (b 1984)

Mirror Images 15'

#### Philip Glass

Etude No.20 12'

### Performers

Víkingur Ólafsson *piano*

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Philip Glass wrote *Opening* to open, indeed, his first album for CBS, *Glassworks*, released in 1982. It is an opening, an invitation into his musical world, and serves as such on this occasion. Consonant chords, and lightly dissonant ones, are held suspended as their notes oscillate, and yet the progression from one chord to another is sure. In this case, the right hand plays three notes against the left's two, which produces a gently rippling effect. There are very few dynamic markings, and so it is up to the pianist whether to aim for evenness or else gently bring forward the faster upper part or the slower lower. The piece also accepts different tempos. On his *Glass* album, Víkingur Ólafsson lets the piece extend in gentle meditation to close on eight minutes, but he has also played it in less than five. Glass himself, in a 1986 appearance on the David Letterman show that can be found on YouTube, makes it to the finish in just three.

Called on more often to present piano programmes, Glass in 1994 began writing études, of which he completed 16 that year and published ten of them to make a first book. These pieces, too, can take widely different interpretations simply in terms of speed. With some pianists the Ninth of the set is dreamy; Ólafsson is inclined to make it electric, the right hand entering over the left's trembling octaves with lightning bolts. Those erratic discharges are answered by descending chords, the whole repeating with more or less subtle modifications until an ominous circling takes over. Then the first music returns, and winds down.

After two pieces ruled by symmetry and regularity, the Second Etude comes along to unsteady the balance. The smallest repeating elements here are 15 notes long, seven plus eight, and there are not the expected four elements to a phrase but five. What results is a gentle lapping, lazily extended and gathering other layers as it goes, as a stream will gather leaves and branches on its surface. Then the extra layers are gradually lost and the stream is left clear, to slow into a pool of silence.

The Third Etude brings a return to speed, beginning with a syncopated figure that might suggest a storm bell and that keeps reappearing amid repercussions and variations. Right at the end the piece finds the light of a major chord.

Slow again, the Fifth Etude sets out a sequence of shadowy oscillations for which there seems no rest. As the long sequence, played by the left hand, begins to repeat, the right hand starts out on its own journey. The two end at the same time, but perhaps not together.

Spinning like a dark merry-go-round, the Sixth Etude at intervals gains weight and depth when its upward charging scale is played by the right hand in octaves. Just when this might be scheduled to happen again, the piece comes to a stop.

On *Mirror Images*, Edmund Finnis has provided his own note:

'Rarely a day goes by when I don't play the piano. For as long as I can remember, placing my hands on the piano keys has been a way to focus my mind, to experiment with sound, gesture and touch, to imagine, listen, and dream.

'*Mirror Images* is a sequence of nine short movements which reflect different aspects of my personal approach to the piano. Some are made of flowing iterative patterns, others are spacious and reflective. The hands trace lines that overlap and interweave, moving at different speeds. The piano tolls with gradually revolving harmonies. Deep shimmering resonances surge and recede. A song emerges. The piece ends with cascades.

'These *Mirror Images* are dedicated with affection to Víkingur Ólafsson.'

The Etudes of Glass' second book, which he completed in 2012, are longer on average, and the last, No.20, is the longest of all, playing for 11 and a half minutes in Ólafsson's recording. It may surprise us. Characteristic Glassian features – fluctuations between notes or chords, repeating sequences – are present, but only intermittently, appearing like relics of a past era. This piece has its sights on longer circuits. It may stumble on the same things again and again, but they will be in different contexts, as the line goes on.

**Programme notes © Paul Griffiths & Edmund Finnis (*Mirror Images*)**

#### **Find out more**

- ▶ [Vikingur Ólafsson](#)
- ▶ [Edmund Finnis](#)
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)