



“Einstein on the Beach” Score Donated to The Morgan Library & Museum

April 9, 2018

by Pat Rogers

Opera, theater and performance art all were turned on its head when the groundbreaking opera “Einstein on the Beach” debuted in Avignon, France in 1976. Stretching nearly five hours and featuring a non-linear narrative, the work was a collaboration between minimalist composer Phillip Glass and avant garde director Robert Wilson. It broke a range of operatic conventions and went on to become a celebrated work and helped propel both internationally. It was produced by the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, who [founded the Watermill Center](#) in The Hamptons in 1992 with Robert Wilson.

Glass’s autograph score for the landmark work, as well as scene designs and other items from the landmark opera, are to become part The Morgan Library & Museum’s collection through a bequest from the estate of Paul F. Walter, a New York collector and philanthropist, announced the New York museum. Walter was a longtime supporter of the Morgan and died in January 2017.

“Many have said that the true starting point of contemporary opera was 1976 with the production of ‘Einstein on the Beach’ in Avignon,” Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum, stated in the announcement. “The work was groundbreaking on so many levels, from staging to instrumentation to the choral arrangements. The unrivaled genius of Mr. Glass is evident throughout, and we are deeply grateful to Paul Walter and his estate for generously leaving this work to the Morgan. It is an extraordinary addition to our distinguished collection of music manuscripts.”

Glass’s score is no stranger to the Morgan. In 2010, Walter loaned “Einstein on the Beach” to The Morgan for the benefit of scholarly research. In 2012, the museum mounted an exhibition devoted to the work and its stage adaptations.

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Philip Glass (b. 1937), Autograph manuscript, Einstein on the Beach, The Morgan Library & Museum, Bequest of Paul F. Walter. Photography by Anthony Troncale. © Dunvagen Music Publishers. Courtesy The Morgan Library & Museum.

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Glass eschewed tradition and composed “Einstein on the Beach” for the synthesizers and

woodwinds of the Philip Glass Ensemble and for voice and solo violin, instead of the typical orchestral arrangement. Abstract dance sequences, choreographed by Lucinda Childs and Andrew de Groat, were juxtaposed against a sequence of large, recurring images projected on a screen at the back of the stage.

The opera's four acts were framed and connected with a series of short scenes or "knee plays." Rather than the standard intermission, the audience was free to enter and exit throughout the almost five-hour performance.

The sung portions of the opera use number sequences and solfège syllables (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti); the spoken sections feature texts by Christopher Knowles, Childs and actor Samuel M. Johnson. Contemporary events and notable people of the 1970s are referenced in various scenes—from the famous trial of heiress-turned-revolutionary Patty Hearst to the Beatles and pop singer David Cassidy.



Philip Glass and Robert Wilson during rehearsals of *Einstein on the Beach* in Avignon, France, 1976, © Philippe Gras. Courtesy The Morgan Library & Museum.

"Einstein on the Beach" was the first of Glass's portrait trilogy featuring three men who changed the world. It was followed by "Satyagraha" (1980), loosely based on the life of Mahatma Gandhi, and then "Akhnaten" (1983), based on the life and religious convictions of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten.

"Einstein on the Beach" was revived in 1984, 1992 and in 2012-2013 when it toured internationally.

Paul Walter was involved with the Morgan since the late 1970s, when he donated a collection of Indian miniature paintings, an area otherwise not represented in the institution's collections, according to the museum. He was named a Life Fellow in 1979 and later a Benefactor and Fellow in Perpetuity. He was also a founding member of the Morgan's Modern and Contemporary Collectors Committee which formed in 2006.