

*Drumming - Part One* by Steve Reich

Percussion Quartet

Performed by Lowell Fuchs, Adam Gresham, Michael Skillern & Dillon Tanksley

Sponsored by Dr. Stuart Gerber

Chief Author: Dillon Tanksley

An Exploration of Phasing and Process Music in Steve Reich's *Drumming*

Steve Reich is considered by many to be one of the most innovative and important American composers of all time. Reich's minimalist style is truly unique and recognizable for the way that he uses the repetition of short rhythmic and melodic phrases that shift and transform in ways that change the listener's perspective. Early in his career, Reich focused on creating electronic music made from pieces of spliced tapes. In his experimentation, he pioneered a technique known as phasing; a technique made possible by layering two recordings of the same phrase and gradually speeding one of the recordings up to fall out of sync with the other until they eventually interlocked again one sixteenth note apart. *Drumming*, composed in 1970, is influenced by the 12/8 rhythms found within African drumming culture, and is one of Reich's first compositions to utilize phasing performed in real-time by musicians on acoustic instruments. From a compositional standpoint, Reich was interested in music being a gradual process. He wanted, in his own words, "a compositional process and a sounding music that are one in the same." This philosophy provides the listener with an opportunity to be just as active in the performance as the performers themselves; dissecting and piecing together the modulation of an original idea into numerous contrapuntal possibilities. In our creative study of this piece, our goal was to explore these possibilities as well as better understand the process of phasing. There is much room left for interpretation as we control which melodies are highlighted and how long the process takes. We have spent many hours of practice learning and understanding the subtleties and nuances that make this music effective, and we aim to bring to life the special musical process that Reich intended. Our desire is to engage those that may be unfamiliar with Reich and minimalist music as well as present this monumental work in a way that is artistically and musically tasteful.