Máire Carroll: Philip Glass' Piano Études
Friday 23 October, 7.30pm

American composer Philip Glass (born 1937) finished his set of *Twenty Piano Études* in 2012, a project that took him over two decades to complete. An étude is a piece of music intended to improve piano technique, usually by focusing on one particular technical challenge. Despite their practical nature, piano études have become some of the most poetically refined works in the piano repertoire. Due to the rapidly growing popularity of the piano since the early nineteenth century, demands for piano études grew with composers such as Clementi, Czerny, Chopin & Liszt contributing to the genre. The twentieth & twenty-first century has seen additions to the piano étude catalogue through the works of György Ligeti, Marc-Andre Hamelin, Nicole Lizeé, Nicolai Kapustin, Louise Talma, Unsuk Chin amongst others.

Glass composed his two volumes of *Piano Études* across two decades between 1991 and 2012 during a productive period of collaboration, performance and commissioning. Nico Muhly, composer and long-term collaborator of Glass, has described these *Études* as "little diagrams of where his head is at the time". Though the first book of *Études* primarily emphasized the idea of the piece as an exercise, the second set developed into what Glass called "an extension of a musical journey undertaken in the last ten years." Glass has discussed how his first book of studies addressed pianistic technique while the second book follows more harmonically daring paths which has been described by the composer as "the language of music itself— developing new strategies regarding rhythmic and harmonic movement." John Rockwell, the music critic who has closely followed Glass' career since the 1970s, has described the Études as "a genuinely new direction for Glass. They retain most of his signature stylistic elements; and yet they manage, without descending into pastiche, to summon all manner of ghosts of keyboards past."

These piano studies afford a fascinating insight into the mind and sound world of Glass. Between the influence of Rachmaninoff in *No 11*, the searching quality of *No 16*, the fiercely repeated quavers in *No 6* and the final elegiac conclusion inspired by Schubert of *No 20*, this collection of *Études* demonstrates the scope of the composer's voice. The *Études* have become one of the most performed and revered modern collections for the instrument. Since their publication in 2015, pianists across the world have taken to performing and recording the Philip Glass *Études* in what is now considered a groundbreaking contribution to the twenty-first century piano repertoire.