

# Talent Glass Works

**P**hilip Glass is so prolific he could be considered the Joyce Carol Oates of the avant-garde. He's just written his second symphony and had a new string quartet recorded by the Kronos Quartet, and in addition to that is preparing a ballet for La Scala, a theater piece with director Robert Wilson (*without* actors), and a third film with director Godfrey Reggio (*Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaaqatsi*). Then there's his latest work, a theater piece incorporating Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, which makes its American debut at BAM December 7. *Beauty* is performed with the Philip Glass Ensemble and four soloists in front of a projection of the entire film, presented without any cuts or alterations but with the sound turned off.

Glass often works in threes (the three films with Reggio and the three portrait operas—most notably *Einstein on the Beach*), and *Beauty* is no different. "I got the idea to base operas on films the way they used to be based on novels or plays," he explains. "I started with *Orphée*, which we did last year at BAM. That was really a straight opera with the libretto based on the film's scenario. In this case, I took it a step further by using the image itself. After about ten minutes, you get the hang of how to look at it. You end up with two characters, the live-performance character and the



film character, and you begin to see it as one character played by two persons." The final work in this particular trilogy will be an adaptation of Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles*, yet another attempt to incorporate film into live performance art. "I'm collaborating with [choreographer] Susan Marshall," he says. "It will be opera, dance, and theater." While *Beauty* and *Orphée* originally featured scores by Georges Auric, *Les Enfants* used music by Bach and Vivaldi. Did usurping such heavyweights give Glass pause? "You mean is that more scary?" he asks, laughing. "Well, I'm thinking of tackling the problem head-on. One of the pieces, as you might remember, is a concerto for three harpischords, and I'm thinking of writing a concerto for three pianos. I'm undaunted. At least I don't have the problem of dealing with a composer who has an estate and a widow and all that."

MICHAEL GILTZ