

Steve Reich's presence a major musical event

By IFAN PAYNE

REVIEW

THE presence on Friday evening of the important minimalist composer Steve Reich and his musicians at St David's Hall, Cardiff, must be counted as a major musical event. This concert, which was the first of the three in the contemporary music series *Who Dares Wins*, featured as its centrepiece a performance of Reich's recently completed *Sextet*.

This is a complex, tough-centred work, with a lovely melodic central section reminiscent on its effect of the "big tune" in John Adams's *Piano Music*.

In its musical theatricality, the *Sextet* represents Reich shouldering his way out of a strictly minimalist structure, while at the same time fulfilling, in its aching beauty, the promise of his equally lovely choral *Tehillim*.

Sextet is, in its complexity of harmonic structure, emotional variety and dramatic tension, a major work of the minimalist style, surpassing in stature Reich's own seminal *Octet*.

Like all great music it creates its own seductive sound world and the end brings the shock of silence.

One cannot imagine a better performance of the *Sextet*, just as the perfor-

mances of *Clapping Music* and of *Vermont Counterpoint* were the most accomplished that I have heard.

These are all lovely and complex works. Like snowflakes and ice crystals every note seems the same, but every sound is different.

Each time I hear Steve Reich's music and that of Philip Glass in concert, the view is reinforced that the music is more effective in live performance than it is in a recording. The reverberation and resonance of the auditorium adds to the build up and layering of extended fundamentals and harmonics in a way which is only hinted at on record.

When the small size of the audience for Screaming Lord Sutch and Jet Harris meets the size of the audience for Steve Reich, I am not sure whether things are looking up or down for music in Cardiff.

But when that audience sits resolutely in its seats cheering at the end of the concert and willing Steve Reich and his musicians to perform once more, there must be some hope for the health of contemporary music here.