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Steinmetz Non-Interview

BRENDA SCHUMAN-POST

John Steinmetz's *Bassoon Concerto* was jointly commissioned by the Santa Rosa Symphony, The Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Keene Chamber Orchestra.

I first met John Steinmetz at The International Double Reed Society Conference in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 1995. Since then, we have seen one another perhaps only three or four times, but we are blessed with one of those mysterious friendships that flow seamlessly. I was so impressed with his *Bassoon Concerto*, performed by The Santa Rosa Symphony, I felt compelled to write a review, and sent him a copy. To my delight, he wrote back, expressing some thoughts and feelings about his own experience of the piece.

STEINMETZ: It is very gratifying to feel so understood. I'm always amazed by this basic mystery of composing: noises that touch my heart sometimes touch somebody else's heart, too, and sometimes even in a similar way. It's astonishing, really. My inner critics are so loud in my head that it really helps me to hear that somebody heard and felt what I was trying to get at.

It's funny, but I was more worried about getting the opposite reaction to the concerto: not that listeners would find the music too strange, but that people might feel that the influences were old-hat, too familiar, or cliché. I tried hard not to let the music be any of those things, but I was still worried. I always forget that sounds I have loved for decades are brand new for most ordinary concertgoers.

At every performance so far, and even at rehearsals, people just seem to get happy when the drums come in. I'm still surprised by how strongly the drums press that happy button.

What I think is happening, even in classical music, is that something that might be called heart-energy seems to be flowing into the culture. Our classical tradition suffers from an excess of intellectualizing and overemphasis on technical matters. (Of course these are strengths of our tradition, too: they can make it possible for music to have amazing power.) As usual, one way that heart energy comes in is through folk musics and folk instruments. (At one of the pre-concert lectures Jeff Kahane and I chatted about how classical music in any culture is about preservation, but if you only preserve without renewing, the music loses vitality. So in the West musicians have continually turned to folk musics to revitalize their music. Sometimes composers have brought in classical traditions from other cultures, and lots of "serious" or "classical" composers of the 20th century drew on jazz. What might once have seemed exotic or "other" becomes accepted as part of a familiar piece. After a while people no longer realize that a "classic" piece includes non-classical elements.

And also as usual, people steeped in the classical tradition often resist those energies and influences, perhaps from a concern for purity or preservation, or maybe just from fear of the unfamiliar. That's the resistance or bafflement some composers surely must encounter.

So far all the performances of the concerto have come about through friendships, and maybe being centered on friendship has helped the piece avoid the resistance. One of my favorite things about the Los Angeles premiere was that the stage was full of friends and so was the audience. It seemed like the right way to make music. Orchestras have been surprisingly happy about playing it, and that definitely surprised me, even though it was certainly what I wanted! Maybe another factor is that younger orchestra musicians have ears full of jazz and world music and groove music of all kinds. Maybe there's more openness now. I have been very lucky that the commissioning orchestras gave the piece much more time than a typical concerto.

I suspect that some listeners don't like the piece -- they don't talk to me, though, so I don't find out what they experience-- but on the whole the audiences have seemed very open as well. As far as I can tell, they want to experience something vivid, and in order to have a vivid experience they need to feel that they can relate to the music. They seem to be able to relate to this piece while at the same time enjoying the unfamiliar things about it. (I don't really know why this time around the unfamiliar is enjoyable instead of scary.)

I have been surprised and delighted by the warmth and enthusiasm the piece sparks. I was so worried before the very first rehearsal! And maybe I forgot about all the work I did to make sure that the piece satisfied me -- so at least one person would like it!

I've been thinking about what has helped me get to this point, and CalArts was a huge help. The place opened my ears and heart to musics I never knew about, and then it helped me not feel too lonely in my collection of interests and enthusiasms. Not only were there teachers from other cultures, but there were fellow students immersing themselves in the other musics while studying Western music. So I had, and have, a lot of friends who are used to the idea of combining different influences. It just wasn't a big deal. Bill Douglas also was a huge influence; he absorbed all kinds of musics into his style.

All these experiences also got me interested in a difficult problem: how to use the influences I love to create something that isn't just a mix of influences, but is music with its own integrity. As you know, there have been many experiments in mixing musical styles -- we need lots of that research to be going on! -- and only some of those experiments result in music that I like. Sometimes the influences seem pasted on, or sometimes their beauty doesn't survive the transplant. Sometimes the hybrid seems exotic but otherwise empty.

Doing crossover is a fascinating challenge, and I think it's very difficult. Well, look how many decades it took me to figure out how to do that concerto!

I want to try to get at one other thought, something I haven't figured out yet, but something I have experienced before. I think that I was helped by my feeling of uncertainty. I did not have very much confidence in what I was doing while writing the piece. I wasn't at all sure that the sounds or the ideas would work, or that people would like them. But by now I have enough experience as a composer to know that all I can do is try to please myself instead of trying to guess what others will like or accept. (It was tricky to do this without triggering unhealthy perfectionism, and I'm still not sure why I finally felt ready to attempt such a large-scale piece, my first piece for orchestra.)

So I kept at it longer than usual, tinkering with the music, often throwing a whole section away after hours of tinkering, until I was reasonably satisfied with the whole thing. Even so, I was very, very nervous at the first rehearsal (thanks to all powers for setting it up that I didn't have to play!), and I was nervous all over again when it was time to play it myself. I'm not even sure what I'm getting at here, but part of it is that it's difficult for people can see the beauty in themselves. As artists we try to make ourselves available to beauty, but we're much too used to our way of being to be able to tell what part is valuable for others. Because there is so much talk of "mastery," it is hard to accept that all we can do is to pursue what we care about with both precision and openness. We don't really know what will come of it.

Terry Riley after "In C" to "A Rainbow in Curved Air"

MARK ALBURGER

I had become interested in improvisation, so obviously jazz started becoming an important part of my life -- the great improvisers in American music were jazz musicians. Almost no classical musicians improvised [Terry Riley in Amirkhanian].

Most of my musical experience has been in the jazz hall, or places where musicians are actually on top of the notes they're playing, every note is danger. I think that music has to have danger, you have to be right on the precipice to really be interested . . . [Terry Riley in Knox, n.p.].

Terry Riley's *Keyboard Studies* (1964-1966) was begun in San Francisco in 1964 and continued evolving over the next several years in both notational and improvisational forms. It is the transition music which links Riley's tape works to *In C* and beyond into the years of solo keyboard improvisations.

In 1964 . . . I was playing this keyboard study with only four notes in it. That's where I was learning what those four notes were about, and I used to play whole performances for an hour or two with the four notes [Terry Riley in Suzuki, 388].

An early version of *Keyboard Studies* -- known alternately as *Keyboard Study No. 1*, or *Keyboard Studies No. 1* -- was performed as *Coule* on November 1, 1964, with *In C*, *Music for the Gift*, *I*, *Shoe Shine*, and *In B-Flat or Is It A-Flat* at the San Francisco Tape Music Center. *Coule* was also given at two other San Francisco concerts in May 1965.

. . . a furiously fast tempo. . . I remember very long night sessions in the spring of '65 when he kept playing his four note motives over and over again with the very gradual changes of emphasis from one tone to another (the four notes at the time were, I think, A-flat, B-flat, G, F), constantly played with just one hand.

. . . the transitions are made so imperceptible[ly] that the listeners now and then land in a state of uncertainty as to the metrical accent, until they suddenly realize that the seemingly static sound actually has rotated a quarter of a revolution. . . .

When [Riley] came to Stockholm two years later [1967] he played with both hands. . . . I asked him if he maintained the four-note piece as an alternative. But he said no. His four-note thing was his state in the spring of '65. Now his constant practicing has led up to the more complex form involving both hands [Folke Rabe in Suzuki, 389].

A second version of *Keyboard Studies* (*Keyboard Study No. 2*, *Keyboard Studies No. 2*) is said by Riley to consist of some thirteen circular scores, probably one to a page. The autograph *Keyboard Studies* (New York City, November 29, 1966) has also been designated *Keyboard Study No. 2* (in Mertens), *Keyboard Study page 2* (in the Cage book of scores) and *Untitled Organ*. The piece exists in both circular and horizontal staves notations.

La Monte Young has pointed out that the reason why you never get tired of listening to the blues is that the pitches in the Dorian blues, the sad moaning blues, are in perfect agreement with the overtone series of the fundamental pitch. . . . So in my "Keyboard Studies," I play only on the pitches that are in the blues [Terry Riley in Knox, n. p].

Pitch language utilizes the basic hexachord F G Ab Bb, transposed at times to the fourth (Bb C Db Eb), fifth (C D Eb F), and octave. The basic hexachord is once enriched to a pentachord via the addition of a C, as transition to other tonal areas. Each of the fifteen cells contains only one of the collections, containing anywhere from three to eight notes. The work is a steady stream of fast notes, with the exception of sustained whole notes in five of the figures.

Each figure should be repeated in a continuous manner, for a long period of time, so that it turns into a stream of notes, moving steadily without accent. When an additional figure is introduced by the other hand, it should match the first figure in tempo and evenness. A figure may start on any note of its group.

Each hand should play all the figures, but one of the first two figures must be present at all times.

3 and 6 note figures, when played against 4 note figures, displace themselves 1 and 2 units respectively, and are useful in making precise changes in alignment.

A sequential order of left to right, top to bottom, should be followed. A performer may return to a previously played figure, but it is inadvisable to skip ahead.

All the above suggestions apply to group performance. The music may terminate when all are playing the final figure [Riley, *Keyboard Studies*].

Riley has played *Untitled Organ* on harmonium, and on electronic keyboard equipped with tape delay system. It was given as a chamber piece à la The Philip Glass Ensemble with two amplified pianos, electric piano, Hammond organ, and pipe organ on August 13, 1970 in London's Albert Hall.

Also under this name, the work became part of Riley's first commercial recording, performed by the composer on harmonium for the album *Reed Streams* (Mass Art, 1966), with *Dorian Reeds*.

By that time, I was really starting to be my own. My main drawback was that I didn't have any money and any equipment. I couldn't buy a keyboard; I couldn't buy a tape recorder. So somebody gave me an old harmonium that had a vacuum-cleaner engine in it, to drive it, to drive the air -- it didn't have bellows, right? I made my first album [*Reed Streams*] on that harmonium. . . . [*Reed Streams*] was on Mass Art -- a little downtown company. But it was a visible company, because they were doing Andy Warhol stuff and pop art stuff and mostly plastic products like shopping bags that Andy Warhol had designed. . . . [T]hey only did a couple of recordings -- one with music of John Cage, which involved Max Neuhaus. I think there were three records put out all together. Every once in a while you'll see one. The other recording was *How To Make a Happening*, by Allen Kaprow [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 13].

The album is a rustic recording to match a rustic instrument, the four-pitch motives heard against a percussion clank of what are perhaps the mechanisms of the harmonium. The initial ascending pattern F-Ab-G-Bb is first heard as an ascending solo line, here, as everywhere, considerably higher than standard tuning (although not quite F#-A-G#-B). To this is joined a second handsworth of contrapuntal interest, with motivic and metrical changes. The effect is one of extreme stasis, hypnosis, trance -- a calmly primitive world. True to the evolving minimalist aesthetic, the work just cuts off unceremoniously at its conclusion.

Figure. Terry Riley. *Keyboard Studies* (November 29, 1966). Hexachord / Pentachord (P) Locations and Number of Beats in Each of the Fifteen Cells

Fm:	I	I	I	I (P)
	4	4	6	8
	V	V	V	
	4	3	4	
	IV	IV		
	4	3		
	V	V	V	
	4	3	4	
	I	I	I	
	4	3	4	

Keyboard Studies has continued to evolve over the years.

I seriously started to consider my voice or role in this arena, which includes the Pantheon of my teachers and heroes, Duane Hampton, Adolf Baller, Wally Rose, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, and Bill Evans, in the mid-1960's when I began formulating and composing "Keyboard Studies" These works, based on very basic improvisational procedures and heavily informed by many years of study of North Indian Raga and Jazz, form the basis of nearly all the keyboard and piano playing I have done [Riley, Notes to Riley's *The Lisbon Concert*].

Autumn Leaves was the next piece I tried to do [after *In C*] -- kind of in a similar style, but it was a much more dreamy piece. It was actually based on the song *Autumn Leaves*, but very, very abstractly. It doesn't use the changes, but motivically it's based on the tune. . . . It was an open score. The only performance that was ever done of that was down at Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz. It was a very strange band -- just people I could get. Sonny Lewis had played the first performance of *In C* and had worked a lot with me. He was in one of my bands in France. I had met him in France when I was playing at the SAC bases. He had come back to California and was playing saxophone. And then an old friend of mine, Mel Weitzman, who plays recorders and was also in the first performance of "In C." So the three of us performed *Autumn Leaves*. I played piano. . . . That was a piece that I liked, but finally rejected as a piece to be performed. That has gone its way and died a natural death [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 10].

Autumn Leaves (1965), one of several open scores beyond *In C*, is in the spirit of its famous relative -- modular, tonal / modal -- but with irregular rhythms, a mix of long sustained notes, and short abrupt figures with and without rests.

Then the next piece that I wrote [after *Autumn Leaves*] was *Tread On the Trail*, for the next [San Francisco] Tape Music [Center] concert. This time I was playing with a rehearsal jazz band with Mel Martin, Jon Gibson, and a whole bunch of people. This was my first time really playing jazz with jazz musicians. We were rehearsing once a week, and we decided to do a concert at the Tape Music Center. And so I wrote this piece for that. And it's a jazz piece, but it's not like most jazz pieces in that it doesn't have any changes. It's built on a 43-beat rhythmic cycle and it goes to the middle and then retrogrades out to the end. Just a bunch of lines. . . . [It is] modal, but the mode gets a little bit convoluted. . . . It's written down. It's been performed; Jon Gibson recorded it on his album -- a version of it, on Point Records. . . . People still perform *Tread On the Trail* [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 10].

Tread on the Trail (1965) references jazz in instrumentation (saxophones, trumpet, trombone, drums) and is based on repetitive, jazz-like riffs and motives which are layered and overlapped -- a live *Gift*, but with a steady, slow pulse and very irregular rhythms.

A taped excerpt from the archives of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills includes an extended drum solo with occasional improvised interjections from the winds.

I came to New York in 1965. After the *In C* performances, I went to Mexico on a bus for three months. I was actually looking for something, but I didn't know what. I guess after *In C*, I was a little bit wondering what the next step was to be, you know. And I guess what I really wanted to do was go back and live in Morocco, because I was interested in Eastern music and, at that time, Moroccan music attracted me the most. . . . So we went to Mexico. My point was to get to Veracruz, put our Volkswagen bus on a boat and have it shipped to Tangier, and live in Morocco on the bus. We drove all the way down to Vera Cruz, but couldn't get a boat; nobody would put our bus on the boat. So we drove all the way up to New York. We were going to try to do the same thing from New York, right? But I started hanging out with La Monte again and renewing old acquaintances. And Walter De Maria, who was a sculptor, had a friend who was leaving his apartment. This guy had a fantastic loft on Grand Street. And he said, "Do you want to trade the loft for the bus?" So I did, and that began my four-year stay in New York. . . . [W]e had a child and she was traveling with us. . . . [M]y wife [Ann] had a teaching credential, so wherever we would go she could always substitute or teach. When we were in New York, she taught up in Harlem at Headstart. She taught the whole four years we were in New York and supported us until my Columbia Record started making a little bit of money for us [Terry Riley in Duckworth, 2754-276].

I was wanting to go back to Europe, actually. I had been working as a pianist in a bar, and I had saved enough money to consider that we might be able to make it if we could find a cheap way to go. . . . What we did was we bought an old VW van, and we'd heard that there was a boat down in Veracruz, Mexico, that would take you to Poland for \$100 a person. . . . Some rumor that someone had told us late one night convinced us that, if we just went to Veracruz, we'd find this boat. So we took off to Mexico, and spent the summer in Mexico camping in the bus, and ended up in Veracruz. . . . This was 1965, summer of '65. I sold Steve [Reich] my remaining tape recorder, whatever equipment I had left. . . . It was a good one. It was the only good one I had. I saw him the other night at Michael Tilson Thomas's -- we were having dinner together. I asked him, "Where's that tape recorder? We should put it in a museum; we both owned it!" He said he sold it to somebody; he couldn't remember who! . . . It's probably history now... So we went to Veracruz; couldn't find the boat. We found a boat to take us to Europe, but it was much more money than we had. So we drove to New York, and I ended up trading the bus for a loft, and ended up spending the next four years in New York [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 10].

Riley returned to New York from California in the fall of 1965, shortly after Jon Gibson (in late 1964) and Steve Reich (in September 1965) made similar moves. By this time, Reich was working with tape loop "phasing," and Riley did not seek out future collaborations with him.

For a while I played with La Monte in The Theatre of Eternal Music, which was a group that satisfied a lot of my musical needs. I mean, it had that kind of framework. We rehearsed every day and the music was inspiring, it was modal, we were dealing with just intervals, just intonation, there were a lot of new ideas, a lot of stimulating people -- Tony Conrad and John Cale -- the musicians that worked with him were really interesting. So, for a while, that was the main interest that I had, playing with them. But then I decided that I really had to do something more creatively on my own, I mean, I had just a little bit different idea of how to do this. I began the solo work then with the solo keyboards [Terry Riley in Amirkhanian, 19]. . . . [La Monte] lived on Church Street; I lived on Grand near Bowery, so I could walk to his house in about ten minutes. . . . When I first got to New York, we reconnected; he asked me if I'd be in the band: The Theatre of Eternal Music. So I joined the band, started rehearsing with La Monte and John Cale and [La Monte's wife] Marian [Zazeela] and Tony Conrad. Maybe we didn't even do one concert together with John. We were rehearsing with John for awhile, but he was getting involved with The Velvet Underground. I ended up doing the next few concerts with The Theatre of Eternal Music. . . . I only worked with them for a few months, actually. I think it was about seven or eight months. I know that the last concert was in the summer of '66. . . . I love La Monte's music, and I like working with him, but I really had other objectives that I wanted to try to realize, and I couldn't realize them. It's his music, and though I enjoyed performing it, I had to do my own work, too [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 10-11].

Further work with Ken Dewey resulted in a theatre piece, *Sames* (1965), presented at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque in November, an outgrowth of *I*, now involving the inflection of the first person pronoun in a variety of singular ways. Riley sang with La Monte Young's Theatre of Eternal Music, beginning about the same time as *Sames*, and so overlapping with violist John Cale, whose last performance with the group was in December of that year. It was in this manner, via Young, that Riley discovered the pleasures of just intonation. He stayed with The Theatre for about a year, performing with them for the first time in February of 1966.

My mother gave me enough money to buy two tape recorders, and I got a saxophone very cheaply -- a few hundred bucks. I made my first album with a saxophone and a harmonium: "Dorian Reeds." It's being re-released. Jon Gibson gave me one lesson. He went up to Manny's with me. We bought the saxophone. He said, "Here are the fingerings. This is the way it works." I said, "Fine. O.K., I'll work on it."

So I started practicing three hours a day like a madman to really learn to be a saxophone player, right? Crash course. . . . *Dorian Reeds* is an earlier generation of *Poppy Nogood* [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 11].

I think La Monte [rather than Coltrane] is more responsible [for the turn to modality and soprano saxophone]. His *Dorian Blues* [1963] and so on were much more influential on me in terms of form than Coltrane's music. . . . Also . . . the shenai of Bismillah Khan [also via La Monte] [Terry Riley in Strickland, *American Composers*, 115]. . . . [*Dorian Reeds*] was the first version of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* [Terry Riley in Duckworth, 275]. . . . I decided there was a sound I wanted to get with the soprano saxophone. I'd been listening to Coltrane a lot and was very much in love with his soprano sound, so I got one and started teaching myself to play it and combined that with the ideas I'd worked on with the Chet Baker Group [Terry Riley in Palmer, "Riley," 18].

Riley was inspired to learn the soprano sax at this time by the examples of Young, Coltrane, and Gibson. The latter gladly provided instruction. Riley's first album, *Dorian Reeds* (1966-67, also known as *Dorian ---*, since it may be for any instrument(s) was composed as recorded.

Two scores are extant: one circular, the other horizontal, both post-dating the recording as 1967. The horizontal score designates two types of repeating figures: "Continuum figures," (identified as three linked ovals in the notation) are the repeating figures which begin both the composition and new sections of the composition after cadenzas and "non-looping" figures; "Looping figures," (shown as two linked ovals) are repeating figures which follow "continuum figures," "non-looping figures," cadenzas and other looping figures.

The performers are numbered 1-?, #1 being the leader, the others following consecutively to the figure he selects. They then make various alignments with him on the same repeating figure. The leader always begins with the continuum figure, but then he is free to move to a loop figure (s), lines 8-9 as a cadenza, always returning back to the continuum figure to begin a new section [Riley, *Dorian ---*, 2].

The overall effect is more and less organized than "In C": All performers stay with one module at a time, yet the piece veers forward and backward ad libitum with respect to the written page, and the allowance for improvisation guarantees a freer approach each time. In effect, the piece represents a written, real-time response to the time-lag-accumulator (as do other Riley works of this period, in a less thoroughgoing manner), and points in the direction of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band*.

A lot of the copies of *Dorian Reeds* ended up going to Europe -- in Sweden, for some reason. Some record store got really interested and bought most of the copies up and they were shipped to Sweden. The first time I got called back to Europe was in Sweden because of that record.

And because of Folke Raabe, my old friend. He'd come to San Francisco for the first performance of *In C*, and went back raving to all his teachers about this piece, so they invited me back [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 13].

Riley's first recording, *Reed Streams* (Mass Art, November 1966), featured *Dorian Reeds* with *Untitled Organ*. Like *Organ*, *Reeds* is an unvarnished affair, with its initial D-F-E-D and D-F-E-D-G motives honking out hauntingly and enthusiastically by the novice saxophonist. The multi-tracking, given the limitations of two tape recorders, is impressive, and the use of saxophone as both foreground and background material makes for an interesting, indeed fascinating, comparison with "Poppy." Here are many of the same motives, but now heard with the benefit of hindsight (or "hindhearing"?) with the knowledge of things to come. The motives range from extremely soulful and to wonderfully blatty, in textures both elegiac and busy.

Two years after the recording, a tape performance of *Dorian Reeds* was presented at Yale University, in a program which included an excerpt from La Monte Young's *Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, Steve Reich's *Melodica*, and Philip Glass's *Strung Out* -- the only time these four major minimalist composers ever shared a concert billing in these early years.

I was invited to play on festivals. The biggest one was *Intermedia '68*, which was very highly publicized in New York. I forget how many artists were on that, but it was just a period when people were getting very interested in intermedia, because of the rock shows with the light and everything. We were doing a similar thing. And then the Electric Circus started. I had a guy that I was working with, an artist [named] Bob Benson, and he created an environment for me to play in, and we toured all the New York Colleges with it and played BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music] with it.

By this time I had worked my way up to a Vox Supercontinental Organ, you know -- a lounge organ, two manual? Which had just been used for pop bands and rock bands, but I actually found it a pretty good instrument.

I wasn't working. My wife was teaching school. We were living on very little money, but we were living. I wasn't making any money at that point. After I was in New York for about six or eight months, maybe a year, I got a gig playing at a bar over in Staten Island once a week. . . . Taking the ferry. That was a trip. I had to take the ferry to Staten Island, then a bus to the gig -- this bar. . . . I remember that it was open until about three. Then, by that time, the ferry wasn't running any more, so I had to take a bus to Brooklyn, and then a subway back to Manhattan. I'd leave for work about eight in the evening. I'd get home at around six in the morning, for thirty-five bucks or something, if I was even making that much [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 12].

I ain't no sit down composer [Terry Riley to Steve Reich in Suzuki, 207].

I put my music down on a tiny sheet of paper and spend all my time playing [Terry Riley Simms, 423].

Olson III (1967), an open score for voices and / or instruments, is a rare example of Riley's early vocal work, and the last piece the composer committed to paper until string quartets of the 1980s. The progressively revealed text results in the phrase "BEGIN TO THINK ABOUT HOW WE ARE TO BE."

For any number of voices and/or instruments.

Tempo is free, although not too slow, and all note values are equal.

Where a chorus is used, it is best to divide into groups of four to six singers who perform together as one unit. In this way a better balance is achieved and the performers can stagger their breathing.

Octave transpositions may be made, but the contour of each phrase should be as written.

The piece may be performed with each performer or group of singers starting at the beginning, although not necessarily together, and moving to each new phrase without pause after an indeterminate number of repeats. Performers should not attempt to remain together. The piece ends when the last performer has finished the last phrase.

Alternatively, each performer may start anywhere in the piece and proceed in order, as described above, through the phrases, returning to 1 after 30, and stopping just before whatever phrase was used to start [Riley, *Olson III*].

Olson III was commissioned by Swedish Radio and the Royal Academy of Music, Stockholm, for a music education project. In it, Riley abandons linearity but maintains the communal aspects of *In C* and the stream-of-notes consciousness of *Keyboard Studies*.

The premiere of *Olson III* took place on April 27, 1967, by the orchestra and boys choir of the Nacka School of Music in Stockholm. Tempo was moderate and pulse was strong. Riley would not pen another score until the 1980's.

[H]aving worked with Sonny Lewis, there were a lot of ideas with the tape delay that I wanted to do. So *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* was the piece that I eventually wound up performing. I knew where I was going with it. I just had to develop the techniques to do it [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 11].

I got a couple of tape recorders and started playing [soprano sax] through them with delay.

That piece *Poppy Nogood* . . . is something I used to play in various forms at concerts for four or five years [Terry Riley in Palmer, "Riley," 18].

My daughter, when she was a tiny little girl, called me Poppy instead of Daddy. And Poppy Nogood sometimes when she was mad at me. . . . The Phantom Band, of course, was the time-lag tape system I'd developed in order to overdub my playing. . . . Both the soprano and the sopranino sound very shenai-like, more like double reeds than other saxophones. I felt the only way I could develop *Poppy Nogood and His Phantom Band* was to play the saxophone myself, because I didn't want to tell the saxophone player to do this or that. I felt it had to come out of my own musical spontaneity. I didn't see any choice but to see if I could learn the saxophone well enough to do it. I only learned to play the saxophone well enough to play this piece. I couldn't play *Cherokee* or anything like that. . . . My goal was to play this piece. And I left the saxophone essentially when I played that piece [Terry Riley in Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 108, 116].

No notation, improvisation. This is the norm for Western popular and most non-Western music. Here Riley takes up the jazz norm with a vengeance to produce one of the more moving works of his career.

[*Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band (All Night Flight)*] was just me -- always me. The idea was that it was a solo thing. I started doing the All-Night Concerts. I didn't do so many, but they sort of became a legendary thing. It sounds like I was doing them for ten years, but I was only doing them for a short period of time [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 14].

Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band was begun in 1965, performed and recorded as *Poppy Nogood's All Night Flight (The First Ascent)* at the Philadelphia College of Art's first *All Night Concert* on November 17, 1967 (billed as *An All-Night Flight*, approximately eight and one half hours long). *Poppy Nogood's Phantom Band Purple Modal Strobe Ecstasy* appeared later that year with The Daughters of Destruction, a circus group.

Riley performed *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* three times in New York in June of 1968: once at Brooklyn Academy of Music's Intermedia Festival and twice at Steinway Hall's closing of the "January through June" Festival. In a concert to promote the *Poppy Nogood / Rainbow in Curved Air* recording, Riley was accompanied by David Rosenboom on violin and percussion on April 14, 1969.

Riley's ensemble, Poppy Nogood and the Persian Surgery Band, performed in the spring of 1970 with Jon Hassell and others.

We played from midnight to sun-up with the Moog chugging out patterns which we played against -- drums, vibes, strings, keyboards, and Moog synthesizer [Terry Riley in Knox, n.p.].

A *Poppy* performance in 1970 for Danish Television featured video effects by Carl Nielson, a proto-MTV effort.

The rather psychedelic Columbia studio recording of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* (1969 -- with *A Rainbow in Curved Air*) was realized as overdubbed solos by Riley with soprano saxophone, electric organ, and Time-Lag Accumulator. It is hauntingly beautiful work -- mournful, lonely, echoing plaintively in contrapuntal oratory over bleak drones.

The performance fades into being in pedal points and sustained ostinati as more active counterparts to Young's stasis. For listeners only familiar with *In C*, this, Riley's second major release, would have been striking and radical departure. The ostinati-within-drones build in intensity and dynamics, reaching a first peak of activity before subsiding into pure drone. This is followed by sustained soprano sax soliloquy rapidly contrapuntalized in the time lag accumulator's echo effects. The opening lyric melodic section again subsides into stasis, followed by more active and extended polyphonic figuration as the body of the work. Calls-and-responses of solitude against desolate drones, the fades and then suddenly ceases in a "hard edge" of silence -- an abruptness also characteristic of Reich and Glass's works of this period.

The album packaging for the Columbia recording includes bright psychedelic colors, a giant smiley headshot, a new age poetic prophesy of peace, and -- appropriately -- minimal liner notes.

The earlier live recording, *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band "All Night Flight," Vol. 1*, or, in its more complete title, *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band Purple Modal Strobe Ecstasy with the Daughters of Destruction All Night Flight, Vol. 1* dates from March 22, 1968, at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo, and has been released for the first time (Organ of Corti, 1996). It is a vastly longer essay -- not exactly all night, but a bloated deciCageian almost double 40:33 when compared to the relative brevity of the almost-miniature-in-comparison 21:40 of the Columbia recording. It is nice to hear the motives of *Poppy* receive such space and spacious treatment, and intriguing to note that the performance is much more about what is perceived as the background material of the Columbia endeavor. Indeed, little of the sweep of the foreground saxophone motives are heard in comparison to both the Columbia *Poppy* and the Mass Art *Dorian*. Like the latter recording, there are rather crude pops in the repetitive cycles, which emerge violently from the overall more quiescent surface.

The composer's own words on the subject, printed as virtually the sum total of liner notes on the Organ of Corti issue, are as follows

Thinking about Poppy Nogood, I saw his ancient body slowly
stand up, stick out a stubbled
chin, take a good sniff from the air blowing down from the
Millennium and say
POPPY NOGOOD
is about WAVES
Waves in the Curved Air --- in the Ether
in the Pran Vayu --- Celestial cloud waves
Waves of Ecstatic attunement to the Sound Current that
Reverse Echo the demonic waves of Anxiety
reverberating in the Underworld.
Wave after Wave crashing upon Consciousness
ever increasing intensity
bringing an enlarged sense of well being and PEACE --- or ---
releasing an expanding crest of demonic terrors
driving us towards MADNESS and Destruction
It is about Waves within Waves
identical components fractilized to INFINITY
It is about Motifs --- Devices --- Phenomenon -- Mirror --
Dervishes --- Paradigms --- Systems --- Order --- Chaos
Chaos in Formation
Form -- Figure & FORMLESSNESS
IT IS THE SINGLE REEDS EMULATION OF THE
DOUBLE REED
It is the reeds alongside the SACRED river that shelter the
infant Deity
It is Birth --- Growth -- Maturation -- Apex
Deterioration --- and Nosedive to Death
It is the same Cycle --- over and over
It is the cycle of infinite variation
the Bicycle --- Motorcycle --- Unicycle --- Unicorn
Cornfield static in merciless Sun
the circular ears of the BUDDHA
Buddha's River
Growing Young --- Growing Old in figure 8's
It is the Brain overflowing and the Heart that is Empty
It is the Heads longing to be full --
to be Fulfilled --- to be Funfilled
It is the ALLAH embracing VOID
It is the Sun
giver of life
Ancient GOD of Cycles
Soundfield of Geese --- Lions in the Bass Section
Harmonics in the Nearfield
WAVES of Persecution --- Absolution --- Renunciation
COMPASSION
Baptism-Memorials Sweet Service Music
Moses seeking Knots in the Air
Moseeq-Ka
The Rope and the Rope Climber
The Hole in Heaven Dripping Honey
The Past running Past the Future
Volcanic Furnace of Hell Blast
A perfectly tuned interval overheating the Brains Vibrato
One String Snaps
Ah --- a Good Sound anyway ---
1001 Echo's climb the Mountain
Gurus Gone Fishin
Song Left Standing in the Smoke RAGA
[Terry Riley, *Poppy Nogood*]

From 1967, during the creation of *Poppy*, Riley had been a creative associate at the Center for Creative and Performing Arts, SUNY, Buffalo. He not only recorded *In C* during this period, but also produced a musical environmental sculpture for the Magic Theatre of the Nelson-Atkins Gallery, Kansas City, entitled *The Time-Lag Accumulator* (1968). The piece dealt with visitor's voices and a tape delay much in the spirit of Steve Reich's earlier *My Name Is*, and was followed by a videotape, *Music with Balls* (1968), utilizing tenor saxophone, electric organ, and tape delays much in the spirit of *Poppy*.

I deal with the very strict constant which is the pulse rate. . . . I've been thinking a lot about constants and to relate to a constant which is the oriental idea of being able to get far out. You can get as far out as you want by relating to a constant [Riley in Suzuki, 19, 36].

. . . I went to a concert of Karnatic music sung by John Higgins, an American musician who sings beautifully South Indian Karnatic music. During the concert he explained some things he was doing rhythmically, how he doubled up the rhythm, and how the same line sounded so differently when you doubled up the rhythm. . . . It immediately gave me a whole different viewpoint of not only doubling up but making them twice as slow and having all of these different octaves of the same material going on at once, which is a very crucial, structural element of *Rainbow* [Terry Riley in Amirkhanian, 19].

A Rainbow in Curved Air is the album companion to the Columbia Recording of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* -- a high energy synthesis of renaissance tactus and rock'n'roll tactics. *Rainbow* is based on a set of melodic patterns arranged in a 7-beat rhythmic cycle, or 4 times 7, or 28-beat cycle. It utilizes the two following modes:

A B C# D E F# G

A Bb C D E F G . . .

As in east Indian music, there are a number of fixed compositions based on these modal and rhythmic cycles. Many of these themes are also heard in their retrograded version. Themes are transposed to four different octaves, in both rhythm and tempo. Some of the basic themes can begin on any note of the 14-beat pattern and can combine with themselves in this manner to produce seemingly endless combinations. Short term tape delays, split stereophonically, create canons that follow one or two beats behind the original signal. From these few principles, the music is improvised [Terry Riley Stockholm press release, 1970, in Suzuki, 426].

All the music on this recording is played by Terry. In *A Rainbow* he plays electric organ, electric harpsichord, rocksichord, dumbec, and tambourine [Notes to Riley's *A Rainbow*].

Like any good crossover artist with a first name, a concert to promote the *Poppy Nogood / Rainbow in Curved Air* album was given on April 14, 1969, accompanied by David Rosenboom on violin and percussion. Phillip Glass would engage in similar but larger-scale promotions later in the marketing of *Songs from Liquid Days*.

From the asymmetrical ostinato bass line which begins *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (Columbia, 1969), interior sustained passages and frenetic, shimmering mid-range and high moving lines are overlain. The music sounds as some sort of pan-cultural pop jam, radiating positive energy. At the same time, most likely because of its improvisatory nature, it must be acknowledged that the piece sounds a bit flabby around the edges with regard to overall organization. Additionally, the underlying repetition can wear. The rapid figuration is as fast as anything produced by Young in his earlier blues pieces, but where Young jams on drones, Riley does likewise on patterns. Aside from the insistent and almost constant bass ostinati, there is very little in the upper lines' instrumental scat that seems minimal -- and Strickland for one identifies this piece as the end of Riley's minimalist period.

[I]t's tambourine. I had a bunch of microphones set up in a circle and I was waving the tambourine around, so I could get a very "panning" kind of sound [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 14].

A brief interior contrast section breaks the forward thrust in minimalist call-and-response, underpinned by the running chain of a tambourine. When the first material returns again, the upper lines shout Dizzy Gillespie. Something in the tuning of an interior sustained climax cadential figure suggests already a turn towards just intonation. Dynamic level is lowered as dumbec is introduced. The surface suggests pop electronics and Eastern musics, the spinning out reflects jazz, yet the working out keeps this solidly in the post-avant-garde classical music camp. An abrupt coda jams into silence.

[*A Rainbow in Curved Air* is] an evocative piece for organ and electronics; a bit flaccid but with moments of rare beauty [Page, "Framing the River, 65].

In C was recorded in the year of the development of *A Rainbow in Curved Air* -- 1968 -- in a midtown church which Columbia often used for recordings. Concurrent was a collaborative progressive rock album with John Cale, *The Church of Anthrax*, which featured Riley's Coltrane-influenced soprano sax but was not released until 1970.

John [McClure] asked if I'd become a Columbia artist - if I'd sign with them. So I did *A Rainbow in Curved Air* and the record with John Cale. I think I recorded the John Cale album, *The Church of Anthrax*, the same week, believe it or not. It was a busy week. It was an opportunity and I said, "Let's do it. Here's the time." So I was recording *Rainbow in Curved Air* at night and *Church of Anthrax* during the day. . . . 30th-Street Studios was a converted church. I think it's where Glenn Gould recorded the *Goldberg Variations*. It's a beautiful old building that is no longer used as a recording studio [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 14].

That Riley's impact was beginning to be felt in the pop world is shown by the name of the rock group, Curved Air. It was at this point that Riley went further -- into a musical ashram.

I remember one time in New York listening to a Bismillah Khan broadcast and being very, very taken with that. Because by then I had already been working on *Poppy Nogood*. And then when I heard Bismillah Khan, I thought, "Wow, this is the perfection of the kind of idea I'm trying to do" [Terry Riley in Alburger, "Shri," 15].

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Concert Review

Steal This Review

MARK ALBURGER

San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, in Igor Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, *Four Pieces for Orchestra*, and *The Fairy's Kiss*. December 4, Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco, CA.

"A good composer does not borrow. A good composer steals," so Igor Stravinsky is supposed to have said. But the lines may have been stolen from Pablo Picasso.

I may have stolen the above paragraph....

So it goes. And Stravinsky's slights-of-hand were very much in effect in a magical concert by the San Francisco Symphony on December 4 at Davies Hall. Michael Tilson Thomas led a program of Stravinsky-once-removed that demonstrated the composer's many gifts.

The standout was a complete performance of *Pulcinella*, with rich, warm readings of the vocal components by mezzo-soprano Irina Mishura, tenor Vsevolod Grivnov, and bass-baritone Juha Uusitalo. This quirky work, a one-act ballet thought by Stravinsky and his colleagues to have been based on the music of Giambattista Pergolesi, turns out to find the earlier composer a thief as well, though possibly a posthumous one. Obscure works often gravitate towards earlier famous composers -- just as a well-known name today can be used to sell product. At any rate, the Stravinskian transformations of these 18th-century tunes are no less impressive whether they were written by Pergolesi, or his contemporaries Domenico Gallo, Unico Wilhelm van Wassenaer, Alessandro Parisotti, and Carlo Ignazio Monza.

After all, a rose by any other name is a rose is a rose is a rose.

Wait a minute -- who said that?

Similarly there's still the spark in Stravinsky's Tchaikovskian retelling of *The Fairy's Kiss*, and it was ignited by the San Franciscan storytellers.

The program opened with another less-specific form of theft in *Four Etudes for Orchestra*, self-stealings from the composer's *Three Pieces for String Quartet* and *Etude for Pianola*. Here Stravinsky finds balances among Russian folk material and early 20th-century modernism, with a bit of fandango thrown in for good measure. The work is not likely to ever appear among Stravinsky's top-ten hits, but is a fascinating exercise nonetheless, as one of the bridges between his great early ballets and his studied neoclassicism.

But that's a stolen notion, too. And the San Francisco Symphony aided and abetted.

Chronicle

December 1

Contrasts Quartet in music of Derek Bermel, Aaron Jay Kernis, Akira Miyoshi, Ned Rorem, and Aram Khachaturian. Merkin Hall, New York, NY.

December 3

DVC Chamber Orchestra in excerpts from Mark Alburger's *Symphony No. 6*, Samuel Barber's *Second Essay for Orchestra*, Sergei Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 1 ("Classical")*, Dmitri Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 5*, Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Symphony No. 7 ("Sinfonia Antartica")*, Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill, CA.

December 6

Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lang Concert Hall, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

December 8

Antares. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.

December 11

Solo Opera presents Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek, CA.

December 14

Goat Hall Players in Mark Alburger's *San Fernando Hub*. Potrero Hill Boosters Club, San Francisco, CA.

Oakland Opera Theatre in Virgil Thompson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Oakland, CA.

December 20

Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. College of Marin, Kentfield, CA.