

**Williams College
Department of Music**

Friday, July 27, 2007, noon-1:00 p.m.

IN front of Chapin Hall

Terry Riley (b. 1935)

***In C* (1964)**

performed by the

Williams INC Band

Ernie Clark (staff), *trombone*
Brian Hwang '09, *guitar*
Teng Jian Khoo '09, *violin*
Daniel King '09, *tenor saxophone*
Jessica Kopcho '09, *piano*
David Moore '10, *violin*

Anthony Sheppard (faculty), *clarinet*
Doris Stevenson (faculty), *piano*
Salvador Villa '10, *violin*
Bradley Wells (faculty), *keyboard*
Benjamin Wood '08, *marimba/vibraphone*
Steven Bodner (faculty), *alto saxophone/leader*

"There aren't very many really revolutionary pieces of music in this century or any other: pieces that seem like cultural mutations that spring spontaneously into being without visible or audible precedent. Le sacre du printemps is an authentic example. So I believe is Terry Riley's In C." (Douglas Leedy, 1992)

"[Listening to In C] may be like staring at a mirror for forty-five minutes; or it may be more like sitting at a window and watching the carnival of life go on below. It is a matter of enjoying things that happen, of being moved helplessly by an exciting performance and at the same time following each development in the performance, and somehow determining in your own head what is and isn't a development and therefore really defining for yourself whatever it is you're following.... Most of the prime components of the musical experience are expressed here, and expressed in such a basic way that one's awareness of these components is totally unimportant, unnecessary: They are there before you, for you to dig; and nobody's asking you to file them away in categories. The music is close to the nitty-gritty; you can go into it with no assumptions whatsoever and come out of it with no assumptions and still be very certain that you heard something that it was refreshing, that it was incredible, that its inability to be classified is of no importance at all. This stuff here is close enough to the basics of what music is to be listened to and appreciated with no musical background of any sort. It's kind of like not necessarily knowing if you dig ballet, but definitely liking the way the girl across the table moves her hands. No preconceptions, you just dig it. Welcome in." (Paul Williams, 1968)

"When I'm not playing it, it's not necessarily my music; I always feel it has a lot more to do with the performer. The performer should own the music he's playing, in the sense that he feels free to shape it.... I gave a prescription of what notes to play and a direction for it, but music is either alive or dead, and the life in that music has to come from the performer. Without that, the notes are dead and they're not going to affect anybody. So [In C] could be a million different things, using the same notes. I formulated it, let's say that, but I can't own it; it's too abstract. We credit all these people like Bach with the great works, but those works came through them. It was like a gift to them. It came from a higher source." (Terry Riley, in Duckworth, Talking Music, 1995)

MORE ON BACK!

Terry Riley's *In C* stands at the crossroads of the two most significant musical styles to emerge during the middle of the twentieth century: aleatoricism and minimalism. *Aleatoric music* (also called "chance music" or "indeterminate music") is music in which some element of the composition is left to chance, or some primary element of a composed work's realization is left to the determination of the its performer(s). Perhaps the most famous (or at least infamous) aleatoric piece is John Cage's 4'33," a three-movement work for solo piano in which Cage instructed the performer to create absolutely no sounds for four minutes and thirty three seconds; thus, "the music" of the piece became the sounds of "the silence" in the hall (although Cage did remark once "Silence is all of the sound we don't intend. There is no such thing as absolute silence.") *Minimalism*, on the other hand, is "a style of composition characterized by an intentionally simplified rhythmic, melodic and harmonic vocabulary" (Keith Potter, *Grove's Online Dictionary of Music*), or, as simply and elegantly defined by La Monte Young—the composer often revered as the grandfather of minimalism—minimalism is "that which is created with a minimum of means." The term "minimalism" was borrowed from the visual arts, initially appropriated by composer/critic Michael Nyman to describe the music of the first minimalists (dubbed the "Fab Four" by historian Edward Strickland): Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. In the classic minimalist pieces of the 1960s, practically every musical element—harmony, rhythm, dynamics, instrumentation, etc.—remains fixed or relatively static (or, if changing, moving at a glacially slow pace) for the duration of the piece; and, as K. Robert Schwarz writes in his *Minimalists*: "the chief structural technique is unceasing repetition, exhilarating to some, mind-numbing to others." Different though the techniques of aleatoricism and minimalism are, though, they do spring from the same well: a reaction against the (perceived) elitism and over-intellectualism of the dominant compositional trends of the early-to-mid twentieth century: serialism and atonality. As Riley himself has commented: "At the time I wrote *In C*, I was almost ready to drop out of music. Classical music was very mental; the mind governed the musical activity. I think the shift in what this music was doing was letting the heart back into the game. I wanted to make the score so minimal that it wasn't important anymore." Elaborating further on his intentions in composing *In C*, Riley commented (In *Talking Music*):

*I think you really have to look at the sixties, and what was going on then. I was never concerned with minimalism, but I was very concerned with psychedelia and the psychedelic movement of the sixties as an opening toward consciousness. For my generation that was a first look towards the East, that is, peyote, mescaline, and the psychedelic drugs which were opening up people's attention towards higher consciousness. So I think what I was experiencing in music at that time was another world. Besides just the ordinary music that was going on, music was also able to transport us suddenly out of one reality into another. Transport us so that we would almost be having visions as we were playing. So that's what I was thinking about before I wrote *In C*. I believe music, shamanism, and magic are all connected, and when it's used that way it creates the most beautiful use of music.*

In writing, *In C*, Riley has stated that he "felt like a transcendentalist, an illusionist, or a magician.... I [felt] it's my field to try to create magic in sound. Magic in the sense of transcendence of this ordinary life into another realm." In fact, Riley claims to have conceived the entire piece in one evening, as he rode the bus to work [playing ragtime piano at the Gold Street Saloon in San Francisco]; when he returned home the following morning, he wrote almost the entire work in one sitting. To create this transcendent experience, though, Riley, in an inspired stroke, utilized the very notion of simplicity; as Douglas Leedy writes: "*In C*'s structure is simplicity itself—it is a loosely-jointed canon at the unison for a fairly large ensemble of treble instruments." The score—which combines features of aleatoricism and minimalism—consists of only 53 short melodic cells (dynamics and articulation non-specified), each player freely repeating each phrase as many times as desired before proceeding to the next, although Riley does instruct the ensemble members to attempt to remain within two or three cells of each other; however, it is also essential that a fixed and constant pulse be maintained throughout the piece (many performances go so far as to include a high-pitched instrument producing a drone of repeated eighth note Cs—as Riley notes, "traditionally played by a beautiful girl"—although this is not a necessary feature of the piece). The harmonic scope of the work is even more limited: those 53 riffs illuminate only four harmonic regions; as Leedy continues: "The effect is of a sparkling, glinting crystal which, as it slowly rotates, changes almost imperceptibly in color from a clear C major to a bright, yet more slowly pulsating E minor then back to C major rather triumphantly, and finally takes on the cast of a much more somber and enigmatic G minor"—or as Mark Burger writes: "the net result is an energized Balinese music unsprung from its hinges. A communal joyous cacophony of secular yet spiritual ecstasy." Riley also does not specify the instrumentation of the piece (besides his instruction that "any number of any kind of instruments can play. A group of about 35 is desired if possible but smaller or larger groups will work." (For example, the November 1, 1964, premiere featured 13 players—including Riley and Steve Reich—on mostly keyboards and wind instruments, while other performances have been mounted with ensembles ranging from an all mallet-percussion band to the traditional Chinese instruments of the 35-piece Shanghai Film Orchestra, from solo piano to the 124 musicians who performed it in 2006 at the Walt Disney Concert Hall.) The length of the work is also indeterminate, Riley suggesting a duration of 45 to 90 minutes as "normal."

From the opening rehearsals (Steve Reich described the work as "an eye-opener for me. Working on it was a tremendous influence.") and premiere performance to today, *In C* has been regarded as one of the most influential pieces due to its underlying paradigm-shifting aesthetic principles. As Alfred Frankenstein wrote in his November 8, 1964 review of the premiere (entitled "Music Like None Other on Earth"): "[Riley] is bound to make a profound impression with [*In C*].... This primitivistic music goes on and on. It is formidably repetitious but harmonic changes are slowly introduced into it; there are melodic variations and contrasts of rhythm within a framework of relentless continuity, and climaxes of great sonority appear and are dissolved in the endlessness. At times you feel you have never done anything all your life long but listen to this music and as if that is all there is or ever will be, but it is altogether absorbing, exciting, and moving, too." And so it is today.