

**Obsessed and Passionate About All Music:
TERRY RILEY in conversation with FRANK J. OTERI**

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Transcribed by Julia Lu

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1. Earliest Musical Experiences

FRANK J. OTERI: Terry, I am so honored and thrilled that this talk is finally happening.

TERRY RILEY: Not as honored as I am.

FRANK J. OTERI: You have been one of the greatest musical heroes in my life. I first heard *In C* and *A Rainbow in Curved Air* when I was a high school student...

TERRY RILEY: You were a high school student when it came out?

FRANK J. OTERI: [laughter] No, I was born when it came out!

TERRY RILEY: Oh [laughter]

FRANK J. OTERI: But I was a high school student when I learned that your music existed. I found your records in a rock record shop in Greenwich Village and that was a pivotal moment for me, which is why I thought it would be interesting for us to start off talking about what your early influences were in your musical education and what shaped the kinds of decisions you've made as a composer and as a musician growing up. You mentioned radio and hearing old standards on the radio as you were growing up in the 30s and early 40s and I thought we could talk a little bit about that for starters.

TERRY RILEY: By the time the war broke out in '41, my father joined the Marine Corps and after that he was sort of a professional Marine and we were living up in northern California and we kind of traveled around California during the war and lived with my grandmother and stuff like that. But I was never living in a big city like San Francisco or Los Angeles. I was always out in smaller rural areas and so my music education was kind of catch as catch can. I had an uncle who played the guitar, an uncle who played the trumpet, an aunt who played the accordion and that was my contact with the music world.

FRANK J. OTERI: What was the first instrument that you played?

TERRY RILEY: Violin. I started on the violin before the war and I was actually really enjoying it and was doing pretty well on violin. But then when the war broke out we moved to Los Angeles briefly 'cuz my father had to take military training down there before he was shipped to the Pacific. And then that was the last; I had four months to six months on the violin. I think it was very, very basic you know. I think I could play the Marine Corps hymn though for my father which made him happy!

FRANK J. OTERI: So at what point did you decide in your life that you were going to be a musician and a composer?

TERRY RILEY: Well, I think I was very young. I mean I remember just always being obsessed and passionate about music when I heard it and deeply moved by it, you know. It was the important emotional event in my life to hear music and to really feel it and I don't know if I formalized in my thinking that I was going to be a musician, but thinking back on it, it was the only thing I really felt obsessed by.

FRANK J. OTERI: Was there any particular music that you heard that you were more interested in than other music or was it everything?

TERRY RILEY: Uh, you know it was pretty much everything. When you're young, like every new impression, any musical impression is a whole new universe, world and galaxy that comes into your life. So as it came in one by one I was tremendously excited to hear anything that I hadn't heard before. As I said, in the beginning it was whatever was coming over the radio and at that time it was commercial radio. So mainly standards that you would hear...

FRANK J. OTERI: So when was the first time you heard western classical music?

TERRY RILEY: I think I was eight or nine when I started hearing occasional pieces of western classical music and around that time also my mother found a piano teacher for me because I had been playing a lot by ear and she thought I should, since I liked it so much, every time I'd go to someone's house that had a piano I'd sit down and spend the time there at the piano. So they got me a piano and a piano teacher and she started introducing me to little pieces of Bach. And that was my first contact with western classical music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now in your formative years growing up, did you ever think of there being a division between classical and popular music or was it all part of one?

TERRY RILEY: Never. I don't think at the beginning especially not, but as I got older of course you know, then. By the time I got to high school I got the first really good music teacher that I'd ever had. I'd go to his house in the afternoon after classes and he'd play me all these really wonderful records in his collection and I was starting to hear for the first time Bartók and Stravinsky and other things of 20th century music and that was my last year of high school/first year of college.

FRANK J. OTERI: And at this point had you started writing your own music?

TERRY RILEY: I did a little. My teacher was writing a musical for the high school to perform. And he asked me to write one of the songs for it. So I think that was my first composition. I wrote a popular song for this musical.

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you still have that music anywhere or is it gone?

TERRY RILEY: I don't have the music. I kind of remember it, but I don't have it. Whatever was written down is gone.

2. Studying Composition and Discovering Jazz

FRANK J. OTERI: Now when you studied music formally at the university level, I know I heard this from La Monte Young when we all had dinner together, that you, La Monte, and David Del Tredici were all in a composition class together. What an exciting composition class that must have been! What sort of things were you writing at that point?

TERRY RILEY: The period you're talking about is I think around 1960, '61 in the UC Berkeley composition class. Around that time, I had gotten very interested in serial music, especially the piano music of Schoenberg, which I liked very much. I found this complete freedom, rhythmic freedom that I hadn't experienced in other composers before and I wanted to experiment with that myself. So around that time, I was writing a set of piano pieces that were very much influenced by Schoenberg and yet when you look at them now, they're still fairly tonal. They hold very close to certain centers and I didn't use a tone row.

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you still acknowledge those pieces. If someone were interested in playing them, would you release them?

TERRY RILEY: Yes. I guess I would say from about those pieces I would say was my beginning. I wrote some pieces that I would still acknowledge before that, but unfortunately they've been lost in my moving around. I wrote some pieces, you know when I was at undergraduate school. A trio for clarinet, piano and violin which I liked very much, but...

FRANK J. OTERI: and it's gone...

TERRY RILEY: ...I can't find it anywhere.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, you were doing things you were influenced by Schoenberg and of course this was the same time that John Cage was doing a lot of his experiments with chance music and indeterminacy and also it was also this great decade for jazz. When did you start getting interested in jazz and improvisation? When did that really take hold?

TERRY RILEY: Uh, I'd say that my interest in jazz really took hold with the period of the Miles Davis Quintet, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane. This emergence in the late 50s and early 60s. It's around that same time that I was going to UC Berkeley and also a lot due to La Monte because La Monte was a jazz musician and had been playing a lot in L.A. with lots of musicians. And he introduced me to a lot. He introduced me to Coltrane. I listened to Coltrane's music for the first time.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now did you first meet La Monte in a composition class?

TERRY RILEY: Yeah.

3. The Birth of Minimalism and *In C*

FRANK J. OTERI: When you look toward the beginning of this thing that we now look back on and say "this is the birth of minimalism" it's sort of hard to say who started what and who was really the originator. Most people acknowledge La Monte Young as the founder of minimalism. But certainly in terms of the use of repetition in music rather than the use of sustained notes, it's really hard to find earlier examples than the examples of your early music. When you first started creating music based on the repetition of small melodic cells, what was the initial name for what you were doing? Did you feel there was any precedent for it?

TERRY RILEY: Naming it never, never entered my mind at that time. It was just something I was doing and that other people were doing. You know La Monte and I did a lot of improvising together around this period too because we were not only at UC Berkeley, we would grab a practice room with two pianos and play for hours together. And then we would go up to Anna Halprin's studio and improvise more freely with whatever she had in her studio, a piano or she had various percussion instruments... La Monte had this fascination with making friction sounds and we ended up doing the two sounds piece on marimbas. We spent a lot of time playing together and improvising together, but never thinking about for instance "is this a kind of music" or "is there something this should be called?" Uh, I think that came later. But I must say I think La Monte is the fountainhead of this modern music period that's called minimalism in the sense that he defined very clearly in his mind and in his work as a very young man, the kind of space that minimalism holds. First of all you have this space, then it's filled with something. Well La Monte filled it with long tones and he also worked with repetition like the Henry Flynt piece, I can't remember the number.

FRANK J. OTERI: 1698.

TERRY RILEY: Whatever. This was a piece of repetition. He was definitely exploring a lot of ways, but his main focus since I've known him and I think it's been an obsession with him is to make pieces based on long frequencies that can be experienced over long durations, especially his work with just intonation where this was a very important element. So in that sense, I'd say that it begins there.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think it might have been David Lang who said that for him and many younger composers, *In C* was what *The Rite of Spring* was for most composers in the first half of the Twentieth Century. This was the great liberating piece. And in 1964, when *In C* was written, whether you were practicing serialism or practicing indeterminacy--the last thing a cutting-edge composer wanted to reference was tonality. By calling a piece *In C*, you were proclaiming the work's tonality and tonal center. What were the initial reactions to this piece in terms of other composers of the time who had heard it?

TERRY RILEY: Well you know *In C* was written in San Francisco in '64. I had just come back. I'll just give you a little background. I had just come back from Europe after spending two years there, so my main contact was with people like Ken Dewey who is a playwright. I was involved in theater with him and street theater. And I'd moved away from any world that had considerations for such things as atonality vs. tonality, or uptown vs. downtown or whatever. They weren't even concerns of mine any more. I was very interested in just the little world that I inhabited at that time. So, when I came back to San Francisco, I'd had this idea about really wanting to write a piece because I worked with Chet Baker over in Europe and really had this chance to experience working with a real jazz musician for the first time. And the immediacy of that kind of music and also Chet was a wonderfully lyric and tonal, and thought in these terms. He was making mainstream jazz music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

TERRY RILEY: So, I wanted to bring that into my music too. And also at time I'd been visiting Morocco and I was getting into their music. And that also was tonal. And had a lot to do with tradition, which I was starting to get interested in, musical traditions of other cultures in the world. But when I got back to San Francisco, I didn't appear to me, I mean it really was an inspiration. I mean it wasn't the piece that I thought I was going to write. This came to me all as a kind of vision so when I showed it to people, like musicians around San Francisco, there was general excitement but there was also a kind of wondering how it was going to work. And, you know, putting together the performance was a bit of a mystery. *In C* really was these formations of patterns that were kind of flying together. That's how it came to me. It was like this kind of cosmic vision of patterns that were gradually transforming and changing. And I think the principal contribution to minimalism was this concept, it wasn't just one pattern, it was this idea that patterns could be staggered and their composite forms became another kind of music.

FRANK J. OTERI: What I find so interesting about a piece like *In C* though is that it's so much about the performers as well. You have these 53 cells, but the performers determine how many times they play them and how many times they'll overlap. So, in a sense, it's a natural outgrowth of Cage's development of an indeterminate music, because there really is some chance involved with this. And it really allows the players the freedom to express themselves, to decide for themselves when to go on to the next measure and to create these multiple layers. It's almost as if the musicians all have to listen to each other to hear... They're creating the counterpoint to some extent.

TERRY RILEY: Right. That was a big concern of mine. And also, I didn't want to have a conductor or someone who was telling the musicians what to do. I wanted them making their decisions based on their listening. Unfortunately, it's hard to play as a large group like that and stay together. Those were the problems we were encountering when we first rehearsed, how to stay together.

FRANK J. OTERI: And that's how eventually it was performed with the pulse. How did that come about?

TERRY RILEY: As you know, and this story's been told. Steve Reich, who was in the group in the first performance, one day said "This isn't working!" 'Cuz we were all playing and couldn't right in the groove with it. So uh, Jeannie Brecken, who was, I guess, Steve's girlfriend at the time, starting playing on the top Cs of the piano and it just immediately helped the group immensely to focus and to stay together. And it became part of the piece.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now you've written other pieces like *In C* that don't have the pulse, that are coming from the same basic idea. I'm thinking of the piece *Olson III* which is also based on cellular patterns...

TERRY RILEY: Well *Olson III* is a pulse piece, I mean, you know its, the whole thing is pulse because it only has eighth notes in it. It only has one note value. So it didn't have the problems that *In C* had being that *In C* is polymetric. You have different meters going on simultaneously. It presents more problems of staying locked together. But *Olson III* has no meters. Essentially, they're just all eighth notes even though the patterns are different lengths. There's never any different note values that would create a little confusion about where the beat is.

FRANK J. OTERI: The pieces that you developed subsequently to that, I'm thinking of pieces like *A Rainbow in Curved Air* and the various incarnations of *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* some of which last all night... Works that you had done with the time lag accumulator, basically allowed you to play *In C*-type pieces by yourself. They allowed you to have these cells, to throw them out there and they would keep repeating.

TERRY RILEY: Right. You could make fields of patterns again, but they came out, you know they were governed then by mechanical means of delay through tape manipulation.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, *Poppy Nogood* you did on saxophone. You don't really play saxophone anymore...

TERRY RILEY: I haven't played saxophone since I started studying voice in Indian classical music.

4. Studying Indian Music

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, let's talk about Indian classical music for a bit. You had three records out on Columbia Masterworks, *In C*, and then *A Rainbow in Curved Air* and then *Church of Anthrax*, the record you did with John Cale had come out. And, at that time, because of these records, you were in a way the most widely known minimalist composer, certainly much more visible than other people doing this music, although the term minimalism really wasn't being used yet. But then, there was a period, I guess from about 1970 to 1980, when you stopped making records for Columbia and went off to study Indian music, which western composers would say is the opposite of a career path. You became a student again and, and it's wonderful. But it's the kind of humility that we rarely would see in somebody who was that successful at that time. What prompted those decisions?

TERRY RILEY: Well I think that there were two things involved. Uh, first of all, I met Pandit Pran Nath, that's the main thing that prompted my decision. And I felt this immediate connection to him and his music that I had no control over. I was drawn to it. The other thing is that for me the late period of the 60s in New York when I was doing the recordings had reached a kind of point of completion.

FRANK J. OTERI: So, were they asking you for more recordings?

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, I had a contract you know to complete more recordings, unfortunately I didn't complete it for another 10 years. They kept sending me notices to show up at the studio and I'd be in India or some place. You know I'd just forget about it. But, you know the thing is that I felt it was a good time, things had happened pretty fast you know with these pieces like *In C*, *Rainbow*, *Poppy Nogood* and I felt this was a good basis of work for me. And the next step for me was to learn more about how the modality of music works. And there's no better place than India. 'Cuz it's a really old tradition. Plus the rhythmic complexity of Indian music fascinated me. So there were two things I really was interested in developing in myself. And I felt I could spend a lifetime trying to find these things out on my own, but here's a person that knows it all. And why not try to absorb it through his teaching?

FRANK J. OTERI: Well certainly just as much as you and La Monte Young spawned this genre of music called minimalism which effected the entire classical music world, the work that you did also spawned a whole generation of rock musicians. The whole genre of psychedelic rock to a good extent comes out of the work that you were both doing in the earlier 60s, what wound up happening in the later 60s in rock music. But I think it's fair to say at this point in the year 2001, you both also spawned yet another tradition. There are now so many American musicians who are playing non-European classical musics, which 40 years ago would have been unthinkable, but we now have American soloists who are not from India playing the sarod and the sitar, and Americans playing shakuhachi or playing in gamelan orchestras. And, and it raises some interesting questions about what is traditional and what makes somebody who is not from that tradition come to that tradition. And a lot of these players are fantastic, but it's hard to book them for concerts because since they're not of that tradition, audiences might not assume they're as authentic. What has been your experience playing Indian music as a westerner?

TERRY RILEY: Well, you know one of the really great things about Pandit Pran Nath was he was able to give us an immediate kind of foundation for this kind of music. He was a great teacher. And he also had a very, very unique position in Indian classical music in that he himself synthesized several different styles. And he was a person that many people looked to for these rare compositions that he had gotten from many of the masters who have since passed on. So we were really lucky to receive from him some teachings that were quite rare and which some of the people in India didn't have the opportunity to learn.

So when we go back to India now and perform, I think we're quite well appreciated. They especially like to hear some of these rare works that he was teaching us and that now are gone except for some of us Westerners who have managed to learn them from him.

FRANK J. OTERI: Did Pran Nath have Indian disciples as well?

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, but few. Most of his Indian disciples didn't turn out to be professional musicians. There were only a few. A lot of them were people who loved his music, but they just did it for themselves. They didn't do it professionally... For the last eight years, I've gone to India every winter with a group of students from the United States and some from Europe who have been interested in learning this music of Pandit Pran Nath. Pandit Pran Nath was alive until '96 and was teaching this class for the first four years. And after he passed on, we continued to take these students over every year. In fact they're going this year too.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's right, they're there right now.

TERRY RILEY: Well, they leave on the 21st I think of February to go. So this has been a really good connection for Americans who are interested in studying Indian classical music because a lot of the people from his tradition are in India, and join our group so we all work together and give concerts and there's a lot of interaction and we perform for each other.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now at this point, do you have Indian students who are studying music from you or studying these ragas of Pran Nath's?

TERRY RILEY: Occasionally I will, but most of my students are Western.

FRANK J. OTERI: Because you're based here most of the year.

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, but you know there's no reason an American can't... It's like jazz, you know, some people say things like only a black man can play jazz. Actually, if you can do it, you can do it. And God knows, why a person can do it if they can.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, as I like to say when people raise the question of authenticity, I say well you have no problems with an American string quartet playing Beethoven. All of the world's music belongs to the whole world.

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, and you know there's a tremendous amount of hard work that goes behind all of this too. It isn't that we just took one or two lessons and went out and started singing raga. I mean that's thirty years of work and long hours of practice and study. So eventually something has to come out.

5. Solo Keyboard Improvisations

FRANK J. OTERI: Right. Now at the same time that you were studying raga, you were doing a lot of solo keyboard improvisations and I believe around this time you started working with just intonation scales. I'm thinking now of *Descending Moonshine Dervishes*, and then *Shri Camel* which was the record that finally fulfilled the Columbia Masterworks contract which I'm so glad finally came out because it's one of my favorite records of yours. And it was so interesting hearing raga one night followed by solo keyboard from you here in Houston this week. How do you feel these two streams of your music have influenced each other?

TERRY RILEY: Well I don't think there's an awful lot of influence coming from my Western music roots or my own compositional roots, although I will say that sometimes when I'm singing raga I do feel that I get into a different kind of feeling than just purely Indian tradition. And I think it has to do possibly with phrasing that maybe is coming more from jazz, some combinational. But there's so much in Indian music. It's such a large tradition that it's hard to find anything in it that you do that isn't related to it, except for say complex chord changes which they don't have. And you don't do this in raga any way.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right, but certainly your keyboard music definitely is informed by your study of raga. And I guess that's where you add the complex chord progressions to the raga-like melodies.

TERRY RILEY: With the keyboard music I feel it's kind of an anything goes palate. Especially since I improvise a lot, whatever I'm hearing at the time, I like to try to pursue. You know, follow in a spontaneous way. There's definitely, you know the study of Indian music and all the tetrachords that make up the raga, all the different little tonal modules that make up the ragas are, are so pregnant with feeling and emotion that as you're playing you'll suddenly be starting to hear one of these and then it'll start dominating the improvisation that this particular modal flavor will become the dominant mood. So it's a powerful influence on anything I do on the keyboard.

6. Just Intonation

FRANK J. OTERI: Now the decision to retune the piano into just intonation. At first you were doing it with electric keyboards, but then later you played on a retuned acoustic piano. I'm thinking of my favorite solo piano recording of yours, *The Harp of New Albion*. What prompted the decision to work in just intonation? Was that also derived from working with La Monte and talking to La Monte?

TERRY RILEY: Of course *The Well Tuned Piano* is a real monument in just intonation piano, and was beckoning me to also work in this way. The piano becomes a totally different instrument when you retune it. You know it doesn't sound like the European piano. It becomes a much more pure instrument. The overtones start reinforcing themselves, each other. And you start getting a different timbre out of the piano. So it's a real temptation to retune the piano to create music. Plus, when you have a tuning you actually have a piece. If you retune the piano, that tuning actually will create a piece. So you'd have as many times as you'll retune it, you'll have that many pieces. You know, and you just have to change intervals slightly in it to create a different color in the piano. I'm sure it's something that will be explored more and more in the future. The only problem is that pianos are quite tedious to retune and to stabilize. It takes many days of tuning. So it's labor intensive and it drives a lot of people away from trying it. Plus it's hard to find a venue that will let you take a piano for three or four days and just hold it there in that tuning because usually there's demand for other people to use it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right, so now when you tour you mostly play pianos in twelve equal.

TERRY RILEY: Especially if I'm doing one nighters. You know.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right

TERRY RILEY: If I'm going here to there there's just no time to do it. It has to be set up so that you have several days in the place where you're going to play the retuned piano.

7. String Quartets & Other Chamber Music

FRANK J. OTERI: I would dare say you spawned yet another thing in contemporary music when the Kronos Quartet asked you to write a string quartet for them. Before that happened I think a lot of composers were really ignoring the string quartet. And since that's happened, the string quartet is so alive and now there are quartets all over the country and all over the world playing new music in a variety of styles and to some extent I think that the collaboration with Kronos in the mid-80s is responsible for that. What prompted you to write music for them after years of not writing music for other people?

TERRY RILEY: Well, as you know, I didn't write any music down in the 70s, that was a period where I was in a non-notational mood so when David Harrington came to Mills College where I was teaching, he started talking to me right away about writing a string quartet. Now I love string quartets. I'd written one in college, and Bartók... At one time I sat and listened to Bartók string quartets for hours on end just because I loved those pieces of his so much. And so it wasn't really hard, I didn't resist it too much when he suggested writing a string quartet. It was a little hard for me to get warmed up to writing music again because I'd gotten into this totally non-notational frame of mind. I saw music as a spontaneous sonic event that had no paper and pencil involved at all.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now since you've written those string quartets, and you've written quite a few at this point, you've also written for a number of other ensembles, I'm thinking most notably of the wonderful work you did with the Rova Saxophone Quartet. In some ways the saxophone quartet is a wind equivalent of a string quartet in that you have the same sonority translated across a range of instruments. Are there any other ensembles that you like writing for as well as this point?

TERRY RILEY: Well I've written for Zeitgeist who I enjoyed working with. A lot of times I'll write just because of the musicians. You know, not necessarily that they're playing any particular instrument but the musicians themselves seem to be the kind of people that I think would be really devoted to the kind of thing I write. And that's what it requires for a really good collaboration. Since I played saxophone, I ended up writing a lot of saxophone quartets, you know I've written a couple since the Rova and I'm writing one right now.

8. The Orchestra vs. Intimacy

FRANK J. OTERI: You haven't written much music for orchestra. Certainly in today's society, the orchestra is not really a medium that's amenable to personal contact. Often times you'll get two or three rehearsals and that'll be the end of it. There'll be one performance and that'll be the piece. It's a shame though, because I know I heard a piece that you did for the Brooklyn Philharmonic which I thought was fantastic. And I thought: "Wow I'd love to hear more Terry Riley orchestral music." How can composers create music for large ensembles at this point in time and maintain that personal contact which I think is so crucial to the success of your music, but the success of so much other music as well?

TERRY RILEY: Well, if you have someone you can collaborate with, if I had a conductor who said: "I'll put the same amount of work into your orchestral music as Kronos put in the string quartets." That would be a good starting point, but that's economically unfeasible today, conductors can't usually commit too much time. Occasionally, there'll be some work that they'll devote a lot of time to. But everything I've done... I've done three pieces for full orchestra and a couple of string orchestra pieces and they've all been under-rehearsed, I mean really under-rehearsed and except for I'd say my string quartet concerto, *The Sands* which the Kronos had played...

FRANK J. OTERI: That's a great piece.

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, that got rehearsed more and that's what it takes. I think the other problem is the kind of things I like to happen in music I think work best with lighter forces because it's more mobile and rhythms can shift faster and there's more clarity. Orchestras are fairly ponderous and it's sometimes hard to get some of these really active shifts in tempo and things that I like to get and have them be clear. You know, have them be able to play with the clarity of a small jazz ensemble or something.

FRANK J. OTERI: You've also improvised music with other players, both Western musicians and musicians of other traditions. You mentioned Krishna Bhatt earlier this week. How do you perceive the difference as a composer looking at a work where you're collaborating with others, playing music with others, versus when you're writing a piece of music for others?

TERRY RILEY: Well, again there we have to have a lot of time to rehearse together. Krishna Bhatt and I have really spent a lot of time sitting together doing music. Both traditional raga and some so-called fusion-type things which evolve from Western musical principles. So that to me the main element is just hanging out with the person so long that you start thinking alike.

9. Music-Theater & a Vocal *In C*

FRANK J. OTERI: You actively perform. You tour around the world. You write music for other people. You also are still studying music. You're still listening. You're still paying attention to so much stuff that's going on. What do you want to do next? What do you feel you would like to accomplish at this point?

TERRY RILEY: Well, I think one of things that I'm kind of interested in going back and working in more is the theatrical kind of situations for music which I really enjoy a lot. I did this little opera a few years ago called *The Saint Adolf Ring* which was a very small chamber opera. There were only three of us on stage. It involved videos and some very elaborate stage sets and I enjoy that very much because it made me think about music in different terms because of the theatricality of it. I'm not interested in really big operas, but I am interested in working more... I just did the music for a Michael McClure play, the poet Michael McClure, called *Josephine the Mouse Singer* and I found it really stimulates my imagination a lot to, to write for the stage. I get ideas very quickly and it seems to be a very spontaneous way to work.

FRANK J. OTERI: And the singing that comes out of that, is that informed by your own singing as well?

TERRY RILEY: Yeah, like for *The Saint Adolf Ring* for instance, the singing in it was somewhere in between jazz and Indian music. Because Woelfli, the person this opera was about, is German, I also tried to do some singing in Swiss Deutsch which he wrote in. And also, he was schizophrenic so he wrote in languages that don't really exist. I mean he wrote kind of nonsense words and I set those and then I sang them in kind of a German, but not operatic, but you know folk music style.

FRANK J. OTERI: So in terms of the kind of singers you would want to work with on this, the standard operatic *bel canto* singing used for Verdi and Puccini doesn't really work with this.

TERRY RILEY: Well, it could. I would like to see for theater works a mixture of singers. So that some might be *bel canto*, but then you might have a singer with no vibrato I mean from an Indian style or a jazz scat singer. I would like to have a theater piece that would mix singing styles. I think there's places and of course there's different approaches to *bel canto* singing too. There are some Western musicians who have very, very fine control on their vibrato so that they're not just doing it indiscriminately.

FRANK J. OTERI: In the performance of *In C* that you're doing with the Bang On A Can All-Stars tonight, you're singing with them. It sort of brings our talk full circle because I'm hearing things in *In C* that I never heard before hearing you sing it. I'm hearing connections to much older modal music traditions than I ever heard in it before. Is that part of the reason why you're performing it this way tonight?

TERRY RILEY: In recent performances of *In C*, I've been singing more and more and not only me, but I've brought in other singers too and I think the vocal aspect of this is a good addition to it. And it probably, as you said, gives the setting of *In C* a different context. You start listening to it as maybe part of old music, or part of Renaissance music. I think the voice always adds some kind of humanizing quality to it.