

## **Chapter 5**

### **Steve Reich – A Revolution in Repetition and Structure**

Although Steve Reich does not fit my definition of Live-Looper, his work has been so crucially influential upon the Live-Looping movement that I feel it would be wrong not to include discussion about his music and its relevance.

Reich befriended Riley during 1964 through playing and organising concerts of *In C* at the San Francisco Tape Music Centre. Reich was clearly massively influenced by Riley's *In C* and also his tape based compositions, around this time "Riley remembers showing his new friend two tape recorder pieces of mine, loops of mine that I was working with"<sup>1</sup>. Although Reich has always stated the influence that *In C* had upon him, the similarities between Reich's breakthrough piece *Its Gonna Rain* and Riley's tape work should also be shown. Reich was present at the showings of Riley tape based text piece *She Moves Me* (1963) which was played alongside *In C* in Riley's early concerts. Riley also made several other text pieces for tape including *I* (1964), *Its Me* (1965), *That's Not You* (1965). These pieces were made of short text phrases that had been manipulated in various ways to create structure through the layering and movement the individual fragments of text. This is essentially what Reich accomplished with *Its Gonna Rain* (1965) with one subtle difference, Reich had discovered Phasing as a system to generate musical structure.

To clarify this issue I asked Terry Riley the following question; during 1963-65 you created a number of pieces using text that were processed via tape manipulation, the

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<sup>1</sup> P117 Potter, Keith. *Four Musical Minimalists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000)

‘Time-lag-Accumulator’. I am talking about *She Moves Me*, *I, Its Me* and *That’s Not You*. Your work with small fragments of text and tape clearly had a massive influence on Steve Reich's early work such as *Its Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*. Did any of your text pieces you created use the technique of phasing or anything similar to generate any of the material? Riley replied,

Steve himself, has acknowledged a debt to my early tape pieces and I think that being said, he subsequently went on to a very unique and personal development quite independent of my work. I think phasing of course occurred in my works that were composed before his. What I did that was important to him I think was to run two or more identical loops simultaneously. He systematized this to a degree that made it his own.<sup>2</sup>

So although the content of Reich’s early pieces were essentially the same as Riley’s, the way in which they were created was different. Reich under the influence of Riley’s *In C* and tape experiments strove to find a new way of working with repetition as a musical technique. Through watching Riley’s creative process Reich discovered the phasing system of creating very long structures of music evolving out of very small fixed phrases. Reich would go on to develop this technique for live performance in what I believe to be his finest work *Piano Phase*.

Steve Reich pieces such as *Come Out*, *Its Gonna Rain*, and *Piano Phase* were revolutionary in their structure. They contained two static looped elements and through the process of phasing the perception of those elements disappeared. The phasing process causes the listener to hear only the changes in the interference patterns losing the sense of

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<sup>2</sup> Terry Riley via private email 23/3/2003

the original musical phrase. This process or 'system music' as Brian Eno would go on to call it was unique because once it was set in motion it would go on to create beautiful music that requires no further intervention. It was a fascinating concept that such a simple system could produce a wide variety of results. This would go on to inspire and influence many other musicians interested in looping including Brian Eno.