



## TERRY RILEY

**The Palmian Chord Ryddle • At the Royal Majestic**

Tracy Silverman, Electric Violin • Todd Wilson, Organ

Nashville Symphony • Giancarlo Guerrero



## Terry Riley (b. 1935)

### The Palmian Chord Ryddle · At the Royal Majestic

Even though he became a formative influence on modern music more than a half-century ago, composer, performer, artistic pioneer and all-around musical guru Terry Riley has never stopped evolving in new directions. The native Californian's early breakthrough work, *In C* (1964), was a cornerstone in the development of American minimalism; its widespread impact has often been compared to that of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Riley's influence has crossed barriers between contemporary classical and popular music, leaving traces in the work of such artists as Brian Eno, Tangerine Dream and The Who – whose guitarist Pete Townshend even gave a nod to the composer by titling one of the band's greatest hits *Baba O'Riley*.

Though he is often still labeled a minimalist, the techniques of repetitive process associated with that movement are merely one part of his expansive and colorful palette. As the music critic Mark Swed aptly remarks, "Minimalist" is a strange tag for Riley. It suits him in that he has never lost his love for interlocking repetitive figures imbued with the strength to send the brain into psychedelic reverie. But Riley is really a musical accumulator."

Riley has always been an intrepid musical traveler, drawing on inspirations that span a spectrum from Miles Davis to a diversity of non-Western musics. Along the way, he has found impulses in his close study of Indian classical and folk traditions, as well as experimentation with a variety of electronic organs, synthesizers, and sequencers. Added to the mix are Riley's countless collaborations over a long career of performing and improvising with various bands and ensembles.

That spirit of exploration underlies *The Palmian Chord Ryddle*, which carries forward Riley's recent forays into writing for the orchestral medium. The composer notes that he started trying out the concerto format with *The Sands* (1991), written for his frequent collaborators, the Kronos Quartet, and orchestra. More recently, he has composed *SolTierraLuna* (2007), a triple concerto for two guitars and violin and chamber orchestra, and *Zephyr*, a concerto from 2009 for Italian violinist Francesco D'Orazio.

"In general I probably wouldn't write a concerto unless it was for someone I've worked with and whose playing I know," Riley says, adding that Nashville resident Tracy Silverman was a powerfully motivating force. The two have collaborated for years on numerous projects, including playing together in one of Riley's bands, the All Stars. "Tracy has been instrumental in developing the technology of the electric violin," he says – a further inducement to explore this unusual sonic combination. It's interesting to note that another concerto written for Silverman and his electric violin – John Adams' *The Dharma at Big Sur* – pays direct homage to Riley's influence in a movement named after the latter's famous composing ranch (*Sri Moonshine*).

Riley points out that improvisation and written-out composition are two different worlds – "and I have a foot in each one." While *Ryddle* is a product of the latter, a spirit of spontaneity and unpredictability significantly shaped the score. Riley began with the highly chromatic gesture presented at the opening, "but I didn't have a conscious plan after that," he adds. Instead, he intuitively drew on his experience with raga melodies and scales from Indian classical music, as well as from memories and associations relating to loved ones in his life. On one level, *Ryddle* is a kind of musical autobiography that refers to his parents, his friends, and his son Gyan, also a composer and a guitarist. (The two frequently perform together, and Gyan is featured on six-string banjo in this recording.)

Even the title came spontaneously. Riley, who has used dream journals for other pieces such as *Autodreamographical Tales*, recalls a dream in which he was discussing an ancient mode called the "Palmian." He decided to apply that to the opening passage, from which the rest of the piece's melodic material is spun out and eventually resolved. The odd, archaic spelling of "Ryddle" implies the mysteriously ancient origin of this mode.

The vastly extended range of the amplified, six-string electric violin is eminently suited to the many layers of

reference on which Riley touches in *Ryddle*. Overall, he explains, his concertos don't follow the classical mold of the soloist battling things out with the orchestra. "The soloist sets the tone for the orchestra as well. Even though it's a large ensemble, the orchestration itself is very sparse." The seven interlinked sections of *Ryddle* take their cue from the soloist's musings, whether the impulse veers toward archaic Eastern European modes, jazz, the Carnatic tradition from southern India, or the gentle reminiscence of *In C* heard in the final section. Riley has provided the following description of this piece:

"What I most humbly would like to say about *The Palmian Chord Ryddle* is that it leaped into my consciousness as a very spontaneous work full of the things in music that I find colorful, dynamic, beautiful, challenging, humorous, loving, friendly, joyous, stark, and universally minded.

"In the writing process, waves of ideas came quickly flooding in, each succeeding wave carrying away some of the old themes and rhythms and carrying in the new. The first section (*Starting from Here*) begins with what I later was to call the Palmian chord (D, E, F, F#, G#, A, B, C, C#), a scale or cluster of notes forming the theme of the opening section and shaping its harmonies.

"This gives way to the next part, *Iberia*, with its Moorish-infused energies that I experienced while living in Andalusia in the early 1960s. Next is the *Slow Drag*, dedicated to Wilma and Charlie, my mom and pop, who were Charleston dancing champions in the 1930s. The bluesy harmonies of *Slow Drag* were written especially for Tracy's abilities to weave melody, harmony and bass simultaneously through the full range of the electric violin, like a one-man string quartet.

"Pulsing drums lead us into *Towards the Clouds*, where large orchestral build-ups of long tones in slowly shifting harmonies create nebulous colors and release quick, bird-like flight formations in the woodwinds. Then a poignant, slow movement with melodies in the Lydian mode (*For Maresa*) leads seamlessly to an exuberant south Indian dance movement in which virtuosic themes are passed around the orchestra (*Ghandi-Ji's Danda*). This jaunty music suggests images of Mahatma Gandhi with his

walking stick ("danda"). There is a buildup in the section *Wedding Music*, written on the occasion of my son Gyan's wedding, but the concerto ends quietly with *The Afterglow*: a moment allowing reflection on the nonstop journey that precedes it.

"If *The Palmian Chord Ryddle* could be said to have a form, I would say it is in wave form, each wave unknown to itself until it emerges in full recognition of its nature. I could not have planned it thus: it just came out that way."

*At the Royal Majestic* is another recent example of Riley's work with a symphony orchestra and a virtuosic soloist, in this case organist Todd Wilson. Riley's organ concerto originated from his hour-long work for solo organ, *The Universal Bridge*, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2008. During an edition of the Philharmonic's Minimalist Jukebox festival, he'd been intrigued by the pipe organ in the orchestra's home, Disney Hall, and even dubbed the instrument "Hurricane Mama." Riley recalls that he was allowed to have several all-night sessions with this organ: "Some of the unused improvisations and sketches I made then later found their way into *At the Royal Majestic*."

The concerto's three movements – two long panels framing a much shorter middle one – require the soloist "to explore many different roles," writes Riley. The title *At the Royal Majestic* evokes "the mighty Wurlitzer housed in the grand movie palaces," which are juxtaposed with "fragments of calliope, Baroque chorales, [the] occasional craggy dissonance of clashing pipes, and boogie." The organist is also required occasionally "to coexist in a large orchestral soup with many parts having equal prominence." Another musical image the composer applies to the concerto overall is that of the "geometric formations seen in starling flight patterns."

The first movement draws on unused material for *The Saint Adolf Ring*, Riley's 1990 chamber opera based on the drawings and poetry of Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930), who spent his life confined to a psychiatric hospital. The movement's title (*Negro Hall*) refers to a colored-pencil drawing of the same name by Wölfli.

"I was intrigued by what Wölfli, who never traveled

outside of Switzerland... thought about Negro culture," Riley writes. "I tried to imagine what a dance hall in the Waldorf Astoria in NYC in the 1930s might be like (from Wölfli's perspective), a gaggle of black dancers in outlandish jitterbug and boogie-woogie routines in a polymetric, changing-tempo frenzy. I used Wölfli's beautifully geometric mandala-like drawings to inspire my own composing process. The wish was to set down music with an identifiable pop/jazz framework of the 1930s but transformed by a dreamlike vision. A cosmic cartoon, if you will."

Following the brief second movement (*The Lizard Tower Gang*), the finale refers to the pilgrimages annually made to the sacred site of Mount Kailash in Tibet, where the Hindu deity Shiva is believed to dwell.

Terry Riley has provided the following description of *At the Royal Majestic*:

"The concerto begins simply with the organist playing a relaxed, gospel-flavored solo that eventually winds its way to a darker, edgier mood. The orchestra joins the soloist and builds to a full crescendo just before polytonal block chords in the organ give way to a slow-rocking minor third pulse supporting a sinuous virtuosic bass clarinet duel. Following sections display quickly shifting metric pattern development, unveiling disjointed, psychedelic, jitterbug extravaganzas propelling the orchestra into sudden shifts in meter and tempo. A slow A–B–A romantic waltz elbows its way into the plot, undergoes a quick development and gives way to more polymetric patterns and unison crescendos before closing with punched-out syncopated chords.

"*The Lizard Tower Gang* attempts to juggle chaos and symmetry in its opening statement, displaying a jagged alto saxophone solo, alternating Chinese gong pulses, water drum heartbeats, string glissandos, ripping elephant tubas, chattering flutes, bassoons, and trumpets. The organ enters with rich chords punctuated over a suspended drone. A slow, ragtime-like sequence in the organ introduces part two, a grinding blues dirge giving way to the coda closing the movement.

"The opening theme of *Circling Kailash* is first stated in the violas and cellos and then taken up by the organ, brass and bassoons. It is interrupted by an eleven-beat descending pattern passed around the orchestra before the opening theme returns and the section idles to a close. The second part of the movement is marked by a slow theme outlined by pizzicato basses. A variation of the theme is then turned into a chorale for organ and brass. Crystalline C major patterns led by the mallet instruments combine with a restating of the theme in diatonic clusters by the organ to announce the closing section. The C major patterns pass around the orchestra as they undergo pan-modal coloration changes. The movement ends with a short, plaintive solo organ phrase over an E Phrygian modality."

Thomas May

## Tracy Silverman

Photo: Martin Cherry



Tracy Silverman defies musical boundaries. He was named one of 100 distinguished alumni by The Juilliard School. He has contributed significantly to the repertoire and development of the six-string electric violin, inspiring several major concertos composed specifically for him, including works by John Adams, Terry Riley, Kenji Bunch, and Nico Muhly. His career has taken him to the world's finest concert halls to work with esteemed orchestras, and conductors including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Marin Alsop, and Neeme Järvi, among others. Silverman has also recorded with the band Guster, the Paul Dresher Ensemble, jazz legend Billy Taylor, composer Terry Riley, and the Calder Quartet. His third electric violin concerto, *Love Song to the Sun*, was commissioned by a consortium of orchestras including the Anchorage Symphony.

[www.tracysilverman.com](http://www.tracysilverman.com)

## Todd Wilson

Photo: Sam Hubish



Regarded as one of today's finest concert organists, Todd Wilson is head of the organ department at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and director of music at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition, he is curator of the E.M. Skinner pipe organ at Severance Hall, and house organist for the Aeolian organ at the Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens in Akron, Ohio. An active member of the American Guild of Organists, Todd Wilson holds the Fellow and Choirmaster certificates. He has been heard in concert as soloist and with orchestras in many major cities throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. In October 2004 he performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic featuring the new organ at Disney Hall, and in January 2005 he performed his Japanese debut recital in Tokyo. An active interest in improvisation has led to his popular improvised accompaniments to classic silent films.

## Nashville Symphony



Photo: Mark Mosrie

Led by music director Giancarlo Guerrero, and President and CEO Alan D. Valentine, the Nashville Symphony has established an international profile with its innovative programming and growing discography. Founded in 1946, the orchestra is one of Tennessee's largest and longest running nonprofit performing arts organizations. With 170 performances annually, the orchestra's concert schedule encompasses classical, pops, jazz and family performances, along with extensive education and engagement programs. One of the most active recording orchestras in the country, the Nashville Symphony has released more than 30 recordings, including 28 on Naxos. These recordings have received a total of 20 GRAMMY® nominations and 11 GRAMMY® Awards, including two for Best Orchestral Performance. Throughout its history, the Nashville Symphony has championed the music of America's leading composers and has commissioned innovative new works from Nashville-based artists, including bassist Edgar Meyer, banjoist Béla Fleck, and singer-songwriter-pianist Ben Folds. Notable for its remarkable acoustics and distinctive architecture, Schermerhorn Symphony Center is home to the Nashville Symphony and widely regarded as one of the finest concert halls in the United States.

[www.nashvillesymphony.org](http://www.nashvillesymphony.org)



## Giancarlo Guerrero

Photo: Tony Matula



Giancarlo Guerrero is the five-time GRAMMY®-winning music director of the Nashville Symphony and music director of the Wrocław Philharmonic at Poland's National Forum of Music. A passionate proponent of new and contemporary music, he has championed the works of several of America's most respected composers, including John Adams, Michael Daugherty, Jennifer Higdon, and Joan Tower. He has presented eight world premieres with the Nashville Symphony, including the GRAMMY®-winning recording of Daugherty's *Tales of Hemingway*. Guerrero also developed and guided the creation of Nashville Symphony's Composer Lab & Workshop initiative, together with composer Aaron Jay Kernis, to foster and promote new American orchestral music. A natural and instinctive musician, he is a charismatic presence on the podium. He has appeared with many of the prominent North American orchestras, including those of Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Montréal, Seattle, Toronto, Vancouver, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. He has developed a strong guest-conducting profile in Europe and has worked in recent seasons with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie, L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Brussels Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Terry  
**RILEY**  
(b. 1935)

**The Palmian Chord Ryddle (2011) 35:23**

- 1 I. Starting from Here – 5:19**
- 2 II. Iberia – 6:34**
- 3 III. Slow Drag – 3:13**
- 4 IV. Towards the Clouds – 5:49**
- 5 V. For Maresa – 3:11**
- 6 VI. Ghandi-Ji's Danda – 5:23**
- 7 VII. Wedding Music – 4:22**
- 8 VIII. The Afterglow 1:33**

**At the Royal Majestic (2013) 33:58**

- 9 I. Negro Hall 15:36**
- 10 II. The Lizard Tower Gang 4:37**
- 11 III. Circling Kailash 13:45**

**WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS**

**Tracy Silverman, Electric Violin 1–8**

**Todd Wilson, Martin Foundation**

**Concert Organ 9–11**

**Nashville Symphony**

**Giancarlo Guerrero**

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**AMERICAN CLASSICS**

Terry Riley's name will always be associated with his breakthrough work *In C*, but his influence on modern music has stretched far beyond minimalism. Both of the works on this recording reveal Riley's spirit of exploration and his close collaboration with remarkable musicians. Commissioned by the Nashville Symphony, *The Palmian Chord Ryddle* is a kind of musical autobiography in which electric violin pioneer Tracy Silverman's "one-man string quartet" sets the pace for the sparse, translucent orchestration. *At the Royal Majestic* is another recent example of Riley's work with a symphony orchestra and a virtuosic soloist, in this case organist Todd Wilson. Its title refers to "the mighty Wurlitzer housed in grand movie palaces," and the music draws on a wide variety of genres including gospel, ragtime, Baroque chorales, and boogie.

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Playing  
Time:  
**69:21**