

One-Note Wonders

BY SETH COLTER WALLS

THE BEST PERFORMANCES OF TERRY Riley's 1964 minimalist classic *In C* come off like great sex: variations are gradually introduced and then withdrawn from a rhythmic structure—and when it's all over, you have a trancelike “what just happened?” kind of hum in your head. Created as a shot across the bow of mid-century atonal complexity, *In C* is typically driven by a pianist who pounds out a C note, in different octaves, for the entire piece, while a group of musicians (any number and on instruments they choose) play 53 shards of melody around that steady pulse. *In C* depends on this radical openness, which in turn reveals the work's ability to retain an identity even as the performers collaborate in surprising ways. So it's fitting that Riley's piece can still shock on its 45th anniversary,

this time courtesy of a two-disc set titled *In C Remixed*. Even more shocking: the album is conceived by Bill Ryan and his students at Michigan's Grand Valley State University.

Yes, you read correctly. This new version comes not from loft-based hipsters in New York or California, but via a mostly undergraduate crew from Allendale, Mich. Beyond the geographical surprise, it actually makes sense that a young ensemble has shown a flair for this music. The kids, as it were, have always been alright with the minimalists. Pete Townshend was so influenced by Riley's early synthesizer pieces that he named “Baba O'Riley” in part after the composer. “Black Mozart,” from Wu-Tang Clan member Raekwon's latest record, might just as easily have been dedicated

Grand Valley State makes a minimalist piece its own.

to a minimalist, given its catchy, brief figure that repeats through verse and chorus alike. The members of Grand Valley State's ensemble play with a confident swing that suggests they understand these links implicitly. It's also why this new release offers not just their own astute performance but also 18 remixes by a collection of big names, such as DJ Spooky and Pulitzer winner David Lang.

The fact that most of these diverse visions of *In C* succeed ought to say something to those who worry about what the future audience for classical music will look like. This isn't Grand Valley's first success, either: it proved its mettle in 2007 by releasing a lush version of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. The album cover for that recording featured a bird's-eye view of an agrarian expanse—as if signaling a flight from the world of philharmonics to one of plowshares. To put it another way, these kids are a trip.



LOVE IT

MIRANDA LAMBERT 'REVOLUTION'



Less self-consciously tough than on 'Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,' she's still one of Nashville's baddest voices.

HATE IT

PEARL JAM 'BACKSPACER'



The band's ninth album is another decent slice of alt-rock. It's also the band's ninth album. Yawn.

DEBATE IT

BARBRA STREISAND 'LOVE IS THE ANSWER'



She won't break your heart, but thanks to producer Diana Krall, Babs won't break your eardrums either.