

# SUBBACULTCHA!

UNRULY MUSIC MAGAZINE

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THE REVOLUTION ISSUE:  
**JEANS WILDER'S  
WILD LIFE.**

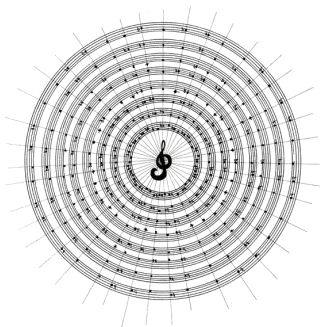
PLUS:  
DUCKTAILS  
45 REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE  
THE GUIDE TO MINIMALISM

**WIN  
TICKETS TO  
LYDIA LUNCH, YUCK  
AND UNHEARD  
FILM FESTIVAL PLUS  
WIN A PAIR OF  
ALL STARS  
MID**

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# SURVIVAL GUIDE TO MINIMAL MUSIC

MANY PEOPLE THINK THAT MINIMAL MUSIC IS THERE TO LULL YOU TO SLEEP. AU CONTRAIRE! IT'S ACTUALLY A FORM OF RESISTANCE, AGAINST POMPOSITY AND ARROGANCE. *SUBBACULTCHA!* EXPLAINS.



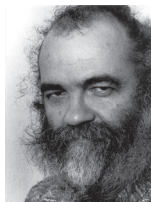
By Marinus de Ruiter

When minimal music rose in the 1960s, it spelled revolution. Although minimal compositions were highly experimental, they weren't as complex as twelve-tone music, the then prevalent form in avant-garde music. Instead, they arose from clear ideas and open-ended structures.

But if you listen to the wrong record by, say, Philip Glass, you might not get the idea - you might just hear a choir going 'fa la la' for 15 minutes, as once parodied in *South Park*. Minimal music is best experienced live.

Inspired by Steve Reich's *Six Pianos* with its repetitive, intertwining piano patterns, we present six guidelines. Start reading wherever you like. Feel free to expand and repeat infinitely.

**1 HAVE A ROCKIN' TIME**  
Listen to 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' by Gene Vincent and you'll know that rock 'n' roll can put you in a trance. Minimalists understood that, and ever since they started they've been rubbing shoulders with rockers. For example, John Cale peeled the Velvet Underground banana while also supporting minimalist pioneers (La Monte Young, Tony Conrad) with his pleasantly nagging viola.



La Monte Young

**2 BRING YOUR PUNK ATTITUDE**

As a young American composer, Philip Glass felt bullied by the increasing-

ly complex twelve-tone serial music coming out of Europe.



Philip Glass

He pissed off critics and audiences by playing simple piano riffs over and over (ostinato is the word), which in time expanded into his extremely successful repetitive style. Sort of like punk crushing progressive rock with three chords. Even one chord was enough for some minimal-minded composers, such as Glenn Branca and Rhys Chatham, who blasted out stomping monoliths of sound. Their electric guitar ensembles featured punk rockers that would later end up in bands such as Sonic Youth and Helmet.



Glenn Branca

**3** DON'T FEAR THE RAGA  
Western musicians can learn from, but should never copy, Eastern and African music, said Steve Reich.



Steve Reich

In other words: feel inspired, but use your own skills and cultural background. And leave those beads and orange dresses in the new age shop. Minimalist adventurer Terry Riley might look like a guru now, but it took him decades to learn Indian music while also exploring boogie woogie piano, analogue synthesizer trance and repetitive ensemble music.

**4** PLUG IT IN  
Originally, electronic instruments imitated analogue instruments. Again, it was Steve Reich who noticed that

synthesizers actually had a specific sound of their own; he predicted that we would eventually try to imitate *them* with real instruments. Right now, we don't even seem to distinguish electronic and analogue anymore. Reich often stages duets between musicians and recordings of themselves. Terry Riley used echo machines to create electronic canons. Who would even notice nowadays?



Terry Riley

**5** KEEP ON PRAYIN' IN A FREE WORLD

Churches have damaged many minds, but religious souls have produced the most amazing music. Estonian minimalist Arvo Pärt is a case in point. His sonic sculptures can last for the lengths of entire albums and still remain fascinating throughout. Don't blame him for the god squad though! As many other original minds, he unwillingly spawned a string of unforgivable copycats. It just proves that being solemn or repetitive is not enough for making good minimal music. The key is in the notes; some composers have a knack for writing good

ones while others fail, no matter how hard they pray.



Arvo Pärt

## VOTE!

6 Minimal music has been political from the start, resisting the oppressive know-it-all of serialism. On top of that, minimalists have often related to socio-political issues. Terry Riley recently used names of victims from both sides of the Iraq war as lyrics in his music. Philip Glass has collaborated with poet and activist Allen Ginsberg, and one of Reich's early pieces used recordings of the testimony of a murder suspect who was wrongfully accused and convicted.



Allen Ginsberg

So, you can be moved to take a stand while being energised by the pulse of a minimalist ensemble. Beats the election debates.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

(NOT NECESSARILY TRUE)

- Minimal music is not minimal
- Minimal music is not boring
- Minimal music does not require being of a certain age
- Minimal music does not require a university education
- Minimal music is not only made by men with beards.

## RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Terry Riley - A Rainbow in Curved Air  
Tony Conrad & Faust - Outside the Dream Syndicate

Philip Glass - Einstein on the Beach  
Steve Reich - Music for 18 Musicians  
Glenn Branca - The Ascension  
Simeon Ten Holt - Canto Ostinato  
Meredith Monk - Do You Be  
Rhys Chatham - Die Donnergötter  
Wim Mertens - The Belly of an Architect

Arvo Pärt - Alina  
Julius Eastman - Unjust Malaise

## FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

Check it out!

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*The World Minimal Music Festival is on at Muziekgebouw from 30 March to 3 April. Subbacultcha! is programming a cutting-edge side programme.*