



Lou Harrison (1917-2003) has stated that music is essentially “a song and a dance” - expansive melody (which he calls “the audience's take-home pay”) and lively rhythm. The rhythmic strain is apparent not only in his many percussion ensemble works (e.g. *Double Music*, *Concerto in slendro*), but also in the wealth of dance movements that permeate his chamber and orchestral compositions (e.g. the 'stampede' from the *Last Symphony*). The melodic strain appears even in the most dissonant of his compositions.

Harrison's devotion to melody and rhythm was strongly encouraged by his mentor, Henry Cowell, whose course 'Music of the Peoples of the World' he took in San Francisco in 1935. Cowell taught that most of the world's music consists of a melodic line with rhythmic support. He encouraged his students to explore world musical cultures, to seek new sound-producing media, and to unite disparate musical styles - all traits that figure prominently in Harrison's work.

Lou Harrison was born in Portland, Oregon on 14 May 1917, but spent his formative years in northern California, where his family moved when he was nine. After graduating from Burlingame High School in 1934, he moved to San Francisco where he collaborated with modern dancers and choreographers (notably Carol Beals, Bonnie Bird, Bella Lewitzky and Lester Horton), and staged high profile percussion concerts with John Cage in San Francisco and Oakland. Harrison and Cage delighted in rummaging through the city's junkyards, import stores, and nurseries to discover new percussion sounds, including automobile brake drums and flower pots. For their 1941 concert at the California Club, they decided to jointly compose a percussion quartet (*Double Music*), each writing two parts of the piece. Although they agreed on basic

compositional procedures and section lengths, the two composers worked independently.

Harrison explains:

We agreed to use a specified number of rhythmicles [i.e. rhythmic figures] and/or rests of the same quantity, which could be put together in any combination. Then we shaped the full length of the piece in half notes. We each did our own form. We wrote separately and then put it together and never changed a note. We didn't need to. By that time I knew perfectly well what John would be doing, or what his form was likely to be. So I accommodated him. And I think he did the same to me, too, because it came out very well.<sup>1</sup>

Through Cowell as well, Harrison developed a fascination with Amerindian and early Californian culture, reflected in a number of works throughout his career, including his *Fourth Symphony* (which he prefers to call *Last Symphony*). The most novel feature of this work is its finale, featuring a baritone soloist chanting Navajo 'Coyote Stories' over a murmuring percussion accompaniment that evokes the Javanese gamelan, one of the most enduring influences in Harrison's life. (Harrison first heard gamelan music on recordings that Cowell played for him; and he first saw a live gamelan at the Golden Gate Exposition on Treasure Island in 1939.)

In 1942 Harrison moved to Los Angeles, where he studied with Arnold Schoenberg, and a year later relocated to New York. There he developed a close circle of friends, including Virgil Thomson, who hired him as a 'stringer' to review concerts for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Between 1944 and 1947, Harrison would write nearly three hundred reviews for the *Tribune* and contribute articles to other periodicals as well, including *Modern Music*, *Listen* and *View*.

In New York he continued his collaboration with modern dance, developing a particularly productive relationship with dancer and choreographer Jean Erdman, wife of writer Joseph Campbell. Together Harrison and Erdman developed a series of substantial stage works during the years 1949-51, among them the thirty-minute *Solstice*, which deals with the struggle between the old year and the new, represented by the Sun Lion (the warmth of summer) and the Moon Bull (the dark days of winter). Harrison depicted the 'primeval fear' of both solstices: "the terrifying one - is everything going to get hotter and we will all burn up?" and the "frightening one - is everything going to get darker and we will head into oblivion?"<sup>2</sup> In one case the fire must be rekindled; in the other, quenched. Harrison's instrumentation calls for a trio of treble instruments (flute, oboe, trumpet), a trio of bass instruments (two celli and string bass), and two keyboards (tack-piano and celesta). The timbral variety and contrasting ranges allowed him to represent the bright days of summer or the nights in winter, to indulge his love of a strong low register, and to imitate a gamelan by combining the keyboards with the double bass struck below the bridge with drumsticks.

Despite his New York successes, however, Harrison never really adjusted to big city life. In summer 1951 he took a faculty position at Black Mountain College in North Carolina (an idealistic educational community that treasured interdisciplinary collaboration), and in 1953 returned to California, settling in the (then) rural village of Aptos, where he had lived ever since.

His return to the West Coast marked a re-establishment of his ties to Asia, which he visited for the first time in 1961. On 25 March he boarded a freighter for Tokyo to attend the East-West Music Encounter Conference, his entire trip funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. During the long sea voyage, Harrison explored the myriad possibilities for pentatonic divisions of the octave (later described in his *Music Primer*) and composed the *Concerto in slendro* for violin, two tack-pianos, celesta and percussion (including four galvanized garbage cans). The *Concerto* is influenced by Asian music not only in its instrumental combination (which, like *Solstice*, imitates the gamelan timbre), but also in its scale, which mimics an Indonesian slendro - a five-tone mode with no semitones.

From Japan Harrison went to Korea and, the following year, to Taiwan. He studied various Korean and Chinese instruments and began to write for Asian ensembles, sometimes in combination with European instruments. After intensive study of traditional gamelan beginning in

1975, he began to compose for this Indonesian percussion orchestra, at times with Western instruments as soloists.

In more recent years, however, Harrison had turned more frequently to standard European ensembles. Between 1975 and 1996 he composed three symphonies, a piano concerto, and a host of chamber compositions (e.g. the *String Quartet Set*, 1979, the *Varied Trio*, 1987, and the *Piano Trio*, 1990). He wrote the brief *Elegy, to the Memory of Calvin Simmons* on 22-24 August 1982, as a tribute to the young conductor of the Oakland Symphony who had died in a boating accident. Two days after its completion, the work was premiered at the Cabrillo Music Festival, a two-week summer festival highlighting contemporary music.

*The Last Symphony*, commissioned by the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra and the Brooklyn Academy of Music and premiered on 2 November 1990, combines Harrison's interests in native American music, ancient music, and Asian music in the context of the Western orchestra. In addition to the Navajo 'Coyote Stories' in its fourth movement, the work contains a medieval dance form, the *estampie*, which Harrison loves to translate as 'stampede' (it has paired phrases with alternately open and closed endings: AxAyBxBxCxCy, etc.). The symphony also reflects a cross-cultural application of compositional techniques, in this case Harrison's adaptation of traditional gamelan embellishment styles to Western instruments. As with many of his works, the *Last Symphony* has undergone various revisions since its premiere. In 1995, Harrison unveiled the fourth and last version of the work for conductor Barry Jekowsky and the California Symphony, the opening movement shortened, and the second and fourth movements exchanged. Asked what would happen should he decide to write still another symphony, the composer quipped: "I'll call it the 'Very Last Symphony'".

Indeed, Harrison views his own art with joy and humor, his compositional tools forming a vast playground filled with fascinating toys. He often remarked that "early on I laid out my toys on a wide acreage", and freely chose among them, selecting what struck his fancy at the moment and linking them in new and whimsical combinations.

Leta E. Miller (Professor, University of California, Santa Cruz and co-author of the book *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*, Oxford University Press, 1998)

<sup>1</sup> Lou Harrison, interview with Leta Miller, 31 March 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Lou Harrison, interview with Virginia Rathbun - *Lou Harrison and his Music* (M.A. thesis, San Jose State University, 1976), p.134.

As founder and Music Director of the California Symphony, **Barry Jekowsky** has created, within ten years, one of California's most exciting and distinctive orchestras. In 1994 he was appointed Associate Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC, by Leonard Slatkin. Jekowsky has earned a national reputation for his innovative and visionary ideas, including the presentation of a work by an American composer in every California Symphony concert. In 1991 he created the Young American Composer-in Residence program, a unique forum for supportive co-operation between musicians and composer. Mr. Jekowsky has appeared with orchestras and in festivals throughout North America, as well as with European orchestras including the Halle and the London Philharmonic. Born in New York, he began his musical training at the age of five; at nine he entered the Juilliard School, where he was awarded his Bachelors and Masters degrees. He is the recipient of a Leopold Stokowski conducting prize.

Gifted with a unique voice that has been likened to a caressing breeze on silk, the innovative musical expressions of the five time Grammy award-winning vocalist **Al Jarreau** have made him one of the most exciting and critically-acclaimed performers of our time. With a host of chart-topping singles spanning musical genres, including *Breakin' away*, *We're in this love together*, *Mornin'* and *Boogie down*, he holds the honor of being one of the rare artists to have won Grammys in three different categories: Pop, Jazz and R & B.

**Maria Bachmann** is an eminent proponent of contemporary music, and has achieved international prominence through her acclaimed recordings and performances. She has won numerous competitions, including First Prize at the International Fritz Kreisler Competition in Vienna and the Concert Artists Guild International Competition in New York; she has also been a laureate at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. Ms Bachmann has been the featured soloist with leading orchestras throughout the world. Of Hungarian descent, she is noted for her performances of the music of Béla Bartók, and was invited by the Library of Congress to recreate the legendary Szigeti/Bartók recital of 1940 in a nationally-broadcast performance. Maria Bachmann holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Szymon Goldberg and Ivan Galamian.

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