SOLEMN PLAY

A Life of Cross-Cultural Synthesis

INTRODUCTION

Art, says Lou Harrison, can be understood as an extension of the solemn play of children.¹ "I cannot conceive of a more absorbing play and one more delightful," he notes, "than assembling a phrase, a section, a form" from tiny melodic bits, "a play in which the moves are alluring and the results beyond all effort rewarding."² Harrison frequently compares his compositional process to the card game of solitaire, governed by strict rules of his own devising—and he rarely tolerates any cheating.³ These rules form a set of "controls," limiting the potential realizations of his musical material and permitting Harrison to manage the array of possibilities offered by his historical research, his cross-cultural studies, or simply his imagination. He may, for instance, severely restrict the set of permissible harmonic or melodic intervals, or confine himself to a limited number of rhythmic figures, a prescribed division of measures or beats, or even a technical restriction suggested by a particular instrument. (In the first movement of his Suite for Cello and Harp, for example, he challenged himself to keep the harpist's hands fixed in one position.) Harrison's goal is to create a tightly-controlled framework which he can then grace with elegant surface materials, giving the listener a sense of improvisatory freedom girded by an internal logic. The rules themselves often remain hidden: "I don't want to wear my compositional tools on my sleeve," he says.⁴

With the rules in place, Harrison selects his compositional game pieces from a variety of sources he has assembled over the years: the music of Handel, Rameau, Cowell, Ives, Ruggles, and Schoenberg; dance traditions of the Middle Ages and the Baroque, or of India, Turkey, and Java; songs of Native Americans or Medieval Europe; Korean court music, Chinese theater, Japanese gagaku, and Indonesian gamelan; the tuning theories of Harry Partch; the protest poetry of Robert Duncan; and the international language Esperanto. "There is nothing labored about all this," wrote Virgil Thomson in 1987; "Lou Harrison is not making plastic roses for funeral parlors. He is simply speaking in many personae and many languages."⁵

Harrison's stylistic path has been less a linear progression than a series of dynamic thrusts—each occasioned by a musical concept, timbre, or tradition that intrigued him at a particular moment (what he calls the "me too" phenomenon), each leading to intensive

¹Variants of this statement occur in many of Harrison's lectures, interviews, and writings; for example, in Marta Morgan's "Composer Puts a 'Sense of Play' in his Music," San Jose Mercury News, Aug. 2, 1976, and in Harrison's "Crackpot Lecture" aired on KPFA radio in Berkeley in 1959 or 1960 (audiotape in composer's personal archive).
²Harrison, "Crackpot Lecture."
³"One does not usually cheat at solitaire," Harrison wrote in his Music Primer (New York: C. F. Peters, 1971, 2nd ed. 1993), 100. The revised edition of the Primer contains a reproduction of the original 1971 version (with page numbering retained), a Japanese translation, and several supplementary essays.
⁴Harrison, interview, May 26, 1994. Note: hereafter "interview" designates a formal taped session with the author; while "personal communication" refers to an informal discussion with the author.
research and study, and each linked in novel ways to its predecessors. A chronological overview of Harrison’s compositional style shows clusters of works building on successive areas of interest. From the late 1930s to the early 1940s, he composed a series of percussion works—for percussion alone, percussion as vocal or dance accompaniment, and percussion as the orchestra in concerti. In the mid to late 1940s, he explored dissonant counterpoint and twelve-tone serialism often with more debt to the style of Carl Ruggles than to that of his own teacher, Arnold Schoenberg. In the 1950s, Harrison focused on tuning systems, from septatonic and pentatonic scales in just intonation to his own “Free Style,” in which pitches are related mathematically only to their immediate neighbors. Trips to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan in 1961 and 1962 prompted him to study and perform Korean and Chinese music on native instruments and to compose works for instruments such as the Korean double reed p’iri and the Chinese cheng (psaltery), as well as for ensembles that combine instruments from a variety of cultural traditions. (Pacifica Rondo, composed in 1963, for example, calls for the Korean p’iri and kayagum [psaltery], the Chinese cheng and sheng [mouth organ], and the Indian jalukara [tuned bowls] as well as European string, wind, and keyboard instruments.) In 1975, after imitating the sound of the gamelan on Western instruments for years, he embarked on a disciplined study of this traditional Indonesian percussion orchestra with the renowned native teacher, Pak Cokro. Harrison’s works for gamelan, inspired by his studies, now number over fifty and include pieces in traditional style as well as hybrid compositions. Other influences appear consistently throughout his career: dance, for example, or the music of the French Baroque; instrument-building, which he has explored since childhood; and his pacifism, manifest in his many political compositions.

The object of Harrison’s musical gaming is to project an original and distinctive voice through the creative integration of seemingly incongruous influences. He wanders in what he views as a compositional playground, choosing the elements that strike his fancy at the moment and linking them in new and sometimes whimsical combinations—such as intercultural concerti in which violin, viola, cello, piano, French horn, saxophone, and trumpet are accompanied by gamelan, or conversely, where the Chinese p’i-p’a is accompanied by a Western string orchestra (1997). “Early on I laid out my toys on a wide acreage,” Harrison says. He intermingles forms and compositional practices as well: the p’i-p’a concerto includes a medieval European estampie; his Psalter Sonata for Chinese cheng (1961) is written in a Scarlatti-type binary form; and his Piano Trio (1990), Varied Trio (1986–87), and Fourth Symphony (1990), though scored for European instruments, all use gamelan ornamental figuration.

Cultural pluralism is the hallmark of Harrison’s style, and synthesis is its essence. “Don’t underrate hybrid music,” he wrote, “because that’s all there is.” For Harrison, diverse styles may coexist within a single composition: serialism finds reconciliation with melody, medievalism with modernism. At the same time, the resultant blend is distinctively personal. “The message,” said Virgil Thomson, “is pure Harrison. And that message is of joy, dazzling and serene and even at its most intensely serious not without laughter.”

The foundation for all of the major elements in Harrison’s music was laid down early in his career, before he left San Francisco in 1942. During high school he traveled each week from his home in Burlingame to sing Gregorian chant at Mission Dolores in San Francisco,
and later, as an undergraduate, he studied early instruments and sang in a madrigal ensemble. In the late 1930s he frequented the city’s Chinese opera productions, heard a live Balinese gamelan at the Golden Gate Exposition on Treasure Island, and developed close working relationships with modern dancers in San Francisco and Oakland. Beginning in 1935, studies with Henry Cowell (1897–1965) introduced Harrison to the works of Schoenberg as well as a variety of world musics. Cowell, who fostered an experimental, open-minded attitude toward compositional technique, taught Harrison to compose by manipulating small melodic and rhythmic cells, to explore extended keyboard techniques, and to seek new sound media. (Harrison and John Cage would rummage through San Francisco’s automobile junkyards, hardware stores, and import stores together for anything that would ping, bong, or twang; and they spent hours testing the pitch and resonance of flower pots in local nurseries.)

Harrison read voraciously—sometimes as many as two books a day—on a broad range of musical subjects. By the age of eighteen, he had already studied Plato’s writings on the social theory of music, ancient Chinese musical treatises (including the Li Chi, the classic Book of Rites, which explores, among many other issues, music’s role in society), and a host of historical and theoretical texts on Western music. He routinely borrowed piles of scores from the San Francisco Public Library, ranging from early keyboard music to the latest works of contemporary classical composers: “That was where I fell in love with Schoenberg’s music,” he recalls; “The library had a very advanced director at that time, a lovely woman, and I always felt like I was presenting an application to the goddess. But she kept me in everything I needed. I went through all the Spanish organists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I went through all of the Lully and Rameau operas and ballets, and all of the French organ composers—Widor, etc. Plus the usual things: Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, Gluck.” Even Harrison’s later interest in just intonation was piqued in these early years by reading Joseph Yasser’s A Theory of Evolving Tonality (1932).

Given the many subcurrents in Harrison’s music, discussions of his work have tended, until recently, to be scattered in a wide variety of specialized sources: writings on intonation systems, percussion music, instrument building, gamelan, or Asian-Western cross-influences. His reputation, too, has often been fragmented. He is known to various constituencies as “the gamelan composer” or “the percussion composer,” as a “tuning theorist” or a “harbinger of minimalism.”

Counteracting this eclectic imagery are the frequent references to Harrison as a quintessential “West Coast” composer—a facile oversimplification, yet one that has accumulated a range of connotations evoking enculturated sound-images, whether or not they adequately characterize the work of any individual composer. Harrison’s music reflects influences indigenous to California, especially those stemming from historical patterns of immigration (the strong Chinese presence in San Francisco, the Spanish mission culture, and the influence of Mexico). But his music also articulates more generalized qualities of texture and temporality often linked to the West Coast’s geography and relaxed lifestyle: spaciousness, open textures, a sense of timelessness, and an attraction to surface features. Yet the term “West Coast” has been used at times to dismiss this music rather than to understand it. To characterize Harrison as a “West Coast composer” is to ignore the diversity of his art—the intricate polyphonic textures of his works from the 1940s and early 1950s, for instance, or the animated rhythmic propulsion of his many estampies and percussion works. At the same time, even his most complex contrapuntal pieces are marked by a characteristic lyricism, and his most rhythmic ones by a sense of spaciousness. In the broadest sense, the West Coast heritage invites a mixing of influences, an approach Harrison finds ideally suited to his nature.

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13Treasure Island, in the San Francisco Bay, was constructed specifically for this 1939 exposition.
14Harrison, interview, December 29, 1993.
15Yasser, a musicologist, organist, and conductor, was educated in Moscow and emigrated to the United States in 1923.
Lou Harrison was born in Portland, Oregon, on May 14, 1917, but spent his formative years in northern California, where his family relocated when he was nine. The Harrisons moved from one California town to another almost annually between 1926 and 1934: Woodland, Sacramento, Stockton, Berkeley, San Francisco, Los Gatos, Redwood City, Belmont, and Burlingame.\textsuperscript{15} Lou and his younger brother Bill had little opportunity to develop long-lasting friendships. Instead Lou carried a small trunk of mementos from place to place: “It was my little life. Since I . . . had no chance to have a peer group or any roots . . . I made an imaginary world and carried it around in paper and books.”\textsuperscript{16} To this day, Harrison is a collector and accumulator—of books, artwork, and his own programs, scores, and reviews. Unlike many other composers, he has not destroyed notebooks, sketches, or early compositions, preserving the history of individual works as well as the development of his compositional process. When faced with a new commission, Harrison frequently revisits old pieces, at times selecting fragments from unfinished works and at other times refashioning completed pieces in new guises: “The gods are always kind and leave us with things to do,” he says.\textsuperscript{17} He has kept many volumes of his writings as well—his early poetry, for instance, and even general musings on a wide range of topics, both musical and non-musical.

Harrison’s mother, Calline (“Cal”) Lillian Silver Harrison, assured her sons a thorough grounding in the performing arts by sending them regularly to dance and music lessons, and encouraging their interest in the theater. Lou first appeared on the stage at the age of two-and-a-half in a production of Jean Webster’s \textit{Daddy Long Legs}, and even toured the Northwest with the Portland stock company that mounted the show.\textsuperscript{18} (His improvisatory antics on the stage inspired delighted commentary from newspaper reviewers.) Cal also gave her sons an ecumenical religious training, changing denominations whenever they moved—and sometimes more often than that. Harrison also attributes to his mother his political consciousness, his embrace of racial and cultural diversity, and his love of Asian art. (“Mom also gave me her gene X428, which predisposes me to like other males,” he announced in a 1997 talk; “It works too.”)\textsuperscript{19}

After graduating from Burlingame High School in December 1934, Harrison attended San Francisco State College (now University) for three semesters, where he studied French horn and clarinet, took up harpsichord and recorder, and sang in several vocal ensembles. Throughout his San Francisco years he performed Renaissance and Baroque music on early instruments and wrote compositions for harpsichord, clavichord, recorder, and other historical instruments, among them a frequently-performed set of six harpsichord sonatas.\textsuperscript{20} Over the years Harrison has also built replicas of early instruments, including two clavichords and several versions of the ancient Greek aulos, efforts that set the stage for his later large-scale instrument-building projects (many completed in collaboration with his partner, Bill Colvig)—including harps, metallophones, Chinese and Korean instruments, and three gamelan.

Pre-classical styles and formal structures have informed Harrison’s music ever since these San Francisco experiences: he has written sarabandes (several works from the 1930s), ductias (\textit{Suite for Symphonic Strings}, 1960; \textit{Rhymes with Silver}, 1996), and a conduc-
tus (Suite for Piano, 1943), as well as a dozen estampies (in works from 1960 to 1997)—lively medieval dances characterized by whirling melodies set against a rhythmic percussion accompaniment.

A seminal event in Harrison's career was his enrollment in the spring of 1935 in Henry Cowell's course "Music of the Peoples of the World" at the University of California Extension in San Francisco. It was here that Harrison first heard gamelan music, from recordings that Cowell had brought back from his studies in 1931–32 at the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv (directed from 1926–33 by Erich von Hornbostel). The following autumn Harrison began private composition lessons with Cowell, who became (and would remain) one of the strongest musical influences in Harrison's life. In addition to encouraging Harrison to explore new instrumental resources, Cowell taught his students the importance of melody and gave them guided exercises in writing diverse forms of counterpoint. He also helped Harrison forge important professional relationships, recommending him for a position as dance accompanist at Mills College and facilitating his interactions with Arnold Schoenberg, Edgard Varèse, Carl Ruggles, and Charles Ives.

On March 25, 1936, Harrison wrote to Ives at Cowell's suggestion: "I am a student at State College in San Francisco. It seems that there are favorable opportunities to perform your works on what we have as student recitals and in theory and history classes." Ives obliged by sending two piano sonatas, and in December 1936, after additional correspondence and requests, had his nephew Chester Ives send Harrison a crate of photostats that included most of Ives's chamber music, songs, and several orchestral works. Harrison studied these pieces at the piano almost daily over a ten-year period. Despite the tentative nature of this initial contact, Harrison would eventually play an important role in the restoration and dissemination of Ives's music, editing several works after he moved to New York in 1943. He orchestrated Ives's song, They are There! and edited the Third Symphony, First Piano Sonata, and Second String Quartet. Working from a corrupt source, Harrison also reconstructed a portion of the Robert Browning Overture with such accuracy that when the original score of the work finally surfaced, the reconstruction was found to be nearly identical to the original.

Among the other friendships instigated by Cowell was that between Harrison and John Cage. Early in the summer of 1938 Cage appeared unannounced at Harrison's San Francisco apartment. He had sought out Harrison at Cowell's suggestion: "I knew that [Lou] shared with me the love of the modern dance," Cage recalled many years later, "and I needed a job." As Cowell suspected, the two men found much in common and developed a close collaboration as well as a lifelong friendship. Harrison recommended Cage to the dancer and choreographer Bonnie Bird, who was seeking an accompanist for her classes at the Cornish School in Seattle (a job Cage held for two years), and made sure that Mills College, where Harrison was on the staff, invited Cage to its summer festivals in 1939 and 1940. (According to Bird's biographer, the Cornish position was first offered to Harrison, who declined.) During these summer festivals and after Cage's return to San

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12 A postcard from Cowell to Harrison, dated September 11, 1935, seems to refer to the first lesson. The original card is in Special Collections in the University of California, Santa Cruz library and is reproduced in Peter Garland, ed., A Lou Harrison Reader, 31.
13 These and other compositional processes are discussed in Harrison's Music Primer.
14 Despite some claims to the contrary, it appears that Harrison's employment at Mills began in the fall of 1937. For details of conflicting information on this topic, see Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison, chapter 1.
15 Harrison-Ives correspondence: originals in the Ives archive, Yale University; copies in Harrison's personal archive.
16 Cage/Harrison panel discussion at the Cornish School, Seattle, Washington, January 1992. Videotape by Bob Campbell graciously made available through the efforts of Jarrad Powell. Quotations from unpublished John Cage material used with the permission of the John Cage Trust.
17 Cage's years in Seattle are discussed in my forthcoming article, "Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle (1938–40)," which will appear in a collection of articles edited by David Paterson and published by Garland Press.
18 Karen Bell-Kanner, Frontiers: The Life and Times of Bonnie Bird, American Modern Dancer and Dance Educator (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Books, forthcoming). Harrison met Bird at the Mills College 1938 summer session, which ran from June 26 to August 6; Bird was there for the first two weeks.
Francisco in 1940, the two men staged high-profile percussion concerts using a variety of novel instruments. For one of these performances at the California Club in 1941, they even wrote a joint composition: the percussion quartet Double Music.¹⁰

Harrison and Cage's compositions for percussion were an outgrowth of their collaborations with modern dancers.¹⁰ In San Francisco, Harrison wrote music for Carol Beals and Lenore Peters Job; at Mills he collaborated with Tina Flade, Marian van Tuyl, and Los Angeles choreographer Lester Horton, who spent two summer sessions in Oakland with his assistant, the now renowned Bella Lewitzky. Harrison even danced in several staged productions—at the War Memorial Opera House (where he played the part of Winter in Harvey Raab's opera Ming-Yi), at the Curran Theater (in Changing World, for which he also wrote the score and helped with the choreography), and at the Lucie Stern Grove (in Green Mansions, where he played the role of Abel, dancing to his own music and performing in the percussion ensemble).³¹

Harrison also wrote percussion music for the concert hall. Among his works from this period are a number of concerti for solo instrument and percussion, including one for flute (1939), which is performed frequently and has been recorded three times, and an equally popular one for violin (completed in 1959).³² He also began a mass for voices and percussion, occasioned by Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939 (although he changed its scoring to trumpet, harp, and strings in 1952). The opening motive in the "Kyrie" is his "cry of anguish" over the impending war, the "Gloria" his plea for world unity with an outburst of bells.³³ This Mass to St. Anthony also reflects Harrison's interest in Native American and California mission music, evidenced by other works throughout his career (Sanctus, 1940; Strict Songs, 1955; Fourth Symphony, 1990).

The many percussion works Harrison composed in the 1930s-40s not only have formed an essential core of the present-day percussion repertoire, but also have served as a continuing influence on his later compositions. In addition to substituting the percussion orchestra for the traditional orchestra in concerti,³⁴ Harrison has often called on melodic instruments for percussive effects: tapping on the body of the instrument (String Quartet Set, 1979), beating the strings of a double bass with drumsticks below the bridge (Solstice, 1950), or striking rapid clusters on the keyboard with an octave bar (Concerto for Organ with Percussion Orchestra, 1973; Grand Duo, 1988; Piano Concerto, 1983). The percussion ensemble also served as a backdrop to his work with gamelan after 1975.

By the time Harrison left San Francisco in 1942 he had composed over 175 works (two of them published in the New Music Quarterly),³⁵ including several twelve-tone compositions and even some quarter-tone pieces. He spent the year 1942-43 in Los Angeles, where he provided piano accompaniments for the dance studio of Lester Horton (an experimental West Coast choreographer who organized the first multi-racial dance troupe in the nation and explored cross-cultural themes in his works).³⁶ Harrison also taught Labanotation, music history, and musical form to UCLA dance students, and he studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg. In contrast to Cage's experience,³⁷ Harrison found

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¹⁰Published by C. F. Peters in 1961.
¹¹For more on Harrison and dance, see Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison, chapter 4, and Miller, "The Art of Noise."
¹²Compact disc recordings of the flute concerto include: Musical Heritage Society MHS 513616L, CRI CD-568; and Bis 272. The violin concerto is available on Crystal CD853.
¹⁴Besides the flute and violin concerti cited above, he wrote Concerto in Síndaro for violin and percussion in 1961 and a Concerto for Organ with Percussion in 1973.
¹⁵Saraband and Prelude for Grandpiano (both composed in 1937): New Music Quarterly XI/4, July 1938.
¹⁷Cage commented that Schoenberg "never once led me to believe that my work was distinguished in any way. He never praised my compositions, and when I commented on other students' work in class he held my comments up to ridicule" (Calvin Tomkins, The Bride and the Bachelors [New York and London: Penguin Books, 1962], 85).
Schoenberg both supportive and helpful. Schoenberg praised Harrison’s published piano works during weekly seminars, helped him find his way through a compositional block, and cited him in a list of promising young composers in a letter to Roy Harris in 1945.18

In the spring of 1943 Horton moved his dance company to New York. Harrison followed some months later, initiating a ten-year residence on the East Coast that rounded out his musical education even as it proved to be the most difficult period of his life. Though he was successful professionally, Harrison’s New York years were for the most part troubled and unhappy, convincing him to return to the West. He ultimately recognized that he was unsuited to urban life on either coast and found a permanent residence in the quiet California coastal town of Aptos, about eighty-five miles south of San Francisco.

SAN FRANCISCO PERIOD WORKS

The two works in the present volume from Harrison’s San Francisco years illustrate his compositional language during the 1930s as well as the themes and genres that most attracted his attention. France 1917–Spain 1937 is one of several political works from this period—and the only one not associated with dance or a sung text. Tributes to Charon is one of Harrison’s many pieces for percussion ensemble, a genre he was able to realize in performance with friends and colleagues. Despite the differences in instrumentation, both compositions show the influence of Henry Cowell’s teaching in their distinctive treatment of short melodic and rhythmic motives. “Henry taught me how to make large melodies out of very small mosaic units,” Harrison recalls; “The technique has been with me for so long now that it has become a subconscious activity.”39

France 1917–Spain 1937

*France 1917–Spain 1937* (for string quartet and two percussionists) was not Harrison’s first political composition. That distinction belongs to *Waterfront–1934* (composed in late 1935 or early 1936), a work for solo percussion stimulated by a request from the dancer-choreographer Carol Beals. In 1934 Beals and her husband, Mervin Levy (later Leeds)40 founded the Dance Council of Northern California, which two years later represented twenty groups and over a hundred dancers and heralded its mission in decidedly political terms: “For unity in defense of culture; for the rights of artists to be paid for the work they do; for a national arts program.”41 *Waterfront–1934* commemorated the San Francisco general strike of July 1934, which capped years of labor unrest in the West Coast shipping industry. Street riots in San Francisco, resulting in the deaths of two workers, prompted a general city strike that virtually shut down business activity for three days in July 1934.42 The premiere of the Beals-Harrison production (with Harrison as performer) took place in the boxing ring of the longshoremen’s union headquarters, the composer seated on the floor surrounded by his instruments, and the dancers occasionally swinging out against the ropes above him.

Harrison’s connections to dance led to several other political works during this period: *Changing World* (nine choreographers including Harrison, 1937) projected hopes for women’s rights and religious cooperation; *Conquest* (Lester Horton, 1938) heralded

40According to Beals, the name was changed to Leeds out of fear of anti-Semitism. Carol Beals, interview, June 11, 1996.
41Advertisement for membership in the Dance Council printed in the 1937 festival program.
Mexican resistance to Spanish colonialization; 16 to 24 (Horton, 1940) lamented youth alienation; and In Praise of Johnny Appleseed (Beals, 1942) urged ecological attentiveness.

France 1917–Spain 1937, though not composed for dance, was nevertheless an outgrowth of these artistic collaborations, conceived in the overheated social and political climate of the 1930s: the depression and the struggle of artists to find employment, labor unrest and union protests, the rumbles of the Second World War, and the civil war in Spain. In June 1937, when Harrison wrote the sextet, the Spanish civil war was at its height and there was even some reason to hope that the poorly organized Republican forces might overcome Francisco Franco’s Nationalists. Though defeated at Malaga in February 1937, the Republicans had shown signs of recovery: they managed to hold onto Madrid despite a siege by the Nationalists, and to repel attacks in the battles of Jarama and Guadalajara (February and March 1937). But Franco benefited from the active support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, who provided him with tanks, troops, and air power, using Spain as a testing ground for new weapons and tactics. Western democracies, though outraged by Germany’s terror bombing of the city of Guernica in April 1937, responded with little more than indignant protest. The Communist International, on the other hand, had begun organizing International Brigades, including the Lincoln Brigade from the United States, comprised in large part of students. Its members began serving the Republican side in early 1937. Spain, as the battleground for this assortment of European political ideologies, became a focal point for the idealism of American liberals in general and the youth of the country in particular. Harrison and his friends were caught up in the frenzy, raising emergency funds for the Republican forces.

The composition of France 1917–Spain 1937 was prompted not by any performance opportunity but by Harrison’s own despair over “Spain and its agony,” a despair heightened by his intensive studies of California mission music and the works of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish organ masters. He has described his score as “partially Cubist,” reflecting the geometric configurations of Spanish architecture and the repetitive melodic patterns in the early keyboard works.

The manuscript of France–Spain is preserved in a notebook of compositions from 1937 (see Plate 1). At the bottom of the first page, Harrison neatly penned a quotation from John Milton’s “Sonnet XI”: “Liberty / For who loves that, must first be wise and good; / But from that mark how far they rove we see / For all this waste of wealth, and loss of blood.” Although John Smart’s critical edition of Milton’s sonnets had been published in 1921, Harrison did not own a copy. His source was a nineteenth-century printing without commentary that he had picked up in a used bookstore in San Francisco. He was thus unaware that Sonnet XI was Milton’s response to criticism of several of his treatises advocating consensual divorce. (The divorce treatises appeared in 1643–45 and prompted vicious attacks by Milton’s critics; Sonnet XI likely dates from 1646–47, though some scholars have placed it as early as 1643.) Harrison was drawn instead to the political resonance of the poem’s final lines. Indeed some scholars have suggested that Milton may have been referring here not only to divorce but also to another civil war: the English revolution of 1642 which ultimately led to the beheading of Charles I and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell.

As Harrison’s concern about Spain was linked to his studies of early Spanish organ music, so his interest in Milton was tied to his studies of seventeenth-century English

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43Harrison, personal communication, July 7, 1997. The reference to France in the work’s title alludes to the end of World War I. When the work was first performed in 1968, it was given an additional title, About the Spanish War, since the events in Spain were no longer current. This title has not been retained in this edition.

44Harrison, personal communication, July 7, 1997.

45In some sources, the sonnet is numbered XII, following the order of the 1673 print. For the pros and cons of the alternate numbering, see E. A. J. Honigmann, ed., Milton’s Sonnets (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966).


music. This interest in Milton also reflects Harrison's own ambitions as a poet. In July 1935 he wrote to his mother about conflicting career aspirations in music or poetry: "When [I work] in either art I become absolutely sure that I am on the right track," he told her.48 Several of Harrison's surviving notebooks are filled with his poetry from the time, some of which has been published in recent years.49

The composition of France 1917–Spain 1937 out of a series small melodic and rhythmic cells is readily apparent throughout: in the shifting metrical placement of the repeated two-note rhythmic motive that opens the piece, for instance (see full score); in the rearrangement and expansion of the violin's opening figure (m. 1) when it recurs in the viola in measure 18 (example 1a); or in the transformation of a harmonic pattern in the two violins into a melodic ostinato (example 1b). Despite these melodic relationships, however, the overall effect of the opening A section (mm. 1–44) is primarily rhythmic—a series of angular outbursts that graphically depict the violence of armed struggle.

The B section (mm. 45–60), added in 1968, features three overlapping ostinati in the viola, cello, and percussion that support an expansive violin melody in parallel twelfths. Mirroring the overall ABA form of the piece, the viola line is cast in an aa'a pattern that is repeated five times (mm. 45–59); simultaneously a related three-measure pattern recurs in the cello (example 2a). The rhythmic variant in the viola's first statement of the ostinato (m. 45), probably resulted from a copying error, but Harrison decided to retain it. He loves the inadvertent irregularity of the "error," which creates a migrating sixteenth-note figure during the first three measures: "Only the spider goddess can weave perfect webs,"50 he says, citing the character Anansi from African/Ashanti lore. The third ostinato is played on two suspended gongs, their pattern spanning seven beats and subtly varied at each recurrence through the irregular placement of rests (example 2b). A varied da capo follows, repeating measures 18 through 44.

The year in which Harrison composed France 1917–Spain 1937 was one of his most productive; twenty-eight complete works survive from 1937 and numerous incomplete or undated compositions can be traced to the same period. His notebook containing the autograph score51 is filled with a diverse assortment of pieces, among them two sarabandes (the

EXAMPLE 1. France 1917–Spain 1937, manipulation of melodic cells in Section A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. violin 1, m. 1</th>
<th>viola, m. 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Example 1a" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Example 1b" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retrograde of violin motive</td>
<td>expansion through rearrangement of pitches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. violins 1 & 2, mm. 10–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>violin 2, mm. 35–36</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Example 1c" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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48 Letter, Lou Harrison to Calline Harrison, July 15, 1935, from Harrison's personal papers.
49 The largest collection is Joys and Perplexities: Selected Poems of Lou Harrison (Winston-Salem, N.C.: The Jargon Society, the University Library (UCSC), and the Cabrillo Music Festival, 1992).
51 A spiral-bound manuscript book with an address on Willard St. in San Francisco where Harrison lived at the time in a "commune"-type arrangement with college friends.
EXAMPLE 2.  *France 1917–Spain 1937*, ostinati in Section B

a. viola, mm. 45–59

![Musical notation]

variant in 1st statement

cello, mm. 45–59

![Musical notation]

b. gongs, mm. 46–47

![Musical notation]

mm. 47–49

![Musical notation]

mm. 49–51

![Musical notation]

mm. 51–52

![Musical notation]

first of which was published in the *New Music Quarterly* the following year; a *Passacaglia* that he revised repeatedly during the next ten years and finally discarded in 1995; two movements of a piano sonata using strict twelve-tone serial procedures; an incomplete dance for the choreographer Lenore Peters Job; and the beginnings of a symphonic work. *France–Spain*, clearly dated June 16, 1937, appears midway through the notebook, though Harrison did not use the pages in sequential order. (*Ritual #4*, dated September 13, for instance, is

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53The *Passacaglia* found its way, after several revisions, into the *First Suite for Strings*, movement three (1948), but was abandoned when Harrison revised the work for the third time and renamed it *New First Suite for Strings* in 1995.

54Titled *Symphony #1*, the work is a short score for orchestra with one movement only, headed "Slow."
found several pages earlier.) This unsystematic procedure also characterizes Harrison's other notebooks; in his enthusiasm, he often opened randomly to an empty page.54

Although the notebook version of France 1917—Spain 1937 is complete in itself, it comprises only the first section of the work's final version (up to measure 44 in the present edition, without the final eighth note in the viola). For the premiere in 1968 Harrison decided to expand the piece, using his early version as the A section of a longer composition. He made several minor corrections at this time (adding an ostinato figure in one measure where it was lacking, for example, and transposing a repeated three-note motive in the cello up a half step), and he added an abbreviated da capo, thus making the work nearly twice as long as the original.55

Following France 1917—Spain 1937 in Harrison's 1937 notebook is a companion work—an untitled, but complete, short score for strings composed the day after France—Spain and bearing an identical tempo marking: "Allegro moderato." From the middle of this neighboring piece Harrison borrowed the source material for his new B section: the ostinato figure in the viola and cello lines, and the rudiments of the violins' melodic line. Like France—Spain, the early companion piece bears a quote at the bottom of its first page, here taken from Isadora Duncan's autobiography My Life (1927): "Where is the truth? God knows, or the Devil knows—but I suspect they are both puzzled."

While Harrison's concerns with "liberty" (Milton) and "truth" (Duncan) were stimulated primarily by the civil war in Spain, they may also have been related to his distress over a personal crisis: the imprisonment of his mentor Henry Cowell, who had been sent to San Quentin the previous year for illegal sexual activity.56 During Cowell's four years in prison, Harrison visited often and found some small comfort in their discussions of musical matters through prison bars. One such visit can be documented on March 17, 1937, only a few months before the compositions under discussion were written.57

The premiere of France 1917—Spain 1937 took place thirty-one years after its conception at a Cabrillo Music Festival concert of "Peace Pieces" on August 17, 1968, during the height of the Vietnam War. Drawing a parallel between Vietnam and earlier nationalist struggles, Harrison revived his 1937 tribute to Spain, which was programmed along with five other Harrison compositions: Peace Piece 1, a setting of the Buddhist Metta Sutta and dedicated to Martin Luther King; Peace Piece 2, a dramatic recitative with a virulent anti-war text by Robert Duncan; Peace Piece 3, a tiny anti-bomb song with a text by Harrison; Nova Odo, which condemns nuclear war but ends with a vision of hope; and the anti-bomb movement from Pacifika Rondo. Peace Piece 2, a no-holds-barred condemnation of the Johnson administration, elicited a protest "boo" from a member of the audience, which in turn prompted a vociferous supporter counter-reaction from most of the others.58 The incident was reported (with screaming headlines) on the arts pages of all the daily newspapers in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas.59 The entire set of pieces, lasting forty-seven minutes, concluded with a reprise of the gentle Peace Piece 1 and was greeted by a "five-minute standing ovation."

Tributes to Charon

The trio Tributes to Charon stands as a fine example of Harrison's pioneering work with the percussion ensemble during the 1930s, and shows as well the genre's continuing influence on

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54 Harrison, personal communication, 1997.
55 The 1968 version was published in Soundings 1/4, 1972.
56 Cowell was charged with one count of oral copulation, the specific case involving a 17-year-old boy. For a detailed account, see Michael Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," Journal of the American Musicalological Society 44:1 (Spring 1991): 92-119.
57 Prison visitation slip, Special Collections, University of California, Santa Cruz.
58 The performance (with the audience reaction) can be heard on the compact disc included in Miller and Lieberman, Low Harrison.

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him in later years. One movement ("Counterdance in the Spring") was completed in 1939, prompted by a request from John Cage; the other was not written until 1982, though Harrison envisioned its form and instrumentation from the start. Although the entire piece is only seven minutes in length, Tributes clearly demonstrates Harrison’s interests in timbral variety, motivic transformation, and formal coherence. Working within the confines of a small ensemble and writing (in the case of the earlier movement) for a group of mostly non-professional instrumentalists, he was nevertheless able to achieve technical virtuosity and a successful coupling of dynamism and melodicism. Although the work was not composed for dance, the kinetic influence of Harrison’s dance training on “Counterdance in the Spring” is unmistakable; in fact, this movement has been performed most frequently as the accompaniment for a choreography by Jean Erdman.

When John Cage, hungry for employment, appeared at Harrison’s San Francisco apartment in 1938, Harrison helped him with the energy and generosity that would so often characterize his interpersonal relationships. Through Harrison’s connections in the San Francisco Bay Area, Cage soon found himself with not one, but several job offers. He chose a faculty position at Seattle’s Cornish School because Bonnie Bird, the school’s modern dance instructor, described to him a closet full of percussion instruments. Bird thereby reinforced Cage’s experiences of the previous three years: the most enthusiastic reception for the percussion music he had been writing since 1935 came not from musicians but from dancers. No sooner did Cage arrive in Seattle than he organized an ensemble of amateur percussionists, ultimately including both musicians and non-musicians. On their first concert (December 9, 1938) he programmed his own Quartet (1935) and Trio (1936), as well as works Cowell had published in the New Music Orchestra Series in 1936 by Ray Green, William Russell, and Gerald Strang.

Meanwhile Harrison was following a parallel path in the Bay Area, composing and performing for Tina Flade (1937–38) and Marian Van Tuyll (after fall 1938) in his position as staff accompanist for the dance program at Mills College. Harrison maintained his own percussion collection, often using the instruments in combination with more traditional ones, typically piano and recorder.

For the second percussion concert at the Cornish School (May 29, 1939), Cage decided to solicit works from composers around the country, among them Cowell, Harrison, and Virgil Thomson. Harrison sent two pieces: Fifth Symphony (a three-movement quartet composed between February 22 and March 8, 1939) and Counterdance in the Spring (the single-movement trio that years later became the second movement of Tributes to Charon). Other composers responded as well. Cowell sent Pulse, which Cage programmed along with March Suite, Studies in Cuban Rhythms, and Waltz and Fox Trot by William Russell; Three Movements by Johanna Beyer (another Cowell disciple); the two Harrison pieces; and his own Trio.

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60 Videotape of Cage/Harrison panel, Cornish School, 1992. Cage also mentions the percussion collection at Cornish (but less colorfully) in “A Composer’s Confessions,” *Musicworks* 52 (Spring 1992): 10. See also my forthcoming article “Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle.”

61 Among the members of Cage’s ensemble over the years were Xenia Cage, his wife; Doris Dennison, an instructor of eurythmics first at Cornish and later at Mills College; the pianist Margaret Jansen; and the future musicologist, Imogene Honley.

62 The New Music Orchestra Series, no. 18 (1936), contained these works: Johanna Beyer, II; Harold Davidson, Auto Accident; Ray Green, Three Inventories of Casey Jones; Doris Humphrey, Dance Rhythms; William Russell, Three Dance Movements; and Gerald Strang, Percussion Music.

63 Examples include Changing World (1937: two pianos or piano four-hands, percussion, recorder, and voice); Conquest (piano, conch shell, percussion, and probably recorder, though it might have been ocarina or flute); and Processional from the Cophantom of Aeschylus (1939 or 1940: recorder and percussion).


65 Russell’s Waltz and Fox Trot are part of his Three Dance Movements, which he expanded to four in 1990 by adding a tango for a concert in New York in honor of his 85th birthday. For information on Pulse, see William Lichtenwanger, *The Music of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Catalog* (New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1986), 168 (no. 365). Lichtenwanger’s information about the companion piece, Return, however, may not be correct. He indicates that the piece is undated but that it was “paired with Pulse” on the May 19 concert. Return does not appear on the printed program for May 19, but was performed on the third Cornish concert (Dec. 9, 1939), as was Pulse.
a letter postmarked April 20, Cage told Harrison that the Symphony was “coming into shape” and that he anxiously awaited the companion movement for Counterdance, which Harrison had apparently promised. Harrison already had a title for it, “Passage through Darkness,” and envisioned the prominent use of alarm clocks. The two movements were to be linked under the title Tributes to Charon. (Charon is the mythological boatman of Hades, who rows dead souls across the River Styx.) Harrison’s intention was to illustrate the fate of Proserpine, who was kidnapped by Pluto, god of the underworld, to be his wife.

Proserpine’s mother, Ceres, pleaded with Jupiter for her daughter’s return, but he could only accede to her request on the condition that Proserpine had not eaten since arriving in the underworld. Unfortunately, she had sucked the juice of a pomegranate (given to her by Pluto), thus precluding her release. Through a compromise, however, Proserpine was allowed to spend half the year in the underworld with her husband (“Passage through Darkness”) and the other half of the year in the upper world with her mother (“Counterdance in the Spring”).

Despite Harrison’s plans, the opening movement for Tributes did not progress past the conceptual stage until 1982, when he finally composed it for percussionist William Winant—using both his original title and the alarm clocks. Winant was then a graduate student at Mills College and Harrison, after a hiatus of forty years, had returned to the college’s faculty, this time as a composer rather than a dance accompanist. The new composition resulted from Winant’s request for works to be performed on a sixty-fifth birthday tribute to Harrison at Mills. For this concert, the two movements were at last joined as Tributes to Charon.

In 1939, however, Cage had composed only the single-movement Counterdance in the Spring. “Your Counterdance is excellent,” he wrote to Harrison in April 1939 shortly before its premiere. Cage found the piece so successful that he performed it on several future concerts as well. The Cage Percussion Players (John Cage and his wife Xenia, eurythmics instructor Doris Dennison, and pianist Margaret Jansen) repeated the piece on a tour to the University of Idaho, the University of Montana, and Reed College in January and February of 1940; Cage also programmed it at the 1939 Mills College summer session and at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on February 7, 1943.

It was the MOMA program that led to the choreography of the Counterdance by Jean Erdman, whom Cage met shortly after his arrival in New York. Erdman, wife of the writer Joseph Campbell, was a protegé of Martha Graham as well as a member of her company. Campbell had met Cage’s wife Xenia ten years earlier when he lived in Carmel and was part of a social circle that included two of Xenia’s sisters and the author John Steinbeck. After John and Xenia Cage arrived in New York in the summer of 1942, Campbell and Erdman graciously offered them housing while the Cages sought their own lodgings.

Cage, who had just come from the Chicago School of Design, arranged for a recital with Erdman and Merce Cunningham dancing at the Arts Club of Chicago on Feb. 14, 1943, one week after his MOMA concert. Erdman had developed a new choreography, working independently (and without music) in her studio. Improvising one day after her warm-ups, she found herself entranced with bird-like movements that imitated the traditional dances of Bali. Her composition, Creature on a Journey, developed quickly: “I saw [it] related to the

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64Harrison, personal communication, 1997.
65Letter, Cage to Harrison, postmarked April 20, 1939 (UCSC Special Collections).
66For details see Miller, “The Art of Noise.” David Revill (The Roaring Silence. John Cage: A Life [New York: Arcade, 1992]) erroneously gives the year of Cage’s 1940 tour as 1939. The concert dates were: July 27, 1939, Mills College; January 8, 1940, University of Idaho (Moscow); January 9, 1940, University of Montana (Missoula); February 14, 1940, Reed College (Portland). The tour also included a January 11 concert at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, but I have not been able to locate the program. Documents in the scrapbook compiled by Cage’s mother located at the John Cage Archive at Northwestern University are confusing; some documents are placed out of chronological order and some reviews are coupled with headlines from wrong publications.
68Thanks to David Vaughan, archivist for the Merce Cunningham Foundation, for providing the program of the Chicago performance.

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human condition of journeying forward and back, round and round . . .” until at last, “tri-
umphant, [the creature] suddenly realizes it has arrived . . . in a totally new place,”
Erdman recalled years later. She asked Cage if he would compose music for her new
dance, but, busy with his preparations for the MOMA concert, he declined. Instead Cage
suggested Harrison’s Counterdance, which Erdman found to be ideal despite (or perhaps
because of) its complex cross-rhythms. Whether the suggestion was prompted by
Erdman’s mention of Bali (which may have reminded Cage of Harrison’s fascination with
gamelan music) or whether he merely suspected that Counterdance would be an appropri-
ate length and style for her choreography, Cage thereby initiated what became a rich col-
laboration between Harrison and Erdman, resulting in several major works in the next
decade. Though the two artists did not meet until Harrison came to New York in the sum-
mer of 1943, they soon discovered their common interests in Asian musics, polyrhythm,
and counterpoint. In future years, Erdman danced Creature on a Journey in performances
from Hawaii to India and taught it to several of her most accomplished students.

“Counterdance in the Spring” is a model of musical economy, built on three motives
derived from a single rhythmic idea: a 5/8 pattern 7 4 1, a 4/8 pattern created by omitting
one of the rests 7 4 1, and a 3/8 pattern derived by rhythmic diminution 7 4 1, thus
preserving the remaining rest. The three motives enter one by one on different instru-
ments, superimposed and repeated until all three end on the same beat (see rehearsal letter
A in the full score). Thereafter the motives occur successively in a single part (rehearsal B)
or in two parts (five measures after B; and D), stacked in pyramid form (C), interspersed
with measures of rest (F), and imitatively (G). The opening section, with its three simulta-
neous ostinati of different lengths, is reminiscent of Cowell’s Ostinato Pianissimo, com-
piled in 1934 (just before Harrison began to study with him) and premiered on the same
New York MOMA concert with Harrison’s Counterdance. The coda of Cowell’s work also
bears a general similarity to Harrison’s irregularly placed unison strokes that appear first at
A and recur periodically, altered in number and temporal spacing (see, for example, two
measures before C, three measures before F, and two measures before G).

In “Passage through Darkness” Harrison devised links to his earlier “Counterdance”
while at the same time utilizing techniques he had developed during the intervening forty-
three years. Like “Counterdance,” “Passage” opens with a unit of five, but here it is dis-
guised (five measures of five beats in the alarm clocks, which is not perceptible by the
listener except in retrospect), followed by five evenly spaced strokes on the suspended
cymbal. Units of five, four, and three appear in the second half of the work, in this case not
as meters but as “icti”—that is, “strikes” or “attention points”—which are independent of
the beat. Player 3, in measures 13ff., alternates among a four-ictus group: 7 4 1, a three-
ictus group: 1 4 1, and a five ictus group: 7 4 1 1 1. The five- and three-patterns are dim-

tinutions of the five cymbal-stroke motive in measures 6–7 and the rhythm in the coi
in measures 8–11. Each ictus pattern spans two beats: the four-ictus pattern within a quarter-
note triplet, the three-pattern dividing the half note in two, and the five-pattern setting up
a ratio of 5:4.

In selecting instrumental timbres for his percussion works, Harrison aims for a sonic
balance between high and low, “wet” and “dry,” sustained and clipped. In “Passage
through Darkness,” however, he placed particular emphasis on sustained timbres,
enhanced by the alarm clocks, which complement the suspended cymbals, gongs, and
bells. Players turn the clocks on and off on cue and create crescendi and decrescendi

?Erdman, “Dance and Myth,” claims that she did not have to change anything in her choreography to fit the
music, a statement that rather strains credulity. She repeatedly said the same to her students (I have discussed
the matter at some length with several of them). Perhaps Erdman was pleasantly surprised by the minimal num-
ber of changes needed and her account became exaggerated over the years.
?For a detailed discussion and analysis of this work, see H. Wiley Hitchcock, “Henry Cowell’s Ostinato
gradually covering or uncovering them. (Alternatively, performers can use pairs of traditional bells, struck rapidly and alternately, to simulate the alarm.)

Compositions like *Tributes to Charon*—especially its “Counterdance” movement built from the kaleidoscopic rearrangement of small musical cells—have given rise to frequent comments by reviewers that Harrison’s music foreshadowed the minimalist compositions of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley. But while some aspects of Harrison’s works resemble later minimalist techniques, his aesthetic is decidedly different. Harrison’s limitation of rhythmic motives in the “Counterdance” functions as one of his many compositional controls, which he uses as scaffolding upon which to build large-scale forms that unfold in extended, coherent sections featuring dynamic momentum leading to points of structural climax. Such an aesthetic contrasts sharply with that of Glass, for example, where motivic repetition is used to draw the listener’s attention away from the surface into a meditative state in which change occurs in slow motion.

Harrison’s early percussion music—of which “Counterdance in the Spring” is a compelling example—features a sense of organic development lacking in much of the music of his contemporaries, a trait noted by many reviewers of the time: “There were no vital and powerful rhythms, no great contrasts, and mainly no organic growth in any of the pieces,” wrote Jacob Avshalomoff, who reviewed Cage’s Reed College concert in February 1940, “excepting Harrison’s ‘Counterdance in the Spring.’”

Cage apparently found this work among the most convincing of Harrison’s percussion compositions, judging from the number of times he programmed it; and Erdman found its kinesthesia irresistible. When William Winant requested a new percussion piece in 1982, “Counterdance” was the work Harrison chose to revitalize (and finally finish). Among the hundreds of compositions lying partially or fully completed in his many notebooks, the potential of this short dance most attracted his attention, urging him to add the prelude he had envisioned in his youth.

**New York, Black Mountain College, and Early Years**

**in APTOS (1943–1960)**

Soon after Harrison moved to New York City in 1943, he was welcomed into the artistic circle around composer and critic Virgil Thomson. Before long he began serving as one of Thomson’s “stringers” for the *New York Herald Tribune*, reviewing as many as three concerts in a single weekend. Harrison would ultimately write nearly 300 reviews for the *Tribune* from 1944 to 1947, rounding out an eclectic, if unsystematic, musical education by attending numerous vocal and instrumental recitals as well as concerts of modern music, early music, Chinese and other Asian musics, and even an occasional jazz performance. He was quick to praise sensitive musicality and adventurous programming, to support young artists, and to encourage informed early music performance practice. (He deplored a performance of the *Goldberg Variations* on the modern piano, for example, and expressed exasperation with romanticized interpretations of Bach.) Harrison was equally forthright in deriding superficial showmanship, and he condemned flashy technique that seemed to him devoid of content. His keen ear and prodigious literary skills led to published reviews and articles in other periodicals as well (notably *Modern Music, Listen*, and Charles Henri Ford’s avant-garde arts magazine, *View*), where he championed the music of Schoenberg, Varèse, Ives, and Ruggles. Henry Cowell gave Harrison work as well, appointing him editor of the *New Music Quarterly* (which lasted only one year), and directing to him various musical jobs, such as a commission from the League of Composers to orchestrate Ives’s World War I song *He Is There!* (revised and retitled *They Are There!*).

In 1946 Harrison published the pamphlet *About Carl Ruggles*, a stylistic analysis that he envisioned as one section of a (never completed) book. There he highlighted aspects of the

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75 Jacob Avshalomoff, “Cage Percussion Players … A Review,” *Reed College Quest*, February 16, 1940, n.n.
76 For a list of Harrison’s reviews and a discussion of them, see Miller and Lieberman, *Lou Harrison*.
77 See footnote 7.
Ruggles style that clearly influenced his own—particularly Ruggles’s finely-honed contrapuntal technique, which combined strong melodic lines with “resonant,” “resilient,” and “open” textures reminiscent of Handel. Harrison’s own compositions from this New York period similarly link melodicism with dissonant counterpoint (a term coined by the ethnomusicologist and composer Charles Seeger, whose teachings were transmitted to Harrison by Cowell). 78

Despite this close circle of New York friends and Harrison’s continued productivity in both literary and musical genres, he never settled comfortably into life in New York. Struggling to make a living from private teaching, occasional commissions, and the meager fees paid by the *Herald Tribune*, he lived in Spartan quarters, including, at one point, a cold-water flat in Greenwich Village that he had to heat by carrying heavy canisters of kerosene across the street and up four flights of stairs. The noise of the city was overpowering and its crowded conditions stifling. To practice late at night without bothering his neighbors, Harrison built a clavichord—and when that instrument failed, he constructed a second one with an improved design. 79 A romantic relationship stemming from his West Coast years soured soon after his arrival in New York and a second one dissolved in 1946.

At the same time, Harrison’s New York period held notable triumphs as well. On April 5, 1946 he conducted the New York Little Symphony in the premiere of Ives’s *Third Symphony*, which he had edited from his old photostat score. The performance, which also included Ruggles’s *Portals* and Harrison’s own *Motel for the Day of Ascension* for chamber orchestra, was phenomenally successful by any standard. Four different reviewers praised Harrison’s conducting skills: “a director of uncommon abilities,” “a real gift for the baton,” “a first rate conductor,” who led the orchestra “with an easy sense of authority,” the group giving “a smoother performance under his direction than it had in the first half of the program under its regular leader.” 80 The following year Ives won the Pulitzer Prize for the *Third Symphony* and sent half of the award money to Harrison in gratitude for his efforts.

A few days after the concert Harrison wrote to Ruggles:

> *Portals* was not done to my own satisfaction though many thought it quite good. The piece is, however, so elevated in expressive content and so forceful in outline that it would survive almost any presentation, I think, and Friday nite it definitely stopped the show! . . . After the final chord (which was badly balanced, though) the applause was so terrific and so long that after I had bowed a respectable number of times and the orchestra had risen etc.[.] I finally had to turn my back on the audience and simply wait until they quieted down so we could go on. 81

As for Harrison’s own *Motel*, some reviewers praised it while others were far less impressed. “[The work’s] expressive purport was not always apparent, but it gave a sense of craftsmanship and able use of its basic thematic idea,” wrote Francis Perkins in the *Herald Tribune*. Noel Straus (*New York Times*) was less forgiving: “[The piece] failed to place him in as flattering a light as did his batonism.” Harrison’s own judgment, then and now, is even harsher. That summer Harmony Ives wrote to him with an offer from her husband to fund publication of the work, but Harrison replied:

> I am very touched by Mr. Ives’ kindness: . . . But the truth is, that while in the past I have twice been represented in *New Music,* I am now unsure that anything I have written is yet ready for the unblushing declaration of print. After the performance of my *Motel for the Day of Ascension* I ripped it apart & have not yet assembled it. 82


79 Diagram in Miller and Lieberman, *Lou Harrison*, fig. 6.


81 Undated letter among Harrison’s personal papers.

82 Undated letter, after June 28, before Aug. 9 (copy among Harrison’s personal papers).
Harrison’s self-esteem, which had been declining for several years, had reached an all-time low. In May 1947 the accumulated stress culminated in a severe nervous breakdown, requiring his hospitalization for nearly nine months. In retrospect, signs of the crisis had been apparent for some time, though neither Harrison nor his friends foresaw its severity. As early as 1945 he had developed an ulcer, which plagued him periodically throughout his New York years, and in March of the same year he had written to Ruggles, “Sometimes I wish I didn’t write music; life would be so much simpler. And besides I am always so tortured and distressed during a performance of my own music that I don’t really hear a note of it anyway.” Cramped and filled with erasures, Harrison’s scores from this period are witness to his uncertainty and his search for a personal language (see plate 2). His slow and painful recovery (he claims it was ten years before he fully recuperated) is testimony to his determination and self-will; in fact, he used the experience as a catalyst for re-evaluating his own style, turning away from serialism and dissonant counterpoint toward diatonicism.

The years immediately following Harrison’s breakdown were, surprisingly, among his most productive. In 1949 Virgil Thomson introduced him to the world of just intonation by presenting him a copy of Harry Partch’s new book, Genesis of a Music, thus initiating a study that would preoccupy Harrison for years, and which continues to be one of his most ardent passions. Meanwhile he continued his collaboration with dancers, forming an especially productive partnership with Jean Erdman that led to three substantial compositions between 1949 and 1951: The Perilous Chapel and Solstice, which have become popular as instrumental suites, and Io and Prometheus. He also renewed ties with Bonnie Bird, who hired him as music director for her summer festivals at Reed College, Oregon, in 1949 and 1950. During these festivals Harrison wrote additional music for dance, including Marriage at the Eiffel Tower (subsequently transformed into an orchestral suite)—the first incidental music for Jean Cocteau’s text by a single composer.

Harrison’s motivation in composing for dance was both idealistic and pragmatic. On the one hand, this work harked back to the dance and theater experiences of his childhood and offered him the challenge of another compositional control—writing music to fit choreographic requirements. But it also had a decidedly practical result: generating much needed income. Harrison counseled composer Ned Rorem, six years his junior, to always charge a standard per-minute fee “no matter who it is, whether it was [for José] Limón or Erdman or whomever.” Yet Harrison often failed to follow his own advice. Cellist Seymour Barab, for one, recalls many so-called “Platonic” commissions with Harrison and other New York composers: “They would write it and I would play it,” he says.

Harrison’s approach to musical composition has always been decidedly non-academic, contrasting sharply with the general retreat into the academy common among professional composers in this period. By the time the twelve-tone bandwagon was charging ahead in the early 1950s (with Copland and Stravinsky as well as a host of younger composers climbing aboard), Harrison had moved toward an idiom in which he felt more at home—a melodic style, inspired in part by Chinese and Indonesian musics, that foreshadowed the work of younger contemporaries such as Terry Riley. He kept abreast of major developments in the performing and visual arts through books, lectures, concerts, performances, and exhibits, but never lost sight of his responsibility to the non-academic audience. Indeed, he felt the greatest affinity to composers outside of academe—or outside the mainstream in general—like Alan Hovhaness, whose first New York concert in 1945 prompted Harrison to pen one of his rare rave reviews.

By the summer of 1951 Harrison (on the recommendation of John Cage) had found a tempting alternative to life in New York: a faculty position at Black Mountain College, an

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8) Harrison to Ruggles, Mar. 1, 1945, (copy among Harrison’s personal papers).
idealistic educational community in rural North Carolina with an emphasis on the visual and performing arts and a student-faculty ratio at times as low as 2:1.87 The college not only offered the opportunity for student-faculty collaboration, but also fostered interdisciplinary projects among its tiny faculty, many of whom worked on the cutting edge of their fields.88 Although Harrison planned to stay at Black Mountain only for one summer, he remained for two years, at the same time maintaining a New York apartment to which he occasionally returned.

Though Harrison had always been known for his productivity, at Black Mountain his output was further increased by a congenial physical environment: wide-open spaces, quiet surroundings, and an inspiring landscape. A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952 provided the luxury of time as well. During his two years in North Carolina, Harrison was able to complete several unfinished works and compose many new ones: the Mass to St. Anthony (begun in San Francisco); the Seven Pastorales for chamber orchestra (the earliest work to benefit from his studies in tuning, which he could now pursue at leisure); Songs in the Forest for flute, piano, violin, percussion; Festical Dance for two pianos; a series of short pieces for keyboard, guitar, or chamber groups; and, most importantly, his six-scene, fifty-minute chamber opera Rapunzel.89 The sheer joy he felt in creating music is apparent in these works, as well as in the numerous letters he wrote to friends and colleagues in this period. During one of his visits to New York in early 1953, for instance, Harrison wrote to Frank Wigglesworth in Italy:

I completed my opera (Rapunzel . . .) and came to N.Y. to get paper to make [a] full score, on which I labour. While I am not entirely happy with it I think it will sound quite amazingly and am writing other musics which do make me happy. . . . As to here, . . . Jean [Erdman] is repeating Solstice on Jan. 11th, when I will conduct. I unfortunately love teaching and as soon as I have more recovered from the brunt of psychiatry, so to speak, I think that I will be a very good teacher. . . . You are right about being a composer, that one composes when one is. But then one always is, and I for one, in the name of nothing whatever, refuse to abrogate a single of the prerogatives of being a musician. . . . It is Saturday night, and I sit in a fairly clean apartment with a freshly tuned (Pythagorean) piano nearby on a stand rest my current reading, [John] Collier's Indians of the Americas [1947], Arts and the Man by Irwin Edman [1939], . . . an outline-history of the middle ages . . . and the ravishing and joyous Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music by [the] literate, perceptive, witty, and adroit, our seventeenth-century friend and colleague, Thomas Morley. I half expect a visit.90

Rapunzel, based on a psychological reinterpretation of the old fairy tale by William Morris (1834–1896), was the product of an intensive effort from August 21 to October 7, 1952, though its orchestration occupied Harrison’s time well into the following year.91 The opera is his last major serial work (although he occasionally used the technique after 1952 for specific purposes such as in anti-war protest pieces). In this case, the compositional process offered special challenges because of unintended symmetries among several of Rapunzel’s row forms, prompting Harrison to seek solutions to what he considered the con-

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87 For further information on the college, see Martin Duberman, Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1972 and 1993); and Mary Emma Harris, The Arts at Black Mountain College (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).
88 Among the resident faculty in the late 1940s and early 1950s either during the year or in the active summer sessions were Buckminster Fuller, Willem de Kooning, Richard Lippold, Merce Cunningham, and John Cage. The college produced more than its share of illustrious alumni as well: for instance, Robert Rauschenberg, Jonathan Williams, and Joel Oppenheimer.
89 The first recording of the opera was issued by New Albion Records in 1997 (New Albion NA 093 CD).
90 Undated letter, Harrison to Wigglesworth, late 1952 or early 1953 (in response to a 1952 Christmas card); copy graciously made available to the author by the late Frank Wigglesworth. Reprinted by permission of Lou Harrison.
91 Harrison was still orchestrating Rapunzel the following April, as he noted in a letter to his parents dated April 14, 1953.
finements of twelve-tone serialism. Despite his admiration for Schoenberg, he had never felt entirely comfortable with serialism, preferring instead the Ruggles approach in which tone repetition is infrequent but not subject to rigid rules. At the same time, Harrison found the challenge of Rapunzel's row irresistible. The opera, a fine example of his ability to combine lyricism with atonality, received positive critical acclaim. The prayer scene from its third act won a Twentieth Century Masterpiece Award for the best composition for voice and chamber orchestra at the 1954 International Conference of Contemporary Music in Rome, and the premiere of the entire opera five years later solicited excellent reviews.

In 1953 Black Mountain College hired Stephen Wolpe, and Harrison decided to return to California. He lived briefly with his parents in Redwood City and then in San Francisco, but found himself yearning instead for the tranquility and isolation he had discovered in North Carolina. The following year he discovered the ideal solution: a tiny cabin on a wooded property in Apts, just south of Santa Cruz. Harrison has lived on this same block ever since, moving only once in the late 1970s to a larger house on the adjoining lot.

In Apts Harrison was able to pursue his tuning studies at leisure and to build on the reputation he had begun to establish in the East. Major commissions from the Louisville Orchestra and Broadcast Music International (BMI) in the next few years led to two substantial orchestral works. For the first, Strict Songs (eight baritones and orchestra, 1953), he set his own poetry modeled on Navajo texts. The second, Suite for Symphonic Strings (1960), developed from a re-examination of a series of older works. He selected, reworked, and orchestrated six short compositions written between 1936 and 1952, adding three newly composed movements to form a nine-movement suite. Strict Songs was one of the many American works commissioned and recorded by the Louisville Orchestra in this period. The Suite, commissioned for BMI’s twentieth anniversary, was premiered by the same group five years later.

The rural environments of Black Mountain College and Apts, along with Harrison’s excitement over his tuning studies and his intensive efforts on Rapunzel, helped liberate him from the aftereffects of his breakdown. William Morris’s retelling of the Rapunzel story—with its probing of the lonely plight of the heroine (who “weeps within the tower”) and the Prince (whose courtesies exhort, “Tis fit that thou shouldst wed”—“held implicit in it some of the problems, tortures and false rapture that I was myself experiencing in analysis and psychotherapy” at the time, Harrison recalled years later. While the immediate cause of his breakdown had been the poverty, stress, and noise of New York, the cure forced him to confront both his personal history and his homosexuality. Though he had seemingly come to terms with his sexual orientation years earlier and had steadfastly resisted forces urging a retreat to the closet (in 1942 he candidly told his draft board he was gay), his post-hospitalization period was characterized by notable equivocation. (He was engaged, for example, to one of his female students for a short time in 1951.) Among Harrison’s compositions both before and after his illness are several that suggest a (perhaps subconscious) attempt to display a strong “masculinity,” among them not only Rapunzel but also the Symphony on G, much of which he wrote in the hospital.

Rapunzel’s row is limited in two respects: it is nearly semi-combinatorial (combining halves of two different versions yields eleven of the twelve pitches), and the first ten notes of the original are identical to the first ten notes of $I_4$ in retrograde. The prime form of Rapunzel’s row is $C H F E G B-I-E-D-A-F-I$. Harrison’s row usage is non-traditional in several respects. For example, he often extracts individual pitches as drones or ostinato, thus permitting him to effectively work with a shorter series. He also allowed himself the freedom to begin a series anywhere within any row form, as long as he cycled back to its beginning. For a discussion of Harrison’s use of twelve-tone serialism and of Rapunzel in particular, see Miller and Lieberman, "Harrison," chapter 12.


Harrison, undated letter to Peter Oskarson in Bonn, 1993.

In high school in the back of a station wagon with a young woman, "I suddenly realized that I had another problem," he says (personal communication, March 1997).
Harrison ultimately emerged strengthened in his self-image and, after his return to California, became active in gay rights organizations such as the Society for Individual Rights in San Francisco. His decision to move beyond acknowledging his sexuality to speaking out for the homosexual community at large was prompted on the local level by an invitation from a Unitarian minister “to explain about being gay” and on a broader level by “the nightmare” of McCarthyism, which, rather than driving Harrison underground, coaxed him into the open. While it is difficult to pinpoint specific musical markers linked to sexual preference, Harrison’s candid acknowledgment of his homosexuality has had concrete and substantial effects on his music, encouraging various artistic associations (with poets such as Elsa Gidlow and Robert Duncan, for instance), giving rise to personal relationships that have marked the direction of his musical practice (particularly that with instrument-builder William Colvig), and stimulating him to write an opera on a gay subject (Young Caesar, discussed below). At the time of this writing, Harrison continues to champion gay rights in his writings and lectures and considers the revision of Young Caesar the most urgent task to complete before he retires from composition.

**MIDDLE PERIOD WORKS**

The three middle period works in the present edition exemplify the dramatic changes in Harrison’s style that took place during his East Coast and early Aptos years. The first, *Praises for Michael the Archangel*, dates from 1946–47, the year immediately before his breakdown. This solo organ work is a fine example of the dissonant contrapuntal language Harrison favored at the time, and shows as well his indebtedness to the language of Carl Ruggles. It would be difficult to imagine a more complete contrast to *Praises* than *Vestiment Sive*, a cheerful song of the birds whose opening section Harrison composed in 1951, shortly before he left New York for Black Mountain College. The re-emergence of diatonicism is striking, as are the Medieval influences in the harmonies. *Incidental Music for Corneille’s ‘Cinna’ (Suite for Tack Piano)* dates from Harrison’s early years in Aptos. For this work, which he envisioned as the accompaniment to a puppet play, he devised a unique just intonation tuning that offered a wide choice of interval sizes. Harrison interwove these various intervals to create a stunning spectrum of harmonic color, ranging from consonances far more pure to dissonances far more grating than those possible in equal temperament.

*Praises for Michael the Archangel*

The year in which Harrison worked on his organ piece, *Praises for Michael the Archangel*, was among his most troubled. The anxiety and distress that heralded his illness—apparent in the work’s stark dissonances and tortured melodies—were often in evidence, and friends would frequently find him quiet and withdrawn. Uncharacteristically, Harrison sought comfort in religion and was particularly drawn to the Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin on West 46th Street (known familiarly as “Smokey Mary” because of the incense burned during services). A number of instrumental works inspired by religious themes date from this period. In addition to *Praises*, Harrison composed the *Mотet for the Day of Ascension* and an *Alleluia* for small orchestra that was published in the *New Music Quarterly* in 1948. He now prefers that neither the *Mотet* nor the *Alleluia* be performed.

To comfort Harrison during this troubled period, Virgil Thomson assured him of “guardian angels” watching out for his well-being. Confused and on the verge of a crisis,
Harrison even told friends about seeing a vision of an angel on a wall in his apartment. His veneration of the Archangel Michael in particular was a sign of his search for comfort and stability. As the ultimate judge, Michael symbolized for Harrison the political and humanitarian principles he had championed since his San Francisco years, and served, during this time, as a spiritual guide to deliver him from his inner terrors. Gustav Davidson, in his comprehensive Dictionary of Angels, notes that Christian tradition invokes Michael as "the benevolent angel of death, in the sense of deliverance and immortality... leading the souls of the faithful 'into the eternal light.' [He] leads the angels of light in battle against the legions of the angel of darkness. As the angel of the final reckoning and the weigher of souls... he holds in his hand the scales of justice."

Praises for Michael the Archangel depicts the Archangel's stern, uncompromising version of justice. To be performed "with majesty," the organ work unfolds in a series of bold, austere gestures tempered by lyrical moments. In its harmonic and contrapuntal language, however, the composition is a tribute to Carl Ruggles. In the year he composed Praises, Harrison wrote:

[Ruggles's counterpoint] is characterized by an absolute lack of negative spacing in the voices, which is to say that no voice is ever given over to repetitious arpeggiation or figuration of any kind at all. Each voice is a real melody, bound into a community of singing lines, living a life of its own with regard to phrasing and breathing, careful not to get ahead or behind in its rhythmic cooperation with the others, and sustaining a responsible independence in the whole polyphonic life.

This sounds like a description of any good contrapuntal piece, and indeed it is, the kind of contrapuntal piece that hasn't really been written by a first rate master since Purcell or Bach. And for this reason it is exciting and important.

Harrison was inspired by such contrapuntal integrity, as well as by Ruggles's habit of infrequent pitch repetition: "A particular tone does not usually return until seven or eight have intervened," he wrote in his 1946 essay. The melodic lines in Praises rarely contain all twelve tones; and when, on occasion, the twelve pitches do appear in a row (e.g., mm. 64–67), Harrison does not treat them serially.

In the brief section on counterpoint in his Music Primer (1966, published 1971), Harrison identifies four types—octaval, quintal, tertial, and secundal—based on the preponderance of specific intervals on strong beats. He further delimits these contrapuntal forms as diatonic or chromatic, imitative or non-imitative, and (in the parlance of Virgil Thomson) differentiated or non-differentiated. By his own definition, Harrison's contrapuntal language in Praises is secundal, chromatic, imitative, and non-differentiated. As example 3 shows, the most prominent interval in the piece both harmonically and melodically is the minor second (hence "chromatic," "secundal" counterpoint). Imitative writing predominates and the voices are similar in speed and character (that is, "non-differentiated"). The prominence of the minor second as the work's foundational interval was further enhanced years later, when Harrison orchestrated Praises as the fourth movement of his Elegiac Symphony. At the end of this movement, he added a unison fortissimo coda: seventeen measures built primarily out of melodic half steps (example 4). Though not serial, Praises for Michael the Archangel nevertheless reveals the influence of Schoenberg. The most important lesson Harrison took from his year of study with the Viennese modernist was to simplify—to "use only the salient." During the period in

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99The story, which Harrison has told repeatedly, is recounted by Anthony Tommasini in Virgil Thomson, 369. (I have found no support for Tommasini's comment that Harrison went back to work at the Tribune after his hospitalization.)


101Harrison, About Carl Ruggles, 7–8.

102Ibid., 10.

103Harrison, Music Primer, 96–97.

104Recorded by the American Composers Orchestra, Dennis Russell Davies, conductor (MusicMasters 60204K).

EXAMPLE 3. *Praises for Michael the Archangel*, mm. 1–6, connections show the prominence of the minor second

EXAMPLE 4. *Elegiac Symphony*, Movement 4 (coda), mm. 157–75: orchestra in unison except for mm. 157–58 (part shown is violin 1)

which he was enrolled in Schoenberg’s seminar at UCLA, Harrison composed a twelve-tone *Suite for Piano* (1943) for Frances Mullen, who with her husband Peter Yates had founded the Evenings on the Roof concert series.\footnote{For a detailed account of the series, see Dorothy Crawford, *Evenings On and Off the Roof* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).} In the middle of the third movement he reached an impasse, and, despite warnings that Schoenberg preferred not to critique serial compositions, took the piece to him.

I was in trouble and he knew it. I played him the first two movements and what I could of the third. He said, “Is this a twelve-tone piece?” “Yes,” I said, waiting for the ax to fall. “It is good,” he said, and plunged right in. His advice I’ve never forgotten: Write only what you need to write—no complications. Simplicity is what he recommended.\footnote{Harrison, interview, May 20, 1995.}

Schoenberg’s counsel helped Harrison find his way through the composing block, and the *Suite for Piano* stands out in his oeuvre as one of his most compelling and tightly constructed...
compositions. *Praises*, written only three years later, shows a similar concern with concision. Its language is terse and intense, its phrases clearly marked and set off by caesurae.

Schoenberg’s influence in *Praises for Michael the Archangel* is apparent not only in Harrison’s occasional use of techniques common to the twelve-tone school (e.g., the inversion of the opening melodic line in mm. 100ff.) but also in the work’s clearly articulated phrase structure (a trait Harrison admired in Schoenberg’s music). In 1944, Harrison wrote in *Modern Music*:

One of the major joys in [Schoenberg’s *Piano Concerto*] is in the structure of the phrases. You know when you are hearing a theme, a building or answering phrase, a development or a coda. There is no swerving from the form-building nature of these classical phrases. The pleasure to be had from listening to them is the same that one has from hearing the large forms of Mozart.\(^{108}\)

*Praises for Michael the Archangel* was not performed until 1966, when organist Fred Tulan (whom Harrison met through Virgil Thomson) premiered it at a concert in Honolulu. Harrison was reminded of the work again nine years later when the Koussevitzky Foundation commissioned him to write a symphony, which he titled *Elegies*. This composition capped another troubled year for Harrison, one marked by the death of both his mother (March 21, 1974) and his (by then) close friend Harry Partch (September 3, 1974).

Harrison used the commission to create a work not only honoring Natalie and Serge Koussevitzky, but also expressing the intensity of his personal losses. Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Michael the Archangel again appeared as comforter, though by 1975 Harrison invoked the angel in spite of, rather than because of his Christian associations. As early as 1960 Harrison had publicly disavowed affiliation with any organized religion, declaring in a radio talk that “I regard religion as insanity just as I regard warring as brutality.” (Although he acknowledged that given the choice, “the wise man will choose the charms of insanity,” he also asserted that “the intelligent man will reject both insanity and brutality.”)\(^{109}\) Harrison nevertheless orchestrated his 1946 organ work for use as the symphony’s fourth movement, adding a few concluding measures and making minor revisions throughout. In the context of the symphony, Michael appears as but one among several sources of comfort. In this thirty-three-minute work, Harrison intermingled pagan, Christian, and Islamic symbols in a musical commentary on the universality of human pain in the face of death. He tempered Michael’s austerity with the tears of Israfel (Movements 1 and 3), the “angel of resurrection and song” who six times a day looks down into Hell with such grief “that his tears would inundate the earth if Allah did not stop their flow,”\(^{110}\) and concluded with a message of hope from Epictetus, who summarized, rather more elegantly, the opinion of Harrison’s father that “when you’re dead, you’re dead.” Through the study of Lucretius and Epictetus, Harrison found consolation in the concept of a complete separation between life and death. “Religion,” he says, “are the expression of the fear of death. But Epicurus taught that where we are, death isn’t, and where death is, we are not.”\(^{111}\)

**Vestimenti Silve**

Harrison recalls that his first task toward regaining mental health after his 1947 breakdown was “to write out my history.”\(^{112}\) Characteristically, this project of “burrowing down” into himself soon expanded far beyond what either he or his doctors envisioned. It became a multi-year burrowing into the history of Western culture in general: “I went down through history—where did this happen, why did this happen?—trying to find things to hang onto as I descended into the pit.”\(^{113}\)

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\(^{109}\) Harrison, “Crackpot lecture.”

\(^{110}\) Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels*.

\(^{111}\) Harrison, personal communication, Sept. 8, 1997.

\(^{112}\) Harrison, interview, Oct. 21, 1994.

\(^{113}\) Ibid.
When he reached the Middle Ages, Harrison stopped for an extended visit. The troubadours, minnesingers, and goliards particularly caught his imagination: "I was fascinated by the concept of secular wandering scholars," he says.\textsuperscript{114} He bought books of their poetry and volumes of their music, and he even purchased a small collection of reproductions of minnesinger portraits from the Weingartner manuscript.\textsuperscript{115} On a blank page facing Kaiser Haenrich (1165–97), Harrison's friend Remy Charlip added a portrait of "Lou S. Harrison." Charlip's imitation of the frame, lettering, background, and pose is a remarkable likeness of the fourteenth-century illuminations, but the costume is 1949 traditional: checkered shirt, slacks, and sneakers.\textsuperscript{116}

Steeped in Medieval lore, Harrison's vibrant imagination turned toward legend and mythology, a study further stimulated by his close association with a group of ardent New York artists including Julian Beck and Judith Malina, founders of the Living Theater. Harrison, Malina, and their circle fervently engaged in the latest literary debates: over Robert Graves's newest and most controversial work The White Goddess (1948), for example, or Jean Cocteau’s film Orphée (1950). Harrison planned an opera on Cupid and Psyche (never completed), wrote music to accompany William Butler Yeats's dance-play The Only Jealousy of Emer, and was engrossed in reading Helen Waddell’s Wandering Scholars (1927; revised and enlarged, 1932ff.) and Abelard (1933). In this fanciful climate Harrison began a musical setting of Vestiant Silke, an eleventh-century hymn to the birds that describes turtle-doves complaining, eagles soaring to the stars, and sparrows chattering beneath the elms.

The prospect of a summer at Black Mountain College was already before him.\textsuperscript{117} Few places could have offered a greater physical contrast to New York than this tiny school nestled in a gentle valley overlooking a shimmering lake (although the intellectual environment, as he soon learned, bore distinct similarities to that of the Malina/Beck circle in New York). Harrison would later write ecstatically to Vladimir Ussachevsky about the frogs in Lake Eden, the "flower-scented" air, the shimmering dogwood, and a whippoorwill's "repetitive serenade."\textsuperscript{118}

On April 4, 1951, Harrison completed a three-voiced setting of the first stanza of Vestiant Silke and appended suggestions for instrumentation (flute, viola or clarinet, and trumpet or clarinet; see plate 3). He got no further, however, until 1994, when he revisited his old sketch for an August 18 performance at the Dartington International Summer Festival in Totnes, England. By extending his opening phrase and adding an instrumental introduction, two interludes, a contrasting central section, and slight variations for the second and fifth verses, Harrison expanded his 1951 fragment into a four-minute composition in quintal harmony, and offered the completed work to composer and musicologist Wilfrid Mellers as an eightieth birthday present. Typically (for Harrison loves to tinker with his works), he revised the ending after the premiere; the new version appears in this edition for the first time.

Vestiant Silke's text comes from the Cambridge Songs, a collection of lyric poems within a larger manuscript now housed in Cambridge, England, but actually assembled in Canterbury in the eleventh century. Though the manuscript is English, the poetry probably originated in various regions of continental Europe.\textsuperscript{119} There is little doubt that many, if not all of the poems in the collection were intended to be sung; the manuscript contains a

\textsuperscript{114}Harrison, personal communication, July 27, 1997.

\textsuperscript{115}This fourteenth-century manuscript contains minnesang texts. See the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, s.v. "Sources, MS., III. 5."

\textsuperscript{116}Both the Charlip portrait and the facing page are reproduced in Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison, fig.11.

\textsuperscript{117}Malina, in her diary, notes on March 25 that Harrison was anticipating a retreat to North Carolina: The Diaries of Judith Malina (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 152.

\textsuperscript{118}Undated letter, Harrison to Ussachevsky (New York Public Library, New Music Edition documents, folder 97).

\textsuperscript{119}For a description of the manuscript and a history of scholarly speculations about its dating and provenance, see Jan. M. Ziolkowski, ed. and trans., The Cambridge Songs (New York and London: Garland, 1994), introduction.
small amount of musical notation (in indecipherable neumes in campo aperto), many of the
texts are sequences (a musical addition to the Catholic liturgy that immediately follows
the Alleluia), and several of the poems discuss musical instruments, theory, or perfor-
mance. Jan Ziolkowski goes as far as to state that “their raison d’être was song” and that
the collector of the Cambridge Songs anthology acted “as the medieval equivalent of a disk
jockey. . . . He selected songs that he liked, ones that he had heard in courts, monasteries,
and perhaps even taverns, and he set down the words, sometimes including only enough
text to jog the memory of his readers into recalling the tune . . . but often insisting upon
having a text or transcript of the whole text as he understood it.”

Vestiment Silke, as found in this source, contains six 4-line stanzas (for text and translation see
performance notes section of score, p. 36). The first five depict the tuneful counterpart of
nature’s songsters, while the sixth abruptly turns religious. Harrison set only stanzas 1–5.
“In the sixth,” he says, “some monk got hold of the text and burdened it with dogma.”
Harrison simply dispensed with the dogma. His instincts about the text were in fact well-
founded; the last verse has been a subject of scholarly debate for years.

The final version of Vestiment Silke, transposed up a fourth from the 1951 sketch, is scored
for soprano with flute/piccolo, two violas and harp. Harrison used these instrumental tim-
bres to paint the bucolic scene. The flute/piccolo part, though mostly doubling the viola or
the voice, lends sparkle to the texture, and evokes as well the instrument’s traditional asso-
ciation with birds. The interweaving viola lines suggest the branches of trees, and the harp
adds a delicate punctuation to underscore the song’s metric fluidity.

The work’s Medieval origins are also recalled by the instrumentation. In addition to the
harp, an instrument prominent in the music of the Middle Ages and earlier, Harrison chose
the flute and piccolo as modern counterparts of a pair of recorders, which traditionally rep-
resented pastoral scenes (and, incidentally, were instruments on which Harrison himself
had acquired considerable proficiency during his San Francisco years). Violas, rather than
violins, were selected to suggest the warm timbre of early bowed strings, a sound Harrison
praised in several reviews he wrote for the New York Herald Tribune. On April 4, 1945, for
instance, he reviewed a performance of Bach’s Passion According to St. John by Arthur
Mendel’s Cantata Singers:

Such a performance of this intimate and intense work . . . arouses, beyond the beauty of the
musical and religious expression, several reflections that the modern person unused to hearing . . .
old music done correctly can hardly escape. The harpsichord and viola da gamba, which were
heard more than any other instruments last night, as well as the viol d’amore and the lute, are
instruments whose strings are all stretched rather mildly. This makes for a sweetness of sound and
hovering warmth that are unknown to modern instruments . . .

These gentle, free-floating sounds are amplified and enriched by the chamber in which they are
sounded, and the effect is in every way beautiful. Indeed we are indebted for the hearing of
new sounds as much to that small group of intelligent musicologists who have brought the
baroque revival to pass as to the composers of modern music or their performing societies.

Harmonically, Vestiment Silke contains an abundance of fifths and fourths—indeed the
two intervals are often sounded simultaneously in the harp, creating a distinctly con-
temporary reference to the work’s Medieval source. Rhythmically, Harrison also calls to
mind the Middle Ages by notating flexibility through constantly changing meter, thus pro-
viding a fanciful reconstruction of the declamatory style of a wandering minstrel. The
accent pattern is dictated by the prosody and, though the work is strictly notated, the
effect is one of free improvisation.

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120Ibid., xi.
121Ibid., xiv.
122A facsimile of the manuscript and transcription is found in Karl Breul, ed., The Cambridge Songs: A Goliard’s
123Harrison, personal communication, 1997.
124Ziolkowski, Cambridge Songs, 42.
Herald Tribune, April 19 and 20, 1945.
Incidental Music for Corneille's 'Cinna' (Suite for Tuck Piano)

In 1949, when Virgil Thomson handed Harrison a copy of Partch's *Genius of a Music* with the offhand comment, "Here, see what you can make of this," he could not have anticipated that it would forever change Harrison's compositional life. Disillusioned with twelve-tone serialism and the style of his pre-breakdown years, Harrison was searching for a new language. Partch's ideas intersected with the historical tuning theories Harrison was encountering in his journey through European cultural history; suddenly he saw a way in which ancient Greek theory could be realized in modern practice.

Harrison considered Partch's work with just intonation the logical extension of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method. In the late 1960s, he wrote:

Mr. Schoenberg's excellent ear early informed him that there is no tonality in equal temperament (only the octave is a good interval). Being a European, and sharing in Europe's heavy investment in equal temperament, it did not seriously occur to him simply to retune. He invented instead a way of putting some order into an essentially chaotic affair by arranging an order of succession through the unrelated pitches (while systematically avoiding the only related ones—the octaves). Thus, he substituted an order of succession for a hierarchy of relationships.


Harrison's excitement over his studies of intonation surpassed that of any of his previous explorations, and pure tuning systems became, for years afterward, the subject of his most impassioned lectures. In the 1950s, he could hardly contain his enthusiasm. Colleagues at Black Mountain College remember his animated lectures on the subject, held after dinner in what they termed the "roundhouse" (the music room); and in later years Frank Wiggleworth would laughingly retell the story of a 1954 trip to Venice where Harrison, in severe pain from a broken foot, lay in a hotel room trying to distract himself by mapping the partials of the bells of St. Mark's basilica.

The first work in which Harrison experimented with these new ideas was *Seven Pastorales*, which he began in New York in 1949 after returning his piano in Pythagorean intonation. Harrison completed the *Pastorales* at Black Mountain in October 1951. After his return to California in 1953 he not only composed a number of works calling for specialized tunings (*Strict Songs, 1955; Cinna, 1955–57*; and the *Concerto in Slendro, 1961*), but also developed his own extension of just intonation, which he calls "Free Style." Free Style tuning dispenses entirely with the concept of a fixed tonal center. Instead, each pitch is related only to the surrounding notes either melodically or harmonically, mostly in strict superparticular ratios derived from the overtone series (e.g., 3:2, 4:3, 5:4, etc.). Since an interval is defined not according to any fixed frequency but rather by its ratio to the previous note, a particular pitch in one portion of the work may differ quite substantially from what appears to be the same pitch elsewhere. (That is, one "C" may be quite different from another.) The use of standard notation thus becomes a convenience for the performer rather than an indication of an absolute pitch. Despite the difficulties inherent in such a system, Harrison used Free Style in several works, including a short *Sinfony* (1955), which calls for specially constructed flutes, and viols with moveable frets. The work has been realized digitally and recorded by David Doty.

*Cinna*, dedicated to the Guggenheim Foundation, was a product of Harrison's early years in Aptsos, when he worked as a forest fire fighter and veterinary assistant ("clipping

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130In Pythagorean intonation all fifths are pure except one, which is so small that it is extremely dissonant. The thirds, as a result, are extremely wide.
131Superparticular ratios are those in which the numerator exceeds the denominator by 1, for example, 4/3 or 10/100.
132Recording on the compact disc included in Miller and Lieberman, *Lou Harrison*.
133In addition to his 1952 Guggenheim fellowship, Harrison received another one in 1954.
poodles,” he quips). After a full day’s work with the dogs, he would spend most of the night composing in a small studio behind his Aptos cabin. The building offered an ideal environment: built to raise chinchillas, it featured heavily insulated walls several inches thick, designed for temperature control but coincidentally functioning as a sound barrier, allowing him to compose at the piano throughout the night.

Harrison envisioned Cinna as an accompaniment to the play of the same name by Pierre Corneille (1606–1684). The drama focuses on the Roman Emperor Augustus’s clemency toward the general Cinna, who had plotted his execution. Harrison was attracted to the play not only because of its pacifist theme (rather than exacting revenge, Augustus disarmed his enemies with mercy), but also because of his interest in the theater in general and the French Baroque in particular. He was drawn to the classical movement of seventeenth-century France and the then-current dramatic theory of the “three unities”; action set in a single day, in a single locale, and revolving about a unified plot—“truly a musical problem,” he says.

Harrison hoped to stage a performance of Corneille’s play in the studio behind his house, using puppets in classical dress, and with musical numbers as intermezzi between the acts. Such a production, however, never materialized. Since a puppet play called for modest musical forces, Harrison decided on an instrumentation of solo piano, but rather than using a standard instrument, he called for one with thumbtacks inserted in the felt of each hammer. The composer Esther Williamson Ballou had first shown Harrison a tack piano after a New York concert in which the instrument had been used to simulate a harpsichord. In a 1945 Herald Tribune review, Harrison complimented the Oratorio Society of New York on using the instrument in Bach’s B Minor Mass, noting that it constituted “a happy substitute for the harpsichord when volume is required”—though he would have much preferred a harpsichord, a smaller orchestra, and fewer singers. The following year, he reviewed the same group performing the same work with less sympathy for this non-historic performance practice: “As a concession to modern scholarship, the sound of the harpsichord was offered in its shadow version supplied by a piano with tacks in the hammers.”

Though the tack piano’s use as a harpsichord-substitute was short-lived, Harrison found another application for the instrument in fifteen works composed between 1949 and 1990. Combined with the celesta and sometimes the harp as well, it created “the gamelan section” of his orchestra. Harrison first experimented with this sonority in two chamber works from 1949: The Only Jealousy of Emer (flute, cello, contrabass, tack-piano, celesta) and Solstice (flute, oboe, trumpet, 2 cellos, contrabass, tack-piano, celesta). He was so delighted with the gamelan sound of the tack piano/celesta combination that he used it again in his 1951 Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra, which contains movements titled “First Gamelan” and “Second Gamelan.” Two other compositions from the same year call for the instrument, as do Rapunzel (1952) and all four of Harrison’s symphonies (1964–1990). Cinna, however, is Harrison’s only work for tack piano alone. In the introductory comments to his own recording of the piece (ca. 1957), he mentions the possibility of substituting harpsichord (an interesting turning of the tables) but does not list that option on the score, most likely because the notated dynamic contrasts would be lost.

On the title page, as restated in the present edition, Harrison gives instructions for retuning the piano, primarily by locating pure (non-beating) fifths or major thirds above or

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134 Harrison’s interest in and fluency with early music becomes evident in the notation of Cinna. Here he uses alto and tenor clefs in addition to treble and bass, thus avoiding excessive use of ledger lines as in eighteenth-century works. This edition uses only treble and bass clefs.

135 Harrison, personal communication, Aug. 6, 1997.


138 Nocturne and Alma Redemptoris Mater.

139 The recording and Harrison’s comments (including his demonstration of the work’s tuning system) can be heard on the compact disc accompanying Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison.
below specified pitches. He then presents the resulting chromatic scale featuring five sizes of semitone, ranging from an exceptionally small 71 cents (G♯–A, C♯–D♭, D♭–E) to a very wide 133 (C–D♯), none of which corresponds to the equal tempered semitone (100 cents).

In example 5, I have calculated the sizes of all intervals in Cinna from the minor second through the fourth and arranged them from narrowest to widest in each interval category. In contrast to the wide variety of semitone sizes, the majority of the fourths and major thirds are pure, though at the expense of others, which can be quite dissonant. The range of whole steps is similar to that of the semitones. The two sizes commonly discussed in Medieval and Renaissance tracts (the “greater tone,” 9:8, and the “lesser tone,” 10:9) are present, as is the 8:7 “supermajor second,” an interval resulting from the “flat” seventh partial of the overtone series (example 6). In the second movement of Cinna, Harrison dwells for some time on this wide second (F–G)—possibly to enhance the pathos of the melodic line.

**EXAMPLE 5. Cinna, interval sizes**

a. Ratios and notation for intervals in Cinna

   **narrowest** → **widest**

   m2
   
   (“lesser tone”) → (“greater tone”) → (“supermajor second”)

   M2
   
   (“subminor third”) → (pure minor third)

   m3
   
   (pure major third)

   M3
   
   (pure fourth)

   P4

b. Interval sizes in cents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interval</th>
<th>Minor Second</th>
<th>Major Second</th>
<th>Minor Third</th>
<th>Major Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Cents</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Cents</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25:24</td>
<td>70.67</td>
<td>35:32</td>
<td>155.14</td>
<td>7:6</td>
<td>266.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:20</td>
<td>84.47</td>
<td>10:9</td>
<td>182.40</td>
<td>75:64</td>
<td>274.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>111.73</td>
<td>9:8</td>
<td>203.91</td>
<td>32:27</td>
<td>294.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:14</td>
<td>119.44</td>
<td>256:225</td>
<td>223.46</td>
<td>25:21</td>
<td>301.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27:25</td>
<td>133.24</td>
<td>8:7</td>
<td>231.17</td>
<td>6:5</td>
<td>315.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32:25</td>
<td>243.77</td>
<td>48:35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144:125</td>
<td>244.97</td>
<td>546.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xlii (Corrected page) Leta Miller
Between the 9:8 “greater tone” and the 6:5 pure minor third are seven intervals of gradually increasing size (see example 5). Among these, the 7:6 “subminor third,” an interval not used in Western harmonic practice, is particularly startling to ears attuned to equal temperament. Near the end of Cinna’s slow second movement (the same one in which he explored the supermajor second), Harrison wrote a passage in parallel thirds that capitalizes on the shades of coloration available in this tuning (example 7a). The passage opens with the 6:5 pure minor third (316 cents) and concludes with a 5:4 pure major third (386 cents), thus creating a sense of stability at the beginning and end. Between these poles Harrison inserted four minor thirds of different sizes, ranging from the 7:6 subminor third (267 cents) to the very wide 128:105 (343 cents).

The most radical juxtapositions of interval sizes, however, occur in the finale, where Harrison makes extensive use of the tuning’s widest half step (C–D, 27:25) as well as the two intervals built around the seventh partial (8:7 and 7:6). Particularly striking is a passage of unadorned quarter notes in which two fourths are interwoven with three gradually expanding intervals: the 8:7 supermajor second, the 7:6 subminor third, and the 6:5 pure minor third. In the passage’s continuation, these three intervals are juxtaposed with the 9:7 major third, a quarter-tone wider than pure (example 7b).

Contrary to his normal practice, Harrison did not date the manuscript of Cinna when he finished the composition; nor are there dates on any of the more than forty pages of sketch material. Although the fair copy, which he prepared in 1968 for the premiere by Donald

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**Example 6.** The overtone series and the sizes of the resulting intervals

a. Overtone series (blackened notes differ significantly from the corresponding equal-tempered pitch)

```
  1  2  3
```

```
  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14  15  16
```

```
subminor third  supermajor second
```

```
“greater tone”  “lesser tone”
```

b. Vibratation ratios, corresponding interval sizes, and comparison (in cents) between the pure interval and the corresponding equal tempered interval (rounded to the nearest cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ratio</th>
<th>interval</th>
<th>pure interval</th>
<th>equal tempered interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>octave</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:2</td>
<td>fifth</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:3</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:4</td>
<td>major third</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:5</td>
<td>minor third</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:6</td>
<td>narrow minor third (“subminor third”)</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:7</td>
<td>wide major second (“supermajor second”)</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:8</td>
<td>major second (“greater tone”)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:9</td>
<td>smaller major second (“lesser tone”)</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10ff.</td>
<td>increasingly smaller seconds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>minor second</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:16–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:19</td>
<td>Increasingly smaller minor seconds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXAMPLE 7.  *Cinna*, compositional use of varying interval sizes

a. Movement 2: passage with parallel, unequal minor thirds, system 7.24f., PI

[bbox] [pure minor 3½, 6:5]  [pure major 3½, 5:4]  

8:7  7:6  6:5 (pure)  

sizes of the 3½s in cents

b. Movement 5: fourths interwoven with the supermajor second, subminor third, and pure minor third, system 4, 18f., PI

[bbox]  

*8:7 = 435 cents (a pure M3 = 386 cents)*

Pippin,140 bears the date 1955-56, *Cinna* was probably not completed until 1957, as suggested by two contemporaneous documents: a report by Peter Yates on hearing the piece's first informal, private performance, and a letter from Harrison to the Esperanto Society.141

Yates's report describes a “trip up the coast” beginning “the third week of May” 1957, during which he revived a friendship with Harrison that had begun during the composer's year in Los Angeles (1942-43). Yates notes that after dinner, “we went back into Lou's studio... the single room cut in half by a large screen for shadow puppets, and heard—the first time he has played them for anyone—his five piano interludes, intended to be played between the five acts of... *Cinna*.142

Scrawled at the beginning of Harrison's working score from the 1950s is a reminder to himself to “Contact [the] Esperanto Society.” He did so on June 6, 1957, describing his “just completed” piece for tuck-piano and seeking help translating his performance notes into Esperanto for the title page of a “small private edition.” In this letter, Harrison suggests that the tuck piano was merely an imitation of his vision of the ideal instrument: a single-string piano “struck by light hammers of aluminum” to produce “an harmonious twanging of strings.”

Although the surviving sketches for *Cinna* are not dated, they do reveal the evolution of both the composition and the tuning system.144 They also provide hints about Harrison's state of mind at the time, for intermingled among them are random musings on a variety of subjects (see plate 4):

On just intonation:
Dean Luther Marchant (of the Mills College Music Dept.) once asked of me: was I not a radical, an iconoclast? Actually, of course, I've always been a conformist, and an intense one; for I think that all our arts and activities had ought to have to do with “the-way-things-are-ness...” For example, I find that we are all (so made, so constituted, so living) that “just-intonation” is

140The premiere took place at the Old Spaghetti Factory in San Francisco on August 4, 1968.
141Letter to the Esperanto Society from the composer's archive (thanks to Charles Hanson for bringing this document to my attention). Peter Yates, "A Trip up the Coast," *Arts and Architecture* 74:12 (Dec. 1957). 4, 6-7, 10, 33-34. Yates erroneously identifies the author as Racine.
142Yates, "A Trip Up the Coast," 33.
143That is, with one string per note instead of the normal two or three.
144All manuscript materials relating to *Cinna* are at Special Collections, University of California, Santa Cruz.
best and simplest for us and I so proceed: still, such is "thought" now, by most in the WESTERN world to be dreams! (of attainment), insofar as music itself is regarded at all as a worthy pursuit. Artists are justly paid less[,] we enjoy life the most. Those of you who have not our fortune should be paid exorbitantly for anything you do. You deserve some compensation for your pitiable state. . . .

On relatedness:
Time and math and intervals and rhythm and balance and life and death.

On classicism and death:
Among Europeans only the Span[ish] have regarded death in a classic manner. Is it the Moorish (occupation) which caused this?

On dogs:
I can't imagine anyone liking Basenjis.
One loves them.
They are works of the very highest artistry.
To discover the Basenji is like finding a unicorn at one's door—
The fabulous arrives.

"Adventure in a liquor store":
What I'd like to have said: "Madame: 'merriment' is an old English word; I believe that the nearest American equivalent is 'making whoopee.'"


Harrison’s return to California after his East Coast odyssey also marked a reopening of his ties to Asia. Though he had been fascinated by Chinese music and Indonesian gamelan since the 1950s, he did not visit Asia until 1961 when he was invited to the East-West Music Encounter in Tokyo. Funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, Harrison boarded a freighter on March 25 for the journey across the Pacific. Along the way, he made a study of pentatonic modes with pure intervals and, using two of these modes, wrote a new work: a concerto for solo violin accompanied by an orchestra of percussion and keyboard instruments—six triangles, six gongs, four suspended galvanized garbage cans, two tack pianos, and celesta—which he titled *Concerto in Slendro.* (Slendro is an Indonesian pentatonic mode with no half steps, or, as Harrison describes it, one with "wide seconds and narrow thirds." There are many varieties of slendro, but they all lack semitones, in contrast to *pelog*, a hemitonic mode having "narrow seconds and wide thirds.")

Following the Tokyo conference, the Rockefeller Foundation funded a trip to a second Asian country of Harrison’s choice. He had arranged to visit Thailand, but was seduced by the beauties of Korean music from recordings brought to Tokyo by one of the most influential scholars of Korean traditional music, Dr. Lee Hye-Ku. Harrison abruptly changed his plans and went to Korea instead. With additional help from the Rockefeller Foundation, he brought Lee to California later that year, and returned to Korea himself for three and a half months the following summer. Harrison studied Korean instruments, including the double-reed *piri*, and worked with Lee on a history of Korean music (only partially completed). He coupled his second trip with a visit to Taiwan as well, where he studied *ch’eng* (psaltery) with the renowned master Liang Ts’ai-Ping.

The decade following Harrison’s trips to Asia was marked by a devotion to, and exploration of, Korean and Chinese music. He composed for the instruments he had studied, built replicas of them, and taught his students to play them; he wrote works for ensembles of mixed Asian and Western instruments (*Pacifica Rondo, Music for Violin with Various Instruments,* and others); and he lectured widely on various traditional Asian musics. He even founded a Chinese music ensemble with his student Richard Dee and his partner William Colvig, whom he met in San Francisco in 1967. Together the trio presented hundreds of concerts of classical Chinese music throughout California, often joined by the singer and *ch’eng* player Lily Chin and the poet Kenneth Rexroth, who would narrate and read his own translations of Chinese poems.
Harrison earned a living during his early Aptos years primarily through non-musical jobs (such as that at the animal hospital), supplemented by working as an accompanist for several dance studios in the San Francisco area. His love of teaching led him to take a part-time position at San Jose State University in 1967, where he offered courses in orchestration, composition, and world music until 1983. (He also taught for short periods at Stanford, the University of Southern California, and Mills College, and, for many years, offered a popular world music course and ran the gamelan at nearby Cabrillo College.)

The period was also one of intense political activism, prompted both by the atomic bomb attacks on Japan and by the arms race and nuclear testing of the following decades. Harrison bought his own Geiger counter, which he set up in front of his cottage and read daily, and wrote a short Political Primer, part of which he set to music using the Geiger counter as background commentary. Equal temperament came to represent for him an undifferentiated grayness, symbolizing the leveling tendencies of modern industrial society. Coupled with serialism—which by now he had largely abandoned as a primary compositional tool—he called for this “mechanized post-industrial tuning” in several political works of the time, including anti-bomb movements in Pacifica Rondo (1963) and Nova Odo (1961–68). The latter includes a Morse code message in the woodwinds (“Class struggle between church and state was won; will layman win struggle against military?”), as well as the voices of children who appeal for sanity in the face of an escalating Cold War.

The Vietnam War (particularly with its persistent media images of Americans killing Asians) only exacerbated Harrison’s outrage and inspired the Cabrillo Music Festival’s 1968 concert of “Peace Pieces”—a protest in sympathy with the increasingly virulent anti-war demonstrations on college campuses throughout the country. Harrison actively supported the pacifist non-commercial radio KPFA in Berkeley and became increasingly outspoken in support of humanitarian and ecological causes. He has continued his political activism to the present day, waging personal battles against noise pollution, economic waste, and the despoiling of nature (he uses exclusively paper made from kenaf, a member of the hibiscus family, and in 1997 began building a straw-bale house in the Mojave desert as a getaway). He has continued to compose political works, the most dramatic example from his mature style period being Homage to Pacifica (1991), which blends sardonic commentaries on American imperialism with a celebration of Native American culture and a vision of a united world.

Meeting Colvig in 1967 (see plate 6) spurred the instrument-building side of Harrison’s life as well. An electrician and amateur musician, Colvig helped Harrison explore a variety of tuning systems by constructing metallophones and measuring their frequency ratios with an oscilloscope. The two men also built an accurate and versatile monochord, on which they could easily set up and compare different modes, both those of ancient or non-Western musics and those of their own invention. They then transferred these modes to other instruments via a specially constructed harp, appropriately dubbed a “transfer harp.”

The pair’s first gamelan, built in 1971 for Harrison’s opera Young Caesar, was not intended as a replica of an Indonesian original but as a percussion ensemble in just intonation, with metallophones tuned in pure non-beating intervals in D major. Harrison and Colvig used readily available materials: aluminum slabs and conduit tubing for keys and stacked #10 tin cans for resonators. Discarded oxygen tanks cut to random lengths and struck with flattened baseball bats added a bell-like timbre to the ensemble, which was rounded out with suspended garbage cans and a small organ (see plate 5). Noting the similarities of this home-made orchestra to an Indonesian ensemble, Harrison and Colvig dubbed it “An American Gamelan” and now refer to it fondly as “Old Granddad.” Harrison composed three works for this unique orchestra: Young Caesar (since rescored for Western instruments), La Koro Satro (1972, with chorus), and the Suite for Violin with American Gamelan (composed jointly with Richard Dee in 1974 and now available in two alternative versions for Western instruments).

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145 Harrison’s Political Primer is published in Frog Peak Anthology (Hanover, N.H.: Frog Peak Music, 1992), 77–83.
Unlike Old Grandad, two later gamelan built by Harrison and Colvig (one for San Jose State University in the late 1970s and the other for Mills College in the early 1980s) were modeled directly on traditional Indonesian percussion ensembles. The two men have constructed numerous other instruments as well: harps, bell trees, plucked and bowed psalteries, and drums built from suspended wooden crates, to name a few.

Harrison engaged with the last major influence on his mature style beginning in 1975 when he met the renowned Indonesian gamelan master and teacher K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat (Pak Cokro) at the Center for World Music in Berkeley. Under Pak Cokro, Harrison began a disciplined study of traditional gamelan instruments, musical styles, and performance practices, a project he undertook with the same fervor he had brought to previous endeavors. He learned to play most of the instruments of the ensemble, mastered works from the classical literature, and gained an in-depth understanding of the structure of gamelan music from various regions within Indonesia.

Soon Harrison began composing for traditional gamelan; his first works for the ensemble appeared in 1976. Within two years, however, he was combining the Indonesian orchestra with Western solo instruments (Main Bersama-sama for french horn and gamelan and Thremony for Carlos Chávez for viola and gamelan). Harrison’s more than fifty gamelan works include pieces for gamelan alone, gamelan with voices, or gamelan with solo instruments (among them a Concerto for Piano with Javanese Gamelan [1987] in which the piano must be tuned to the Indonesian instruments). Rather than exploring the extended instrumental techniques used by some of his contemporaries (such as bowing, rather than striking, the bonang—knobbed gongs laid horizontally on rope supports), Harrison uses the instruments of the ensemble in a traditional manner, adapts standard organizational structures, and welcomes idiomatic elaboration by performers. His personal voice is heard in the novel instrumental combinations, in the just intonation tuning systems he has used for his three sets of instruments, and in the mixing of compositional processes. Although Harrison had become adept at simulating gamelan sounds on Western instruments long before his studies with Pak Cokro, his new knowledge of traditional practices enabled him to do more than just mimic its timbres: he was now equipped to utilize Indonesian compositional processes as well. Such cultural transference is apparent in works like the Fourth Symphony, one movement of which calls for a baritone chanting California Indian “Coyote Tales” over a murmuring percussion accompaniment evoking Javanese sounds. In the second movement of his Piano Trio, he introduced typical gamelan elaboration patterns such as mepat (a oscillation between two pitches) or cengkok (longer embellishment patterns arriving periodically at unisons with the main melody).

The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a revival of Harrison’s interest in standard Western ensembles. To date, he has composed two operas, four symphonies, and a series of chamber works for various instrumental combinations (string quartet, piano trio, etc.). Despite repeated vows to retire, he has not stopped, or even reduced his compositional activity. Between 1994 and 1997 alone he completed five major commissions: incidental music for a radio broadcast of Eugene O’Neill’s Lazarus Laughed; a fanfare for the San Francisco Symphony entitled Parade for M.T.T. (honoring musical director Michael Tilson Thomas’s first year with the orchestra); Rhymes with Silver for the dancer and choreographer Mark Morris and the cellist Yo-Yo Ma; a solo work for Japanese shamisen (Suite for Sangen); and a Concerto for Pi-P’a (a pear-shaped Chinese lute) with String Orchestra commissioned by New York City’s Lincoln Center.

Two Works from the 1980s

Harrison’s compositions from the 1980s and 1990s do not eschew the eclectic influences of the past (percussion, dance, Medieval music, the French Baroque, tuning, and instrument building), but rather integrate them in novel combinations typified by the two latest...
chamber works in the present collection. Completed within a year of each other, the *Varied Trio* and the *Grand Duo* illustrate the syncretic process Harrison has cultivated over the past half century and summarize the influences that have guided him during his long career. Both works have been performed repeatedly and recorded, yet neither has heretofore been published.

*Varied Trio*

The *Varied Trio*, like many compositions throughout Harrison's career, arose from a personal friendship, in this case with the percussionist William Winant, who began working closely with the composer at Mills College in 1980. Although Harrison envisioned the piece for three players from the start (intending it for Winant and two colleagues, Julie Steinberg and David Abel), he first composed it as a quintet so that he and Colvig could join the group for the premiere on February 28, 1987.

By the time of this concert, Harrison had known Winant for eight years; Winant, in turn, had been playing Harrison's percussion music since he was an undergraduate at the California Institute of the Arts in 1972. "Lou was one of my idols," says Winant, recalling his early percussion studies with John Bergamo and James Tenney; "I was in awe of him." The two did not meet until 1979, however, when Winant was completing his undergraduate work at York University in Toronto and Harrison came to the city to hear the premiere of his *String Quartet Set*. The following year Winant enrolled in the master's program at Mills College, where he was assigned a graduate assistantship helping Harrison and Colvig build a new gamelan. "They set up a little workshop for Bill in the loft above the concert hall," says Winant; "I spent every day there making resonating boxes, and helping him cut the wood for the gambaung [xylophones] and file the metal bars for the metallophones." (Their completed gamelan contained two sets of instruments, one in slendro tuning, the other in pelog, which Harrison named Si Darius and Si Madeleine in honor of Darius Milhaud and his wife.)

For Harrison's sixty-fifth birthday concert at Mills (May 10, 1982), Winant played in the first performance of the *Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Gamelan* and premiered the finished version of *Tributes to Charon* with its new opening movement, "Passage through Darkness" (see above). Also on the program was the *Concerto in Slendro* in which faculty member Julie Steinberg played the tacet-piano. After the concert, she introduced Winant to her husband, violinist David Abel, and the three planned a future collaboration. The opportunity did not arise until two years later, when Winant was organizing a concert called "Three Generations of American Music" for Cal Performances, a series sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley. He programmed Cowell's *Set of Five* as well as Harrison's *Music for Violin with Various Instruments, European, Asian, and African* (1967), for which Harrison played the psaltery part and Steinberg performed on a reed organ. The concert was so successful that a tour to other University of California campuses was arranged, during which Harrison resolved to compose a new piece for the ensemble. The resulting quintet later evolved into the *Varied Trio*.

In the original version, Harrison performed on harp and Colvig played bells. In place of piano, Steinberg played a virginal, tuned in the composer's favorite eighteenth-century temperament, Kirnberger II. Shortly after the February 1987 premiere, Steinberg, with Harrison's permission, arranged the score for trio by assigning the bell parts to a vibraphone or gong and adapting the harp and virginal parts to the piano (at times calling for the instrument's strings to be plucked with the finger or the frame to be hit with a hard  

\[\text{147 Winant, interview, Aug. 21, 1996.}\]
\[\text{148 The performance by the Oxord Quartet took place on April 28, 1979.}\]
\[\text{149 Winant, interview, Aug. 21, 1996.}\]
\[\text{150 This tuning was described in 1779 by J. S. Bach's student Johann Philipp Kirnberger. All fifths are tuned pure except D-A and A-E, the pitch A being raised from its equal tempered position. The result is that, despite compromising these two fifths, three important thirds (C-E, G-B and D-F) become pure. Harrison used this tuning in his 1985 Piano Concerto as well.}\]
yarn mallet: the original harp part had called for some percussion effects, including knocking on the instrument's frame.) The Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio performed the new version for the first time at Mills on Harrison's seventieth birthday (May 14, 1987).

The Varied Trio provides a case study of Harrison's cross-cultural approach to composition. Each movement draws on different compositional resources (percussion, dance, gamelan, the music of India, the French Baroque, Rococo painting, the teachings of Henry Cowell), from which he created a unique personal synthesis. Harrison's percussion ensemble experiences of the 1930s are most apparent in the Trio's second movement and finale. The former features the jalataranga, an Indian instrument comprising a set of rice bowls struck with thin bamboo sticks. The bowls are tuned to different pitches by filling them with various amounts of water. Harrison had used the jalataranga in various works for years; in fact, he first heard it on a 1930s recording by Uday Shankar (the elder brother of Ravi Shankar). Henry Cowell also called for the instrument in Ostinato Pianissimo (1934).

The finale, a lively dance, was partially inspired by a routine shopping trip in downtown Santa Cruz. Passing a kitchen supply store one day, Harrison and Colvig noticed a display of baking pans in the window, reminding Harrison of the days he spent shopping for new percussion instruments in San Francisco: "Those are musical instruments," he said to Colvig, and the pair went into the store to test them. They promptly bought a set of six in various sizes for the Trio's finale.

Indonesian gamelan influences (specifically those of the Cirebon region of northern Java) appear in the Varied Trio's opening movement, titled "Gending," which means simply "piece." The opening two measures constitute a traditional gamelan lukisan, the solo introduction that defines the mode, in this case a type of slendro (anahemitic pentatonic): D–E–F♯–A–B. The texture of traditional gamelan is often a type of elaborate heterophony (often called polyphonic stratiﬁcation), in which different instruments perform various levels of rhythmic diminution over a structural melodic pattern called the balungan. The balungan, which may never be heard as an integral line in any one instrument, is built from four-note groupings in which the second and fourth notes are stressed. In the Trio's first movement, the balungan is A–D♯ D–B E–F♯, first sounded on the quarter-note level in measures 3 through 6 as the initial note of each group of sixteenths (see the circled pitches in example 8). The vibraphone's three off-beat sixteenth notes lead to the following balungan pitch by anticipating and decorating it. Beginning on the second beat of measure 6, an additional layer appears, not through the use of faster notes, but by the slowing of the balungan itself to half speed. The vibraphone material from measures 3 through 6 is transferred to the piano in augmentation, the balungan now articulated on the half-note level instead of on the quarter-note level. Although the vibraphone continues its rhythm of sixteenth notes, each set of four notes now represents an eighth, rather than a quarter of the balungan. This change in note density, created through alterations in the speed of the balungan, is typical of traditional gamelan works; density levels are called irama. The effect is one of speeding up although the structural melody has actually slowed down. Still a fourth metric layer begins in measure 12, though in this case without alteration of the balungan speed. The original irama is restored at the end.

The violin, which enters in measure 13 with a line that sounds free and improvisatory, mimics the gamelan's two-string bowed rebab (fiddle), which plays a similar solo role in traditional works. Meanwhile, the right hand of the piano, through its thirty-second-note ﬁguration, imitates the elaborate embellishment patterns typically played by the gender, a metallophone with thin ribbed plates and individually tuned tubular resonators. The gender, which is played with two soft padded disc-shaped mallets, is among the most difﬁcult of the instruments of the gamelan. In typical fashion, all of the various layers, including the violin (rebab) part, meet on downbeats on unison "goal tones," articulating the notes of the balungan (example 8b).

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151 Uday Shankar led a music and dance troupe that played a kind of popularized Indian music and toured widely abroad in the early 1930s. Although Harrison no longer has the recording he heard, a possible candidate would be the album "Hindo music / Shan Kar and His Company," directed by Vishnudass Shirali, RCA Victor, Victor Musical Masterpiece series M-382, ca. 1937.
EXAMPLE 8a. *Varied Trio*, Movement I ("Gending"), mm. 1–11

(circled notes = balungan pitches)

From the gamelan influences of the opening movement, we move to India for Movement Two, “Bowl Bells.” In addition to the *jalatarangi* reference cited above, Harrison uses a *jhālā* technique (borrowed from North Indian practice)—the intermittent reiteration of a single tone between the notes of the main melody. In Harrison’s usage, the *jhālā* functions as an interrupted drone, or what he calls “India’s answer to the Alberti bass.”

While the compositional process and instrumentation of this movement are Indian, the overall form is borrowed from the French Baroque: it is cast in a typical eighteenth-century rondeau form, ABACA. Another rondeau appears in the fourth movement, this time identified as such in its title. Harrison’s tribute to eighteenth-century France is seen not only in the fourth movement’s form, but also in its texture, rhythms, ornaments (standard

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155Harrison, personal communication, n.d.
French agréments), and dedication to the painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806). Struck by the classical grandeur of Fragonard’s work during a visit to New York’s Frick Museum, Harrison purchased several volumes of reproductions: “Violent Romanticism before its time,” he calls Fragonard’s style, “with an astonishing breadth of expression.” 33 That breadth includes representations of mythology, classical antiquity, theater, and puppetry, all of which parallel long-term interests of Harrison as well. (Harrison himself is an accomplished visual artist whose works have been shown in public exhibitions.) This fourth movement is another Harrison hybrid, blending the French Baroque with the gamelan, for the violin’s melody is based on the hemitonic (pelog) scale of the “gamelan degung,” the classical orchestra of the region of Sunda (example 9).

Movements Three, “Elegy,” and Five, “Dance,” hark back to Cowell’s teaching that (in Harrison’s words) “most of the world’s music is melody with some sort of rhythmic support.” 34 The central slow movement features the type of expansive melody for which Harrison has become widely recognized—in this case, an unmeasured rhapsody for the violin. In the finale, the tune is joyful, supported by drums, tambourines, and those baking

33 Harrison, personal communication, Aug. 6, 1997.
EXAMPLE 9. Varied Trio, gamelan degung scale used in the violin part of Movement 4

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tins from the kitchen store, as well as a recurrent low E in the piano that functions as an
interrupted drone. The conclusion of the Varied Trio recalls one of Harrison’s most memo-

rable quotations: “Music,” he has often said, is “basically a song and a dance.”

Grand Duo

Like the Varied Trio, the Grand Duo was inspired by personal friendship. At a casual lunch with
Dennis Russell Davies in October 1987 (after Davies had conducted the Philadelphia
Orchestra in Harrison’s Third Symphony), Harrison remarked, “Dennis, I think I’ll write you a
polka.”156 And indeed, an energetic polka, reflecting the social dance classes of Harrison’s
childhood, eventually became the Duo’s finale. The following year, when he was in Portland
for the rehearsals and performance of his opera Young Caesar, Harrison began working out
ideas at the piano for a largo movement, which eventually became the work’s “Air” (Move-
ment Four). “An Ivesian hymn tune began to emerge,”157 he says, recalling the delight he
felt in the reappearance of this early influence (see mm. 53ff). “Mr. Ives . . . left us the most
wonderful of playgrounds, a kind of People’s Park in which we are all arrangers of lovely
things.”158 A commission from the Cabrillo Music Festival prompted the expansion of these
fragments into a five-movement, thirty-five-minute Duo, which was premiered by Davies
(piano) and violinist Romuald Tecco (the Festival’s concertmaster) on July 28, 1988.

Harrison composed the first and fourth movements using “interval control,” a technique
that had served him well since his early San Francisco days: he simply restricts (rather
severely) the number of admissible intervals. In the Duo’s opening movement, melodic
motion is confined with one exception to the minor second, minor third, and minor sixth
(ascending or descending); in the “Air,” he uses only the minor second, major third, major
sixth, and an occasional perfect fourth between adjacent pitches. (Each voice in a contra-
puntal texture is treated independently; the harmonic intervals between them are not sub-
ject to the restrictions. As a case in point, see the piano’s opening introduction to Movement
Four, in which two interwoven contrapuntal lines are each built from the four permitted
intervals, while the intervals between them include the perfect fifth and the minor sixth.)
Through the years, Harrison has found this technique one of the most useful of his composi-
tional “controls” and has employed it often, for instance in his flute concerto (1939), in three
piano pieces from the 1930s (Saraband, 1937; Prelude for Grandpiano, 1937; and the Third
Piano Sonata, 1938), and in the Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra (1959).

The second movement (“Stampede”) is one of Harrison’s most vibrant estampes,
though its form varies slightly from the traditional pattern of paired phrases (AxAyBxByCxCy,
etc.):
158 the repeat of section D is postponed until after section F (example 10a). Harrison
first used the estampie, a medieval dance form, in the Suite for Symphonic Strings (1960),
and has included it in works as diverse as the String Quartet Set (1979), the Double Concerto
for Violin, Cello, and Gamelan (1982), the Fourth Symphony (1990), and the Concerto for P’i-
pa with String Orchestra (1997). The Duo’s estampie also uses one of his favorite scales: the
octatonic (alternating half and whole steps; example 10b).

In his later works, Harrison often used the term “stampede” in place of “estampie,”
stemming from an inadvertent slip by William Winant during a rehearsal of the Double.

156 Harrison, personal communication, summer 1997.
157 Ibid.
159 Note: “x” and “y” represent open and closed section endings that in traditional estampes are similar, but
not always identical.
EXAMPLE 10. *Grand Duo*, Movement 2 ("Stampede")

a. Form: Ax Ay Bx By Cx Cy D Ex Ey Fx Fy D' Coda*
(measure numbers rounded to the nearest downbeat)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section:</th>
<th>Mm.</th>
<th>A x</th>
<th>B y</th>
<th>C y</th>
<th>D x</th>
<th>E y</th>
<th>F y</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4-15</td>
<td>16-39</td>
<td>56-73</td>
<td>74-87</td>
<td>134-41</td>
<td>144-55</td>
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<td>(189-149)</td>
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<td>(226-189)</td>
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<td>(226-189)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30-41</td>
<td>42-55</td>
<td>88-105</td>
<td>106-121</td>
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<td></td>
<td>189</td>
<td>284-91</td>
<td>294-135</td>
<td>345-60</td>
<td>361-73</td>
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<td>189</td>
<td>284-91</td>
<td>294-135</td>
<td>345-60</td>
<td>361-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>574-454</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>455-47</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*AxAyBxBy… is used instead of AA’BB’… in order to demonstrate the point of variance in each major section. The various x and y sections are not necessarily related to each other.

†374-91 related to 189-205; 392-405 = 205-189; 419-34 = 233-47

b. Octatonic scale, showing pairs of half steps alternating with whole steps

![Octatonic scale](image)

*Concerto* in 1982. Unfamiliar with the word estampie, Winant blurted out “stampede” instead, sending Harrison to the dictionary to track down etymologies. He discovered that “estampie” denoted a general brouhaha, an implication he accentuated in the *Duo* by the use of an “octave bar.” This device, about two inches high with a sculpted rubberized-foam bottom and light wooden handle, spans the length of an octave, allowing the performer to replicate the keyboard clusters pioneered by Henry Cowell at a breakneck tempo.†9 The arch shape of the sculpted foam makes the outer notes of the octave speak louder than the intervening pitches (see illustration and instructions preceding the score). Although the tone cluster passages in the *Duo* have distinctive melodic contours, their overall effect is rhythmic, recalling Harrison’s percussion ensemble background. For the pianist, the octave bar sections in the “estampie” (sections D and D’) are truly an athletic exercise; for the audience, they are a delightful visual treat (a distinct advantage of live performance over recording). The difficulty of this passage may well have encouraged the variant in the movement’s form as well: the pianist’s right arm simply needs a rest before the repetition. Splitting section D from its recurrence further enhances the movement’s dramatic momentum as the technical display creates climactic arrival points both in the middle and at the end. The octave bar also makes a dramatic reappearance in the *Duo*’s polka finale, where it brings the thirty-five-minute piece to a crashing finish.

To balance the dynamic stampede and finale, Harrison introduced at the *Grand Duo’s* center a gentle “Round,” a duet in quintal counterpoint that he had written seven years earlier for Davies’s two daughters, Annabel and April. The original composition was an idiomatic French rondeau (“round”) with a refrain and two couplets (ABACA). For the *Duo* Harrison expanded it by adding a third couplet (ABACADA) in canon (mm. 82ff.). Reflecting traditional eighteenth-century practice, he repeated the A section once at the beginning (mm. 9–17), and then ornamented it differently at each subsequent recurrence (beginning in mm. 34, 66, and 100 respectively).

In 1992 Mark Morris asked Harrison for permission to choreograph the *Grand Duo’s* polka. Morris, who served for three years as director of dance for Belgium’s state opera house (the Théâtre Royal de La Monnaie), had been intrigued by Harrison’s music ever since he heard the Louisville Orchestra’s recording of *Strict Songs* (1955) as a teenager. By the time Morris heard the *Duo’s* polka, he had already choreographed the *Strict Songs* for his

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†9Ives used a device similar to Harrison’s octave bar in the Hawthorne movement of the *Concord Sonata*.
own troupe, using the entire 120-voice Seattle Men’s Chorus in place of the original eight baritones. In Morris’s hands, the Duo’s polka became “five minutes of frenzy.” But he was dissatisfied with the lone movement as an independent dance piece: it lacked the climactic exhaustion he had envisioned. So the following year he (uncharacteristically) choreographed backwards, setting the earlier movements with the exception of the long “Air.” In that way, the polka became the culmination of a dramatic curve. The dance has since proven to be one of Morris’s most popular works, and he has programmed it frequently.

Both the Varied Trio and the Grand Duo have prompted some of Harrison’s most enthusiastic reviews. To quote a few examples:

On first live hearing the recent [Varied] Trio seems to have hit a peak. Deceptively accessible, it flaunts the elegance of simplicity. Ever-humble, it rises to eloquence. Minimal in its materials—Harrison was a minimalist 40 years ago, when today’s composers of that persuasion were children—it utilizes them with a thoroughness and rhetoric that make the total irresistible.

(Daniel Cariga, Los Angeles Times, May 4, 1988.)

At the end there was the best music of all, Lou Harrison’s “Varied Trio”: full of the old codger’s flowing, genial melodic invention, with piano and percussion . . . filling in with Oriental evocations at one moment and something medieval the next. Sheer loveliness this music.


Harrison’s impressive range as a composer was demonstrated fully in the “Grand Duo for Violin and Piano.” . . . Harrison has a gift for impassioned lyricism in the grand romantic manner that few can rival today, and showed moments of intensity worthy of Brahms or Beethoven at their peaks.

(Robert C. Marsh, Chicago Sun-Times, August 8, 1989.)

[Harrison’s Varied Trio is] a treasure house of exotically tinged modal melodies, rhythmic vivacity and subtle instrumental color. In one of the movements, the percussionist plays with chopsticks on an array of eight differently pitched . . . rice bowls; another one calls for Chinese drums and a row of baker’s pans. From another composer, these would seem like stunts (albeit amusing ones). But the integrity of Harrison’s music is so clear—the notes so obviously call for these exact sonorities—that the listener hears only the ravishing melodies and intricate rhythmic counterpoint. (Joshua Kosman, San Francisco Chronicle, October 10, 1991.)

Together the Varied Trio and Grand Duo encapsulate most of the major influences that have guided Harrison’s compositional development over the years:

- Percussion: in the Trio and the octave bar sections of the Duo
- French Baroque music: in the three rondeaux (two in the Trio, one in the Duo)
- Compositional “controls”: in the restricted interval vocabulary of the Duo’s first and fourth movements
- Medieval music: in the Duo’s “Stampede” and the quintal counterpoint of its “Round”
- Gamelan: in the Trio’s opening movement, “Gending”
- Other Asian musics: the jatataranga and jhala in the Trio’s “Bowl Bells”
- New instruments and extended performance techniques: the Trio’s baking tins and the Duo’s octave bar
- Dance: the Duo’s “Stampede” and “Polka,” the rondeaux, and the Trio’s finale
- Painting: in the dedication to Fragonard of the Trio’s second rondeau
- Expansive melody: in all of the slow movements
- Tuning: in the specified pentatonic mode for the jatataranga.

Conclusion

Harrison’s ability to combine wide-ranging influences in extended compositions while projecting a sense of cohesion and individuality is the essence of his skill. Reviewers have consistently highlighted the successful eclecticism of many of his works. Large-scale compositions, such as the Suite for Symphonic Strings (1960), the Elegies, Third, and Fourth Symphonies (1975, 1982, 1991),

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160 Morris, interview, Nov. 6, 1995.
and 1990), and the Piano Concerto (1985) embrace radically divergent styles ranging from Ruggles-inspired dissonant counterpoint and Medieval dances to solemn evocations of Korean court music. The trick—or, Harrison might say, the game—is to forge from these various influences a personal style, to dismantle his compositional toys and reassemble the pieces into a new one that mirrors its lineage while boasting of a distinctive character all its own.

An excellent example of the process is Homage to Pacifica, composed shortly after the Gulf War in 1991 for the dedication of the new headquarters of the Pacifica Foundation, parent company to Harrison’s favorite “electronic gadfly,” radio station KPFA. To Harrison the war was a grim reminder of his earlier political statements, such as France 1917–Spain 1937 and his Peace Pieces of the 1960s. For Homage, he chose an anti-imperialist text by Mark Twain on the Philippine War for one movement and wrote a Horatian ode on the “untied snakes of America” for another. Still another movement consists of a percussive speaking chorus comprising a litany of Native American tribal names. The finale adds a note of hope with a text attributed to Chief Seattle (Chief of the Dzunukwa, Suquamish, and other Puget Sound tribes) on the interconnectedness of all life-forms: “Where is man without the beasts? If the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit....” The work’s instrumentation calls for an eclectic mix, bringing together musicians who probably never before joined forces, nor are likely to do so again: chorus, solo voice, narrator, Javanese gamelan in just intonation (with both slendro and pelog instruments), bassoon, harp, psaltery, and one percussionist. During the work’s gamelan prelude, Jody Diamond (Pak Cokro’s assistant and one of Harrison’s former gamelan teachers) improvised a vocal part in Indonesian style, using, with Harrison’s enthusiastic endorsement, the call letters of the Pacifica radio stations interwoven with the theme of “We Shall Overcome.” Harrison balanced the vocal movements with an instrumental tribute “to the divine Mr. Handel” (in a mode and instrumentation the Baroque master would never have imagined) and introspective interludes on unaccompanied bassoon. The Chief Seattle text that concludes the work on a note of optimism is set to a bright gamelan accompaniment. Homage to Pacifica is not a traditional gamelan work, nor an imitation of Handelian style, nor a Native American song. And yet in a sense it is all of these, with a Harrisonian twist.

In assessing Harrison’s more than 300 works, Homage to Pacifica does not emerge as a major composition. Yet the piece is indicative of his composition process, similar to that we have seen in the Grand Duo and the Varied Trio. Whatever the underlying influences, the final product bears a personal stamp: there are the long-breathed, modally inspired melodies—at their best, expansive almost to the point of timelessness. These are often contrasted with exuberant dance movements and even, at times, angry protests in dissonant counterpoint. Instrumental color is of primary importance, and Harrison achieves it not only by his skill in traditional orchestration, but also by his use of extended techniques, his imitation of non-Western sounds with Western instrumental combinations, and his unique mixtures of instruments from various cultures. He combines compositional processes and forms from various cultures as well. (“Alban Berg on an Indonesian jaunt,” commented one reviewer of his Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra of 1959). Harrison’s compositions are in a sense an extension of his political philosophy, a type of joining-hands-around-the-world to create, in the words of one commentator, a “musical Esperanto.” His life has been marked by his in-depth studies: percussion, serialism, just intonation, instrument-building, Korean and Chinese music, gamelan, Esperanto—which he combines in fanciful ways. Harrison’s life of cross-cultural synthesis is summarized in the words of Chief Seattle that close Homage to Pacifica, “All things are connected. This we know.”

165The text quoted by Harrison is from a letter of 1854 to President Franklin Pierce (probably written by Henry Smith) purporting to convey Seattle’s words (David M. Buerge, “The Man We Call Seattle,” in Washingtonians: A Biographical Portrait of the State, ed. David Brewster and David Buerge [Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1998]).
Plate 1. France 1917–Spain 1937, first page of the original version, from Harrison’s 1937 composition notebook, with several annotations from 1968. The later additions can be identified by the change in Harrison’s handwriting which took place ca. 1950 after he began to explore calligraphy; see, for example, the beginning (“2 perc. players”) and the bottom of this page (“D.C.,” “va,” and “2 other gongs”). Notebook in the composer’s personal collection; used by permission.
Plate 2. Second page of Harrison’s Changing Moment (1946), a dance for Jean Erdman, showing the composer’s pre-breakdown scores filled with erasures. (Score in the composer’s personal collection; used by permission.)
Plate 3. Vestiment Silke, sketch from 1951. (Special Collections, University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC); used by permission of Lou Harrison and UCSC Special Collections.)

Plate 4. One of the more than forty sketch pages from Cimna. (Special Collections, University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC); used by permission of Lou Harrison and UCSC Special Collections.)
Plate 5. Some of the instruments of "Old Granddad"; two metallophones with aluminum keys and tin cans as resonators. Rear: cut-off oxygen tanks. (Photo by Fredric Lieberman, 1996; used by permission.)

Plate 6. Lou Harrison and William Colvig with the muse Erato in their garden, July, 1998. (Photo by Fredric Lieberman; used by permission.)