

LOU HARRISON

New World Records 80366

Piano Concerto

Suite for violin, piano and small orchestra

KEITH JARRETT

NEW JAPAN PHILHARMONIC

NAOTO OTOMO

LUCY STOLTZMAN

ROBERT HUGHES

Lou Harrison likes to reminisce about his student days in San Francisco around 1935 and the music he heard there, which set him on the course he has followed throughout his lifetime. He had moved down from his native Portland, Ore., primarily to study composition with Henry Cowell. After formal classes were finished for the day, he went on his own musical explorations, often accompanied by fellow student John Cage.

"Chinatown was a significant part of the city's cultural life," he remembers. "It was impossible to shop there without hearing Chinese instruments being played in the streets, and of course this was vastly intriguing. After dinner we'd go to the Cantonese opera, walked in off the street for a quarter. This was very beautiful, just one aria or duet after another. If you could stay to the end, about 1 a.m., you'd see this beautiful turquoise silk descend onto the stage, with embroidered phoenixes and the name Alka Seltzer in sequins; the company had donated the curtain. By the time I was an adult, I had heard much more Chinese opera than the Western variety."

Along with Cage, the young Harrison based his entire musical outlook on his first encounters with non-Western music. "Henry Cowell was our influence, of course. If you look through our scores you'll find no snare drum and no timpani; that's simply because we never had those particular instruments. We'd go to junkyards and pick up old discarded brake drums and big springs that made wonderful sounds when you hit them. In Chinatown we could buy tam-tams a yard across for only forty-five dollars, and so John and I put all this stuff together and formed a percussion ensemble--the world's first. We simply bypassed the establishment."

By "establishment," of course, Harrison refers to the body of music that constitutes the established repertory, music by Western composers played on Western instruments. Harrison's output over 50 years doesn't shake itself entirely free of Western influences, of course; what is remarkable about this sizable legacy, in fact, is its breadth: some music obviously under the spell of Oriental musical practices, some thoroughly in the stream of the Western symphonic tradition and, most wonderful of all, the music that manages to bestride a multitude of styles without coming apart at the seams. (It is perhaps significant that one of Harrison's longtime passions is the study of Esperanto, with its aim of unifying world speech into a single language. His music accomplishes much the same.)

His later works, notably the many pieces that call for Indonesian gamelan--either alone or in combination with Western instruments--show the results of his considerable immersion in the music of the Far East. But so does the earlier, marvelously subtle Suite for Violin, Piano, and an Orchestra, consisting of three winds, two cellos, bass, harp, celesta, tam-tam and a "tackpiano" (an upright with tacks in the hammers so as to give off a harpsichord-like clangor), composed in 1951, ten years before

Harrison's first visit to the Orient. Two of its six movements are entitled "Gamelan; with their simple, open sonorities and their accompaniment obsessively repeating, they do indeed capture the essence of this haunting, teasing music--a "honeyed thunder," as Harrison himself describes it. (They also prefigure, long before its time, the essence of some of today's minimalist music.)

As a whole, this unutterably charming small-scale work provides a full picture of Harrison in the early 1950s, a man who has eagerly grasped everything there is in the musical world, and now is ready to make it work for him. "Cherish, conserve, consider, create"--that he claims as his lifelong motto, and the earnest eclecticism of this music bears it out: the intensity of the opening movement and, again, of the final Chorale that trails off toward infinity, the simple melodic warmth in the two slow movements ("Elegy" and "Aria"), the delight throughout the work with tiny musical sparks, fireflies made audible.

Nearly 35 years separate this work from the large-scale Piano Concerto completed in 1985. During those years Harrison fulfilled his dream of exploring the faraway lands whose music he had already absorbed. This assimilation of exotic musical sounds and designs led him to the actual building of Oriental instruments, including two complete gamelans (in collaboration with his longtime friend William Colvig). This activity, in turn, led him to a consideration of the manner in which instruments are tuned, and of systems of intonation in use throughout the world in the past and present.

Keyboard instruments, since the time of Bach, are tuned to what is called "equal temperament," a compromise system in which, for example, the notes G-sharp and A-flat can be played by the same piano key, even though they are harmonically unlike. Given the invitation to write a concerto for the noted jazz and classical composer Keith Jarrett (who, like Harrison, has crossed musical boundaries throughout his career), Harrison suggested a work in which the piano would be "mistuned" to an earlier, pre-compromise system.

"[This] Concerto," writes Harrison, "is an exploration of the many beauties of...this astonishing tuning." Briefly put, the black keys are tuned to produce the mathematically precise 4ths and 5ths beloved of medieval theoreticians; the white keys come off resembling the "just intonation" of the Renaissance and Baroque. The orchestra consists of strings, two harps, three trombones and a large percussion section; each group, furthermore, tunes to different facets of this system.

That's all very complicated; what results, however, is less so: a kind of harmonic richness that sounds slightly disconnected from the customary tuning of, say, a piano concerto of Brahms, without sounding truly "off." There is an urgency to the harmonic impulse here, and this is only partially offset by the ever-so-intangible "exotic" sound of the whole. It is, furthermore, astonishingly beautiful, as the composer promises.

Four movements make up the work, the first two large-scale, the last two single, simple afterthoughts. The massive first movement takes some delight in oratorical proclamations from soloist and orchestra that might indeed have come from the mature Brahms's worktable. But some of the piano writing, too, has a way of suggesting the clangor of Eastern bells; there is an open, clattery quality, not unlike a Bach invention gone amok.

In the wild and wonderful second movement quite a lot goes delightfully amok, in fact. The piano takes flight in veritable perpetual motion to a breathless, dazzling rhythmic configuration. Sharp, boisterous tone-clusters from the pianist accentuate the irregularities of this rhythm; even a brief

cadenza near the end cannot stop the onrush. A slow meditation and another airy, light-hearted *perpetuum mobile* bring the Concerto to an end.

Many strands of thought, some of them seemingly irreconcilable, are imaginatively entwined in this work, itself a sort of synthesis of Lou Harrison's all-embracing musical outlook. "It's never enough," he says, "just to know your own musical tradition. There's so much out there in the world; there's no reason to put on blinders."

—Alan Rich

Alan Rich is *music critic* for The Los Angeles Herald Examiner.

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SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

See also Selected Discographies for 80281, 319 and 330.

Double Music (with John Cage). New Music Consort. New World 80330.

LaKoro Suro; Varied Trio; Suite for Violin and American Gamelan. Chorus; American Gamelan; David Abel, violin; Julie Steinberg, piano; William Winant, percussion; Philip Brett and John Bergamo conducting. New Albion NA 015.

String Quartet Set; Suite for Percussion; Three Pieces for Gamelan with Soloists. Kronos Quartet; Manhattan Percussion Ensemble, Paul Price conducting; Gamelan Sekar Kembar. CRI ACS-6006.

String Trio. New Music Consort. New World 80319.

Suite for Cello and Harp. Seymour Barab, cello; Lucile Lawrence, harp. New World 80281.

Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra. Anahid Ajemian, violin; Maro Ajemian, piano; ensemble, Leopold Stokowski conducting. CRI SD 114.

Keith Jarrett has received wide acclaim as pianist, composer and improviser, and has performed extensively in jazz, classical and contemporary idioms. He was born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1945, and began piano studies at age three. After high school, he attended the Berklee School of Music briefly, before moving to New York. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Jarrett worked with Art Blakey, Charles Lloyd and Miles Davis. He eventually formed his own group with bassist Charlie Haden, drummer Paul Motian and saxophonist Dewey Redman. In 1972 Jarrett began a series of recordings for the ECM label, an association that continues to the present, and which includes over forty albums. He is perhaps best known for his solo piano improvisations, both live and on record. Since 1983 he has recorded and performed with Standards, a trio comprised of Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette and Gary Peacock. He has performed works for piano and orchestra by Barber, Stravinsky, Mozart, Bartok and Hovhaness with such orchestras as the San Francisco Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the

Atlanta Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the English Chamber Orchestra and the American Composers Orchestra. Jarrett's compositions have been performed throughout the United States, Europe and Japan.

Lucy Chapman Stoltzman, violinist, attended the North Carolina School of the Arts and the Curtis Institute of Music, and studied with Dorothy DeLay, Jascha Brodsky and Arnold Steinhardt. She participated for many summers at the Marlboro Music Festival. She taught at Boston University and at the University of California at Santa Cruz, was Acting Associate Concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony and was first violinist of the Muir Quartet for two years. Stoltzman performed the world premiere of Keith Jarrett's Suite for Solo Violin in 1987. She performs frequently with the trio she and her husband, clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, formed with pianist Richard Goode.

Naoto Otomo, conductor, was born in Tokyo in 1958. He studied at the Toho Gakuen School of Music, with such conductors as Seiji Ozawa, Kazuyoshi Akiyama, Morihiro Okabe and Takaaki Otaka. In 1982 Otomo attended the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, where he worked with Leonard Bernstein, Andre Previn and Igor Markevich. He has been conducting and touring with major Japanese orchestras, including the NHK Symphony Orchestra, the Osaka Philharmonic, the New Japan Philharmonic, the Sapporo Symphony and the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. Otomo appears regularly on a television music program in Tokyo and hosts a weekly radio program on music.

Robert Hughes, conductor, has worked closely with Lou Harrison for nearly thirty years, conducting many of his works, including the recent premiere of Harrison's stage opera *Young Caesar* with the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. Also a composer and bassoonist, Hughes is active in new music performances on the West Coast. He has conducted the Oakland Symphony, for the San Francisco Ballet and at the Cabrillo Music Festival. A scholar of Ezra Pound and his music, Hughes conducted the world premiere performance and recording of Pound's opera *Le Testament* in 1971, and the premiere of Pound's second opera, *Cavalcanti*, in 1983. Hughes has recorded for CRI, Fantasy, Desto and 1750 Arch.

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Lou Harrison

Piano Concerto

- 1- I. Allegro (11:40)
- 2- II. Stampede (9:37)
- 3- III. Largo (8:34)
- 4- IIII. Allegro moderato (2:53)

Keith Jarrett, piano
New Japan Philharmonic,
Naoto Otomo, conductor
Recorded in performance at Kanihoken Hall, Tokyo (1986)

Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra

5- Overture (3:20)

6- Elegy (3:25)

7- First Gamelan (3:34)

8- Aria (2:55)

9- Second Gamelan (1:58)

10- Chorale (3:07)

Lucy Stoltzman, violin

Keith Jarrett, piano

Robert Stallman, Judith Mendenhall, flutes; Henry Schuman, oboe; Barbara Allen, harp; Elizabeth DeFelice, celesta; Aleck Karis, tackpiano; Benjamin Herman, tam-tam; Eugene Moye, Lanny Paykin, cello; Michael Willens, contrabass

Robert Hughes, conductor

This recording was made possible with grants from Betty Freeman, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Piano Concerto

Recorded in performance January 30, 1986
at Kanihoken Hall, Tokyo, Japan
Recorded by Macransa Co., Ltd.

Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra

Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow

Recording engineer: John Newton

Assistant engineer: James Nicols

Recorded at RCA Studio A, New York,
May 21 and 22, 1988

Digital editing: Everett Porter

Mastering: Robert C. Ludwig, Masterdisk

Both works published by C.F. Peters Corp.

Cover art: Roy Lichtenstein. Detail from Artist' Studio No. 1 (Look Mickey) (1973). Oil, magna on canvas, 96 X 128 in. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth N. Dayton and the T.B. Walker Foundation, 1981. © Roy Lichtenstein/VAGA, New York, 1988.

Cover design: Bob Defrin

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