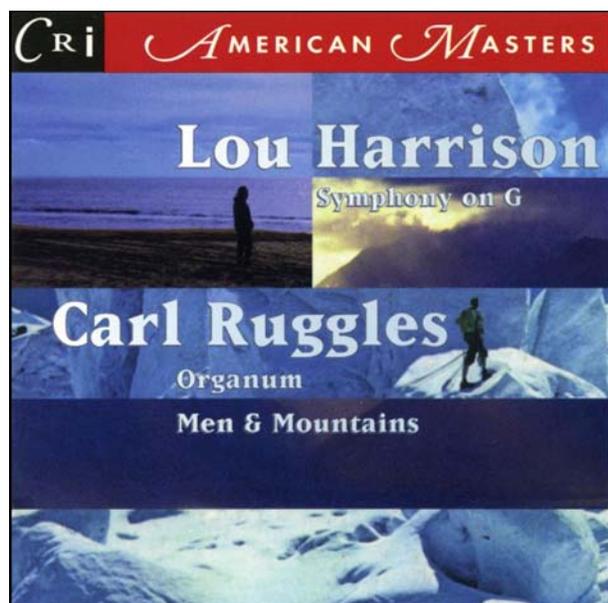


NWCR715

Lou Harrison / Carl Ruggles



Lou Harrison (1917-2003)

<i>Symphony on G</i> (1964, 1966)	(39:07)
1. I Allegro deciso	(6:10)

2. II Largo	(10:47)
3. III Scherzo - 1 Waltz	(2:59)
4. III Scherzo - 2 Polka	(2:12)
5. III Scherzo - 3 Song	(4:44)
6. III Scherzo - 4 Rondeau	(3:30)
7. IV (Finale): Largo; Molto allegro, vigoroso, poco presto; lento	(8:47)
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Gerhard Samuel, conductor	

Carl Ruggles (1876-1971)

8. <i>Organum</i> (1945)	(6:15)
Japan Philharmonic, Akeo Watanabe, conductor	
<i>Men & Mountains</i> (1924-1935)	(9:36)
9. I Men	(2:42)
10. II Lilacs	(2:17)
11. III Marching Mountains	(4:28)
The Polish National Radio Orchestra William Strickland, conductor	

Total playing time: 54:58

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Notes

Even when his contemporaries were mostly gone, Lou Harrison refused to play the grand old man of American music. Still actively composing, traveling, and lecturing while in his late seventies, he never let himself be pigeonholed. Harrison was the youngest, the most eclectic, and the last surviving member of that group of composers—from Ives and Ruggles to Partch and Cage—that has been designated The American Eccentrics. Virgil Thomson perhaps said it best when he described Lou Harrison’s music as not so much original as personal.

Harrison is probably best known for his rejection of twelve-tone equal tuning in favor of “just intonation” or the “equal temperaments” and for his use of percussion instruments and ensembles (including a piano with tacks stuck into the felts) and Javanese gamelan. It is surprising therefore to discover him here as the composer of music for the twelve equal-tempered tones of the traditional European system. He came to twelve-tone music by a simple, legitimate means—he studied with Arnold Schoenberg. But his output also includes a thorough exploration of equal temperament as well the forms of western music from neoclassic to popular.

Lou Silver Harrison was born in Seattle in 1917, studied in California with Henry Cowell as well as Schoenberg, and collaborated with John Cage in the formation of one of the first all-percussion ensembles. In 1943, he went to New York where, under the aegis of Virgil Thomson, he became a music critic for the old *Herald-Tribune*. An important advocate of the music of Charles Ives, in 1947 Harrison conducted in Carnegie Hall the world premiere of the Third Symphony for which Ives won the Pulitzer Prize.

In 1954, after a personal crisis, he returned to California, settling in Aptos where he lived with his companion William

Colvig. Harrison’s California music shows the influence of the philosophies and music of the East as well as the ideas and music of Harry Partch, a philosopher/ composer who constructed original instruments with non-traditional tunings and espoused utopian social ideas.

Symphony On G—so-called because it uses the twelve-tone method of composition but remains tonally centered on the note G—bridges the gap between, on the one hand, the teachings of Schoenberg and Harrison’s New York experience (with its European influenced energies) and, on the other, his roots on the West Coast. The work was begun in 1948 during what the composer described as a “recovery from a breakdown” and it was completed in the mid-Fifties. The first performance was at the Cabrillo Music Festival in 1964 under the direction of Gerhard Samuel. Two years later, it was performed by Samuel on the regular season of the Oakland Symphony in a new version with a “new and final Finale.” The revised symphony is scored for a smallish orchestra without bassoons or tubas but with piano and tack piano; it is dedicated to Gerhard Samuel.

The piece is in the four traditional movements, opening with an Allegro deciso and a Largo, both written in what the composer calls “classical twelve-tone procedure” and “according to common symphonic formal practice.” The energy and intensity of these movements is relieved by the Scherzo which is, in itself, a little suite in four movements: lively Waltzes, a Polka, an expressive Air and a Rondeau that is literally a trio for piano, tack piano, and harp (“a kind of ‘cadenza’ for the whole Symphony”). In the rewritten Finale, Harrison intentionally broke some of the rules of strict twelve-tone writing and, to use his own words, wrote “freely

in the 'grand manner'."

Though as a serialist work the *Symphony on G* is uncharacteristic of Harrison, it is not unique. Two other major twelve-tone works predate it, the opera *Rapunzel* (1952) and Suite for Piano (1943). These are in addition to a number of smaller unpublished works including the recently discovered piano piece *A 12 Tone Morning After to Amuse Henry*—all part of the reawakening of interest in Harrison as he approached his eightieth birthday year.

There is a distinctive strain of chromatic expressionism in American music that is very different from the European. Its first and most uncompromising exponent was a New Englander, Carl Ruggles, whose small, dense body of work resembles nothing else in the twentieth century canon in its fierce originality, cragginess, and reach for the sublime.

Charles Sprague Ruggles was only two years younger than Schoenberg and Ives. He was born in Marion, Massachusetts on March 11, 1876, started in music as a violinist, went to Boston to learn ship design, and ended up studying music at Harvard with John Knowles Paine while fiddling in theater orchestras to make a living. In 1907, he went to Winona, Minnesota, where he founded and directed the local orchestra. Ten years later, he returned east and settled in New York City where he became involved with the most advanced musical trends of the day at Edgard Varèse's International Composers Guild and Henry Cowell's Pan American Association of Composers. The guru (and sometime backer) of this group of eccentric and diverse composers was Charles Ives, whose music was just beginning to become known. It has been suggested that Ruggles's small, single-minded output stands up against the vastness of the Ives legacy as Webern's miniaturism does to the much larger scope of Schoenberg's work. The comparison is perhaps valid only in a very general sense. Ruggles's work is not at all like that of Webern or Ives; but it is close to Varèse and it anticipates composers like Roger Sessions and even Elliott Carter.

Ruggles spent his final years in an old school house in Bennington, Vermont, which he and his wife Charlotte had restored, and where he died in 1971 at the age of ninety-five. Throughout his life, but particularly towards the end of it, he devoted much of his creative energies to painting. He shared with Arnold Schoenberg not only a dissonant, twelve-tone style, but the rare distinction of having produced notable work both as a composer and a painter. His canvases are represented in several major collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Ruggles's reputation as a composer rests on a few short compositions. He destroyed most of his early music and what is left of his mature output is a handful of pieces, densely composed and highly worked but also rugged, intense, and even mystical in tone. He developed a kind of intuitive twelve-tone or serial style that was largely of his own devising, avoiding repetition, and creating long contrapuntal

lines and a consistent and dissonant harmonic style. Everywhere there is the sense of striving, of the hard and mighty struggle toward transcendence. The esthetic of this music is well suggested by the titles: *Angels, Vox Clamans in Deserto, Men and Mountains, Portals, Sun-treader, Evocations, Organum*.

Ruggles labored over these few works, revising them and polishing them to gem-like hardness. Henry Cowell often told the story of visiting his Bennington schoolhouse and waiting at the door while Ruggles repeatedly banged out a single ferocious chord at the piano. Finally Cowell blurted out, "Carl, why are you playing that same chord over and over again?" "Why," said Carl, "I'm giving it the test of time."

The history of the various versions of the piece now known as *Men and Mountains* is complex. It originally dated from the early 1920s under the title *Men and Angels* with the first movement of its two movements carrying the phrase from William Blake that was later to become the motto of the full work: "Great things are done when Men and Mountains meet." Ruggles then pulled the work apart and *Angels* became a separate piece. In its final form, heard here, the first movement was titled simply "Men," and two other movements were added. The title of the second, "Lilacs," refers to Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" as well as to the flower (which were favorite subjects of his paintings). This exquisite movement, scored for strings only, and the final movement, "Marching Mountains," add up to a symphony-size piece in a non-traditional form.

Men and Mountains, originally scored for chamber orchestra, had its first performance at a Guild concert on December 7, 1924, and caused an uproar. On March 19, 1936, the work, now re-scored for large orchestra, was played by the New York Philharmonic under Hans Lange. This time, the reception was somewhat warmer. Lawrence Gilman of the *New York Herald-Tribune* wrote "There is a touch of the apocalyptic, the fabulous ... He is a master of a strange, torrential and perturbing discourse."

Organum for large orchestra, Ruggles's last composition save for one short choral piece, is generally dated to 1945. In fact, he seems, typically, to have worked at it over a period of years between 1944 and its premiere on November 24, 1949, with the New York Philharmonic under Leopold Stokowski. The title is taken from medieval music—organum was the earliest form of multi-voiced music which grew out of Gregorian chant—but the work contains no obvious evocation of the past, suggesting instead a shattered landscape of great sublimity and terror. It is in a single intense movement with the typical swelling, surging dynamic that characterizes all of Ruggles's work.

—Eric Salzman

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Symphony on G

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From SC 127

Organum:

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