

Although the compositional style of **Lou Harrison** (1917–2003) evolved and matured during his long and productive life, he held fast to a number of basic aesthetic principles: a devotion to beautiful melody; the foregrounding of rhythm, melody, and counterpoint over harmony; a preference for just-intonation tuning systems; and the integration of influences from diverse world musics. On the present disc, which includes works from 1939 to 1987, all of these characteristics are in evidence.

The earliest piece on the recording, the *First Concerto for Flute and Percussion*, dates from 1939, only four years after Harrison graduated from Burlingame High School near San Francisco. He had begun college work at San Francisco State University in January 1935, but dropped out after two years. Thereafter, Harrison studied privately with Henry Cowell, composed for modern dancers, and (beginning in 1937) worked as an accompanist for the dance department at Mills College. The flute concerto was premiered on August 10, 1941, at Bennington College by Otto Luening, with Henry Cowell and Frank Wigglesworth on percussion. Despite its early origin, this short composition has remained one of Harrison's most frequently performed and recorded works. The apparent simplicity of the concerto is deceptive: Harrison has built in subtle complexities such as an intricate interlock between melody and percussion lines, and has taken full advantage of the flute's range, repeatedly calling for the instrument's highest notes.

Harrison always began his compositional process by devising a set of “controls” that served as restraints on his seemingly limitless imagination. As he developed each work, he treated these controls like rules in a game of solitaire; and he never allowed himself to cheat. In the case of the flute concerto, the restriction was one he called “interval control,” a simple, yet rigorous, limitation that he continued to use as late as the 1980s: Only three melodic intervals are permitted—in this case, the major second, minor third, and major seventh (ascending or descending).

The two percussionists play ostinato figures repeated in each movement without variation. In the first movement this ostinato (played on drums and rattles) consists of three measures of 4/8, while the flute part is written in 6/8. Thus the downbeats in the ostinato intersect those in the solo line only once every twelve beats. The final movement features a series of measures in 4/8, 6/8, 3/8, and 5/8 repeated throughout the movement in all parts, balancing internal irregularity with the solidity of macroscopic pattern repetition.

The intervening movement of the concerto is marked “Slow and poignant.” Here Harrison features bells and gongs supporting a supple and flexible melodic line. Harrison loved extremes in tempo. On this recording, produced under his supervision, the speed is deliberately broad, enhancing the pleading quality of the winding flute line and the strategically placed dramatic leaps. Harrison considered the performer a partner in the realization of his scores. No dynamics are given, nor are phrasing and slurring indicated. When asked during the recording session whether he preferred a particular note played as a pick-up to the next phrase or a release from the preceding one, Harrison steadfastly refused to make a decision. He was determined to allow the performer to choose between these very different options in the firm belief that the result would be more musically convincing.

In 1942 Harrison left San Francisco for Los Angeles, where he studied with Arnold Schoenberg and composed highly complex works in dissonant counterpoint. The following summer he moved to New York and reconnected with Cowell as well as with John Cage, with whom he had staged high-profile percussion concerts in the San Francisco area in 1939–41. Although professionally successful—many of his works were performed, he conducted the premiere of Ives's Third Symphony, and he wrote hundreds of reviews for the *New York Herald Tribune*—Harrison found East Coast life extremely stressful. He was very poor (he had to carry heavy cans of kerosene up four flights of stairs to heat a cold-water flat) and he found the noise and crowds of the city almost unbearable. The stress of his life culminated in May 1947 in a severe nervous breakdown that required Harrison to be hospitalized for the better part of a year.

Recovery was slow. Harrison claimed it was a decade before he was completely healed; and for the rest of his life he saw a therapist weekly as insurance against a possible new crisis. Some colleagues predicted the end of Harrison's composing career, but they seriously underestimated his resolve and dedication to music. Instead, Harrison used his recovery period to engage in self-study, examining his compositional language and searching for a distinctive and independent musical voice. He found this identity in a new dedication to musical syncretism, pure tuning systems, and melodicism. Abandoning the complex counterpoint he had cultivated during his Los Angeles and early New York years, Harrison explored the colorful palette of just intonation and the world of Asian musics, which had intrigued him in his youth.

One of the first major works to take shape after Harrison's breakdown was the ballet *Solstice*, composed in 1950 for the dancer Jean Erdman. A protégé of Martha Graham (and a member of that company before establishing her own troupe), Erdman developed the plot in consultation with her husband, the author Joseph Campbell. *Solstice* depicts the struggle between the old year and the new, represented by Moon-Bull (the dark days of winter) and the Sun-Lion (the warmth of summer). Harrison sensed a primeval fear in both solstices: "the frightening one—is everything going to get darker and we will head into oblivion?" and "the terrifying one—is everything going to get hotter and we will burn up?"¹ In the first case, the fire must be rekindled, in the other, quenched. For the premiere on January 22, 1950, at the Hunter Playhouse in New York, Merce Cunningham danced the part of the Sun-Lion; Donald McKayle portrayed the Moon-Bull.

When Erdman approached Harrison to write the score for her completed choreography, she already had music in hand by another composer. She was dissatisfied with this score, however, and sought a new interpretation from Harrison. He never saw the original music; indeed, he never knew who composed it. He simply began from scratch, devising sounds to complement Erdman's movements. The reviewer for *Dance Magazine* found the new score a decided improvement. "When first done," wrote Doris Hering, "Miss Erdman's *Solstice* was a cumbersome bore. But the dance has since acquired a luscious, Oriental-sounding score by Lou Harrison. And the small orchestra . . . gave it the sound of woven gossamer."²

Solstice is written for octet: three treble instruments (flute, oboe, trumpet), three bass instruments (two cellos and string bass), and two keyboards (celesta and tack-piano). The tack-piano is a standard piano with tacks inserted in the hammer felts, thus creating a tinkling timbre related to that of a harpsichord. Indeed, Harrison first saw the instrument in an orchestral concert in New York where it was being used as a harpsichord substitute. He found that by combining the tack-piano with the celesta (and, in later works, also the harp) he could create a sound that resembled that of an Indonesian gamelan—a percussion orchestra comprised primarily of metallophones. Harrison had first seen a gamelan in 1939 at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay. There, in the Netherlands East Indies pavilion, he marveled at the performance of a live Balinese ensemble. At the time, Harrison had been composing a great deal of music for percussion ensemble, using found or newly-built instruments. When he heard the sparkling gamelan, he thought it the most beautiful sound he had ever encountered. But Indonesian music remained an untapped inspiration until after Harrison's breakdown, when he turned to Asian musics as a source for his own creativity. In New York he studied Colin McPhee's writings on Balinese music and, as part of his re-evaluation of his musical language, Harrison took delight in the complex rhythms and exuberant melodies of the Indonesian ensemble. The gamelanish sounds in *Solstice* can be heard most prominently in the fourth movement ("Earth's Invitation"), when the solo flute line is accompanied by celesta, tack-piano, and pitched percussion created by the bass player, who strikes the strings of his instrument with drum sticks below the bridge.

Solstice opens in the Garden of the Sun, portrayed by a languid, expansive melody in double octaves in

¹ Virginia Madison Rathbun, "Lou Harrison and His Music" (M.A. thesis, San Jose State University, 1976), p. 134.

² Doris Hering, "Jean Erdman and Dance Company," *Dance Magazine* 25:3 (March 1951), p. 43.

the flute and cello, creating a strangely mysterious string/wind instrument of exceptionally wide range. Harrison loved to write in octaves, again (as in the flute concerto) a deceptively simple strategy. In truth, octave writing can be extremely precarious, as there is no room for intonational variability. The effect when well played, however, is shimmering. At the entry of Moon-Bull, the exuberant flute/cello melody gives way to rhythmic beating and sharp dissonance as the battle of the opposing forces is joined. In the Vernal Dance, the Sun-Lion (temporarily the victor) carries off the Bride of Spring. The Moon Bull returns in Part 2, however, throwing the world into darkness in a wild Saturnalia. As the bride dances in desolation at the loss of both Lion and Bull, a lone flute sings a haunting incantation. The bride begins a pulsation that grows in dynamics as she encircles the stage, slowly reviving Bull and Lion, who now face each other in reconciliation.

In 1953 Harrison returned to California and the following year settled in the then rural town of Aptos, just south of Santa Cruz, where he lived the rest of his life. Two years after his return he received a prestigious commission from the Louisville Orchestra, for which he composed *Strict Songs*, a work for symphony and eight baritones. The text, modeled on Navajo ritual song, is of Harrison's own invention. Each line opens with a salutation (one per stanza), which is then fleshed out by references to nature.

Here is Holiness — of the begonia leaf with innumerable crystalline cells.

Here is Holiness — of the Mountain's deer and the unscented faun.

Here is Holiness — of the begonia leaf, and deer, and the star Aldebaran, lighting endlessness.

Here is Holiness — of the bleached agate, wet with wave.

Here is Nourishment — of the swamp-rooted cattail.

Here is Nourishment — of the water-reed, and the redwing, singing enrapturedly.

Here is Nourishment — of the Meteorite lining the sky.

Here is Nourishment — of the falling star, and the damp-darkened, crumbly soil.

Here is Tenderness — of the redwood tree, which is immortal.

Here is Tenderness — of the fantail goldfish trailing double tails.

Here is Tenderness — of the tree, the fish, and moon Ganymede encircling, third, the largest planet.

Here is Tenderness — of the tourmaline showing Flamingo light.

Here is Splendor — of the airplant Spanish moss asway in sun.

Here is Splendor — of the airplant, and the cobra arching his head.

Here is Splendor — of the galaxy in Andromeda.

Here is Splendor — of the galaxy, and the turquoise cloudless heaven.

Harrison's interest in gamelan had led him to explore the possibilities of pentatonic modes (five pitches per octave instead of the Western seven-pitch diatonic scale). Each of the four movements of *Strict Songs* is based on a different pentatonic mode. All intervals are tuned to exact mathematical proportions, rather than to the impure compromise-intervals of present-day equal-temperament. The fixed-pitch instruments in the ensemble (piano and harp) are retuned to produce non-beating intervals; the strings and trombones match these pitches by ear. Harrison recalls that the retuning at first caused considerable consternation among the string players, but within a half hour, they had adapted to the piano and harp and were reveling in the purity of the non-tempered sounds. The effect of the retuning is a rich palette of intervals, far more varied in size than those in equal temperament (where all intervals of a particular type are the same).

The tuning in each movement is different. In the first, there are two sizes of whole tones (in the ratios 9:8 and 10:9) and two pure 6:5 minor thirds (16 cents larger than the equal-tempered minor third). The third movement is also based on major seconds and minor thirds, but here Harrison makes use of the seventh overtone, an interval not present in the Western scale. The relation between the sixth and seventh

overtone creates a very small “subminor third”: 267 cents as opposed to 316 cents for the pure 6:5 minor third (and 300 cents for the equal-tempered interval). The relation of the seventh overtone to the eighth creates a “supermajor second,” larger than the whole tone by about 30 cents. These two movements contain no semitones. The second and fourth, by contrast, use both major and minor seconds, as well as major thirds. Indonesian gamelan music is based on two types of pentatonic scale: sléndro (without any semitones) and pélog (with semitones). Thus Harrison’s first and third movements are meant to evoke a sléndro tuning, while the second and fourth are in pélog. As shown in Figure 1, the seconds and thirds in all of the movements combine to create pure fourths and fifths, which Harrison features prominently. By changing the tuning in each movement, Harrison adds a compositional tool normally unavailable to the Western composer: He is able to evoke the spirit of each movement not only by variations in tempo, rhythm, melodic shape, and harmony, but also by contrasts in the size of intervals comprising the scale.

Critical reaction to the January 18, 1956 premiere of *Strict Songs* was extraordinary. The reviewer particularly commended Harrison on the boldness of his simplicity: “His daring is the gift to be simple. . . . He succeeds . . . in building a carpet of sounds that is serenely active. . . . All the participants combined to establish a mood of quiet rejoicing.”³

In 1992 Harrison rescored *Strict Songs* for standard SATB chorus and baritone solo, the version heard on this recording. The work has also been performed with a male chorus of 100 voices and a choreography by Mark Morris.

The latest work on this recording returns to the scoring of the opening one: flute and percussion. Composed in 1987 for the San Francisco dancer Eva Soltes, *Ariadne* draws inspiration from the music of India. Soltes, who served as Harrison’s assistant and publicity agent for several years, had studied the technique of Bharatanatyam, Hindu temple dancing, with the renowned teacher T. Balaraswati. This dance style, which was first described in a treatise dating from before the third century, uses dance as an element in narrative. In addition, the dancer participates in the musical realization by keeping time with ankle bells. Harrison chose the story of Ariadne for this work because of the myth’s link to India. Theseus, son of King Aegeus of Athens, had been sent to Crete as one of fourteen youths to be sacrificed to the Minotaur of the maze. Princess Ariadne fell in love with Theseus and contrived his escape from the maze. Together the two fled from Crete. When they reached the isle of Naxos, however, Theseus abandoned his rescuer. The god Dionysos, returning from India, found her there forlorn and made her his bride.

Harrison’s music combines Indian and Western influences. The opening movement, “Ariadne Abandoned,” functions like an *alap*—an introductory piece that introduces the mode and spirit of the work. In the second movement, “The Triumph of Ariadne and Dionysos,” Harrison employs a compositional principle related to the Indian *tala*, a complex repeating rhythmic pattern. In this case, Harrison has composed seven lines of music for flute and seven for percussion, each consisting of seven measures in the order 3/2, 3/8, 4/4, 3/8, 6/8, 4/8, and 4/4. The order of these seven lines is left up to the performer, who may play them in any arrangement, repeating or omitting some at will. Any flute line may be combined with any percussion line, and one of the players may choose to be silent for a particular repetition. The piece is thus variable in length and dramatic form. The present performance was structured to create a rhythmic crescendo, mirroring the building frenzy of the wedding celebration.

—Leta Miller

Leta Miller is a professor of music at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is the author of two books and several articles on Lou Harrison, as well as the entry on him in the New Grove Dictionary of Music, second

³ Dwight Anderson, “Orchestra’s Program of Arresting Quality,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, Jan. 19, 1956.

edition. *Miller also edited a collection of Harrison's chamber and keyboard works in the series Music in the United States of America*, v. 8.

Conductor **Nicole Paiement** has been the Artistic Director of Ensemble Parallèle since 1993. With this professional ensemble Paiement has recorded many world-premiere performances, including music by Lou Harrison, Germaine Tailleferre, Henry Cowell, Claude Debussy, Henri Collet, Andrew Imbrie, and music by students of Olivier Messiaen. The Ensemble is dedicated to the performance of music from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and has commissioned many new works from composers of various countries. Paiement is also the Ensemble director at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the Artistic Director of the New Music Ensemble at the San Francisco Conservatory. She is also Artistic Director of the BluePrint Project, an important new-music series in San Francisco.

Paiement is also an active guest conductor. Her more recent guest-conducting engagements have included leading the Kochi Orchestra from Japan, the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, the Monterey Jazz Festival Orchestra, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, the Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Seoul Contemporary Opera.

Dennis Russell Davies is considered among today's most inventive conductors at the forefront of the orchestral, chamber and operatic worlds. In Austria he was the conductor of the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1997–2002, has held a conducting professorship at the Salzburg Mozarteum since 1997, and is at present chief conductor of the Bruckner Orchestra Linz as well as Opera Director at the Landestheater Linz (since 2002). Since 1995 Dennis Russell Davies has been chief conductor of the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra.

The **UCSC Chamber Singers**, an advanced choir, specializes in performing works for small ensembles from a variety of historical periods. Repertoire has included works by Britten, Fauré, Tailleferre, Handel, Bach, Mozart, and Stravinsky.

The **UCSC Chamber Orchestra** performs works from all musical areas. With the UCSC Chamber Singers, the Chamber Orchestra also specializes in presenting historically informed performances of masterworks such as Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Haydn's *The Creation*.

Baritone **Leroy Kromm** has performed as a soloist with the Aspen Music and Carmel Bach Festivals, and the Sacramento, Reno, Livermore, Marin, and San Jose Symphonies, as well as with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Harvard University Chorus and Orchestra. He is currently a professor of voice at California State University in Fresno.

A professor of music at the University of California, Santa Cruz, **Leta Miller** has been featured on twenty solo recordings on Renaissance, Baroque, and modern flute, including music by Claude Debussy, Germaine Tailleferre, Joseph Bodin de Boismortier, C.P.E. Bach, Lou Harrison, and many others. A musicologist with specialties in sixteenth-, eighteenth-, and twentieth-century music, Miller has published books, articles, and critical editions on the French chanson and Italian madrigal, music and science in the Baroque period, and the flute music of C.P.E. Bach. She has co-authored two books on Lou Harrison with ethnomusicologist Fredric Lieberman. In addition, Miller has written numerous articles on Harrison, John Cage, Charles Ives, and Henry Cowell. She has been awarded three recording grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and two from the Copland Foundation, as well as three research grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Heather Sloan studied percussion with William Winant. She received both a B.A. and Master's degree from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is an active performer in the San Francisco Bay Area and has performed with the Cabrillo Music Festival, New Music Works, and OCTAGON.

William Winant is principal percussionist with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and the John Zorn Chamber Ensemble. Since 1995 he has been the percussionist with the avant-rock band Mr. Bungle. He has made more than 100 recordings, covering a wide variety of genres, including three recent records with the influential band Sonic Youth. John Cage, Lou Harrison, Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma, and John Zorn are among the many important composers to have written pieces for him. For ten years Winant was principal percussionist with the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, and was timpanist with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra from 1985–1989. He teaches at the Berkeley and Santa Cruz campuses of the University of California, and is artist-in-residence at Mills College with the internationally recognized Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra.* J. Lower, violin; D. Colson, percussion; Continuum Percussion Quartet, R. Brown conducting. New World Records 80382-2.
- Double Concerto for Violin and Cello with Javanese Gamelan.* K. Goldsmith, violin; T. King, cello; L. Harrison, W. Winant, percussion; Mills College Gamelan. Music & Arts 1073.
- Drums Along the Pacific.* William Winant Percussion Group. New Albion NA 122.
- For Strings: Concerto for Pipa with String Orchestra and other works.* Wu Man, pipa; The New Professionals Orchestra, London, Rebecca Miller conducting. Mode Records 140.
- La Koro Sutro and other works.* Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio, the Berkeley Chorus, Philip Brett conducting. New Albion NA 015.
- Lou Harrison: Chamber and Gamelan Works.* New World Records 80643-2.
- Pacifika Rondo.* Oakland Youth Orchestra, Robert Hughes conducting. Phoenix Records 118.
- The Perilous Chapel and other works.* San Francisco Contemporary Chamber Players, Stephen Mosko conducting. New Albion NA 55.
- Piano Concerto.* Keith Jarrett, piano; New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, N. Otomo conducting. New World Records 80366-2.
- Rapunzel.* Lynne McMurtry, mezzo-soprano; Patrice Maginnis, soprano; John Duykers, baritone; Ensemble Parallèle, Nicole Paiement conducting. New Albion NA 93.
- Rhymes with Silver.* Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio with B. Simon, viola; J. Jeanrenaud, cello. New Albion NA 110.

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LOU HARRISON (1917–2003)

IN RETROSPECT

80666-2

First Concerto for Flute and Percussion (1939) 8:58

1. Earnest, fresh, and fastish 1:59

2. Slow and poignant 4:55

3. Strong, swinging, and fastish 2:04

Leta Miller, flute; William Winant and Heather Sloan, percussion

Strict Songs (1955, revised 1992) 19:10

4. No. 1, Here is Holiness 7:41

5. No. 2, Here is Nourishment 4:42

6. No. 3, Here is Tenderness 3:03

7. No. 4, Here is Splendor 3:44

Leroy Kromm, baritone; University of California, Santa Cruz Chamber singers and Chamber Orchestra; Nicole Paiement, conductor

Ariadne (1987) 8:01
8. *Ariadne Abandoned* 2:52
9. *The Triumph of Ariadne and Dionysos* 5:09
Leta Miller, flute; William Winant, percussion

Solstice (1950) 26:57

Part 1:

10. *Garden of the Sun* 4:22
11. *Entrance of the Moon Bull* 3:51
12. *Battle* 2:31
13. *Earth's Invitation* 2:57
14. *Vernal Dance* 2:38

Part 2:

15. *Saturnalia* 1:47
16. *Rekindling of the Fire* 2:59
17. *Turning of the Wheel* 2:58
18. *Blaze of Day* 2:54

Leta Miller, flute; Yvonne Powers, oboe; Adam Gordon, trumpet; Nohema Fernández, celesta; Emily Wong George, tack piano; Stephen Tramontozzi, string bass; Peter Shelton, Lee Duckles, cellos; Dennis Russell Davies, conductor

Total time: 63:31

New World Records, 75 Broad Street, Suite 2400, New York, NY 10004-2415
Tel (212) 290-1680 Fax (212) 290-1685
info@newworldrecords.org
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