

Conductor's Notes  
April 2017  
Artistic Director, Steven Schick

Our "At the Cross Roads" festival proposes musical encounters, some real and others imagined, among composers of different generations. Each year, we'll anchor "At the Crossroads" in performances of a "legacy" composer—this year the great Lou Harrison, in his centennial year—and counterpoise them with performances of living composers at various points in their careers. We're after how these composers encounter one another, how they speak to each other across the boundaries of generations. What does Lou Harrison say to Jimmy Lopez and Annie Gosfield about questions such as instrument choice or interpretative latitude? Or, how will the music of an emerging master, Natacha Diels, sound next to that of Roger Kim, Michelle Zhang, or Ben Zucker, the young composers chosen in our inaugural SFSearch process? We'll arrange the musical conversations and let you eavesdrop!

What do we hope to gain from this cross-generational mix?

Perspective perhaps. An overly devout reading of the "new" in "new music," often causes us to miss the richness of cross-generational encounters. We tend to hear the most recent music as though it were born *ex nihilo*, and by the same token often consign older music (as old as the last century!) to an historical—read, secondary—role. We hope by meeting "at the crossroads" of generations that we might be able to cross-wire our perceptions and understand that the very latest work is often grounded in time-less questions, while in established work one still finds ideas of breathtaking freshness.

We also hope to pay homage to a shared legacy. Fittingly, at the center of our inaugural "At the Crossroads" festival is Lou Harrison: musical polyglot and visionary; common man and uncommon intellect. Many of us in the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (and I regret that I am not among them) knew Harrison well and worked closely with him. Our performances therefore will be simultaneously acts of love and remembrance, and the closest thing we can find to authentic Harrison performance practice. But which Harrison are we celebrating? The instrument maker? The musician of the world? The grandfather of modern-day intonation geeks? The unashamed melodist in a world of modernists?

We celebrate all of them!

But most of all we will honor how the great spirit of Lou Harrison thrives in the minds and hearts of living composers. Sometimes the connections will be obvious, and at other times less so. Michelle Zhang grew up in Aptos, not far from Harrison's home, and speaks eloquently about the shifting light and changing tides that inspired them both. Ben Zucker is a musical polymath, in Harrison's image, and talks of his indebtedness to both Harrison's fascination with the Gamelan and with his iconic experimentalism. And though Roger Kim's music may not sound very much like Lou Harrison's, it features the same quiet beauty and generous space for his interpreters. There are similar points of connection with Natacha Diels, Annie Gosfield, and Jimmy Lopez, and in large and small ways when we listen to them, we also hear Lou.

I do not have a personal Lou Harrison story. But I do feel a personal resonance every time I walk by the Palace Hotel on New Montgomery Street, where Harrison worked briefly as a floral arranger. The Palace was no center of culture or academia, but for a time a young artist with one of the most fertile minds this nation has ever produced, worked there and turned over in his imagination ideas of profound beauty and lasting impact. And for someone who is now much closer to old than to young, it makes me happy to think that there are other artists, young, unknown and working far from the centers of culture and academia, in whose minds and souls similar notions of beauty, impact, and truth live on.

Steven Schick