

LOU HARRISON (1917-2003) was an American composer celebrated for his inventive scores which integrated Native American and Asian influences. They are distinguished for their superb craftsmanship and emphasis on melody and rhythm at the expense of traditional harmony. Born in Portland, Oregon, he moved at an early age with his family to California. In the San Francisco area the young Harrison absorbed music of diverse cultures which throughout his life informed and inspired his imagination. He studied with Henry Cowell and became friends with John Cage, with whom he composed numerous works for percussion. In Los Angeles Lou studied atonal theory with Arnold Schoenberg. He then moved to New York City where he thrived not only as a composer of symphony and opera, but also as a music critic (mentored by Virgil Thomson), and as an author, publishing a study of Carl Ruggles. During this period Lou met Charles Ives and conducted the premiere of the elder composer's Third Symphony; the work eventually won the Pulitzer Prize. But despite his success the rigors of life in New York proved oppressive to his sensibility. He left the city in 1947, first for Black Mountain College, where he developed an interest in Asian music; and then for Aptos, California, where he settled. Lou pursued his innovative methods which displayed original tunings and tonality for just intonation orchestra and chorus. After attending the 1961 East-West Music Encounter, a conference in Tokyo, his knowledge and appreciation of Asian music blossomed. In 1975 influenced by the Javanese gamelan orchestras, Lou began scoring many works using gamelan, western instruments and custom-made ones to create a wonderful blend of Pacific Rim & Asian style music – 'East Meets West' – in a reverence of world cultures. Overall Lou's music is joyous with a love of melody and beauty in all its forms. Recognized and honored by his peers, he was named Musical America's composer of the year 2002. Lou Harrison passed away in 2003 en route to a festival dedicated to his career.