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**Orientalism, Regionalism, Cosmopolitanism:
Musical Manifestations of Cultural Hybridity**

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Introduction

If the declaration that music is a “universal language” is in itself controversial, then any assertion that there can be “purity” within a musical style is surely even more contentious. Even the terms “East” and “West” can be difficult to tease apart. As we consider artistic cross-fertilization, we should remember that compartmentalizing cultures and countries (or even continents) involves potentially arbitrary, or certainly changeable, boundaries. In reality, cultural sub-groups cannot be neatly distilled to a formulaic laundry list of attributes. They serve as poor substitutes for nuanced distinctions and too easily reinforce cultural place-markers or stereotypes.

Musically speaking, the so-called “classical music” of the West may seem to be an exception; that is, to contradict a norm of hybridity. European tonal music emerged from centuries of slowly evolving norms of harmony and voice leading. However, “Western” music has incorporated a variety of idioms and practices. One kind of cultural hybridity that emerges in various guises in the context of tonal music is a formulaic, what might be called “Orientalizing,” allusion to the Near or Far East. In this essay, I will explore attitudinal shifts among European and American composers toward incorporating non-European art music sources in art music. A wide variety of attitudes about Eastern-Western musical hybridity are reflected in the compositional processes and approaches of composers from Mozart to Ives. I pose the question: given centuries of music that reflects an “Oriental formula,” how might anyone write music that is not a scrapbooked amalgam of stereotypes? In the following, I will consider examples including works of Giacomo Puccini, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Béla Bartók, Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and Lou Harrison. I will attempt to suggest a progression from incorporating non-

Western elements as “exoticism” to a cosmopolitan and egalitarian understanding of disparate musical cultures. In particular, Lou Harrison’s compositional approach demonstrates that constraints of musical tradition are superficial barriers to the fusion of seemingly disparate musical styles and practices. My ambition to perform *Lou Harrison’s Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Javanese Gamelan* inspired this project, and in this essay, I consider not only the special challenges in performing the work, but also the broad cultural questions and themes it establishes.

Cultural Hybridity as Orientalism

Western classical music has hardly been insulated from outside musical influences—quite the opposite; but in many cases, European concert music that draws on non-Western musical styles treats the incorporation of non-European idioms as inserting exotic “others” within an overarching Western musical framework. From a contemporary, multicultural perspective, the results of cross-fertilization between European and non-European sources is often seen as problematic when they set up a dichotomy and a cultural hierarchy. Let us consider a familiar example: writing the opera *Madama Butterfly* in 1903 about the love affair between an American soldier and Japanese girl, the sixty-five year old Giacomo Puccini did not set out to recreate Japan through strict adherence to its musical idioms, but rather re-purposed foreign and exotic-sounding musical elements (specifically, the pentatonic scale, tam-tam, and Japanese bells) to enrich the orchestral ensemble and harmonic vocabulary familiar to the Italian operagoer of his day. According to Alexandra Wilson, the result was “neither authentically Japanese nor credibly Italian, but, rather, struck listeners as a tribute to bland internationalism.” With his “prioritisation of false surface detail” and “cobbling together of pre-existing elements,”

Puccini became “someone who had been seduced by his own imagined construction of a foreign land to the point at which he felt no longer felt it necessary actually to travel there and verify his fantasy.”¹ *Madama Butterfly* was “Japan a la Puccini” in that the composer inserted exotic idiosyncrasies within an overall familiar Italian opera template rather than reimagining and fundamentally transforming his own compositional approach.

Similarly, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov intended to transport his listeners to romanticized Orient in composing his symphonic suite *Scheherazade* (1888). *Scheherazade* was inspired by the Arabic folklore of the *One Thousand and One Nights* stories. Rimsky-Korsakov’s rendition is based on the story of Scheherazade, the Persian woman who, through her storytelling abilities, ended the vengeful sultan’s practice of marrying and subsequently beheading the kingdom’s virgins. Rimsky-Korsakov used recurring melodies to portray Scheherazade and the sultan as well as the tales she tells; for instance, the lilting, wandering solo violin line in the Dorian mode represents Scheherazade, while the blaring, chromatically unstable, descending unison brass fanfare of the opening conveys the despotic brutality of the bloodthirsty sultan.² The musical portrayals of the sultan and Scheherazade immediately connote barbarian and irrational violence juxtaposed with femininity and sensuality, representations that closely align with literary portrayals of Middle Eastern tyrants and seductresses as well as gender binaries.³

While Rimsky-Korsakov had used many “authentic Arabic melodies” (taken from Borodin’s French edition of Arab melodies from Algiers) for his earlier symphonic suite

¹ Wilson, Alexandra, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 114-115.

² Scott, Derek B. “Orientalism and Music Style,” *Music Quarterly* 82:2 1998, 313.

³ Al-Taee, Nasser. *Representations of the Orient in Western Music: Violence and Sensuality* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010): 241.

Antar, the melodies of Scheherazade were Rimsky-Korsakov's own compositions, created to conjure the glamour and mystery of far-flung Persia.⁴ The composer liberally uses dotted rhythms and syncopations, ornaments and decorations, the whole-tone scale, arpeggios, glissandi in the harp, and percussion (particularly the tambourine)—all of which are techniques that pervade Orientalist compositions in the classical canon.⁵ For example, the recurring violin solo representing Scheherazade is supported by harp glissandi; the solo itself is a descending scale highly ornamented by constant triplets, which, unlike the Baroque trill or mordent, create a sense of weaving and cascading motion. Much of the melodic material in the suite is repeated throughout the four movements (much like the cyclical structure of some Arabic music). Each time it returns it is often more rhythmically complex and layered within other simultaneous melodic activity (perhaps a the musical approximation of the density of detail in a Persian carpet). Derek Scott argues that musical representations of “the Orient” rely not on true Eastern musical idioms, but rather are derived from Western conventions of signifying the unknown and exotic aurally: “Oriental music is not a poor imitation of another cultural practice: its purpose is not to imitate but to represent.”⁶ Using Scott's interpretation, Rimsky-Korsakov's intention was never to approximate Persian music or compose in a Persian style, but rather to use recognizable themes and musical tropes to “stand for” a generalized entity that encompassed not only Persia, but also all of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, gypsies/nomads, and Spain.⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov, like Puccini, preferred conjuring

⁴ Abraham, Gerald, “Arab Melodies in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin,” *Music & Letters* 56:3/4, Jul-Oct 1975: 313-318

⁵ Al-Tae, *Representations of the Orient in Western Music: Violence and Sensuality*, 241; Scott, “Orientalism and Music Style,” 327.

⁶ Scott, “Orientalism and Music Style,” 309

⁷ *Ibid.*, 327. Scott's article includes a fairly comprehensive list of musical elements composers have historically used to denote “the Orient.”

an imagined Orient using musical markers to accurately recreating, or even simulating, ancient Persia's musical culture. Much as music in a minor key can be used in a most basic sense to signify sadness, musical markers in *Scheherazade* were used as props that reduced the culture to a barely unrecognizable set of generalities implying "otherness." This reduction and minimizing of diverse cultures generated a kind of formulaic approach for composing music inspired by multiple music idioms; it also supported clear-cut and hierarchical divisions between "East" and "West." The "Oriental" and highly decorated melodic and modal compositional techniques of Rimsky-Korsakov and his contemporaries spilled over beyond Russia; Gurminder Bhogal writes about the profound influence the Russians had on French composers such as Debussy and Ravel, writing, "In the French imagination, the perceived exoticism of Russian music rendered this tradition attractive to their ears."⁸ The evolution of Orientalist musical tropes reflected overarching Western attitudes toward non-"Western" cultures even beyond the world of music. Superficially assimilating musical idioms that do not lend themselves to the notational conventions of Western classical music and inserting them into a predominantly tonal music context to suggest a rustic, foreign, or barbaric quality, for instance, can be construed as a form of musical imperialism. Diminishing complex musical elements from non-Western cultures to caricatures of their former selves parallels Western conquest and domination of foreign cultures. Programmatic music such as *Madama Butterfly* and *Scheherazade* entrenched an imperialist worldview especially clearly because the works' narratives hinge on blatantly Orientalizing text—the literature and sounds of an imagined Orient pervade every aspect of the works. In *Scheherazade*, the ambiguity between modal

⁸ Bhogal, Gurminder, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music, and Art in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 177-178.

and tonal harmonies suggests a faraway Orient, and its absorption into a highly exposed, concerto-like setting puts the exotic on display within the confines of the orchestral suite.

Cultural Hybridity as Regionalism

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, nationalist movements challenged cultural monoliths. The music of Béla Bartók offers an important example. Bartók's ethnographic fieldwork in Eastern Europe to identify a "pure" Hungarian national music idiom and his shifting views on the role of musical hybridity signaled a change in how Western music composers perceived and used "otherness" in their music and musical identities. Bartók did not merely include folk music in his compositions, but instead grounded his entire compositional approach in the tonal and melodic frameworks of the musical idioms he encountered working in the field. His documentation of music from various cultures and adoption of those musical idioms in his own work for a 'high culture' audience demonstrated his attitude that, while high culture music may be transnational, it could emerge and be developed from multiple regional sources.

In his early twenties, Bartók made it his goal "to collect from the Hungarian folk songs the most beautiful ones and, providing them with the best piano accompaniment possible, to elevate them, as it were, to the level of art song....[S]uch a collection would serve the goal to let Hungarian music be known abroad."⁹ Bartók immersed himself in recording and collecting folk tunes from Eastern Europe, including Austria-Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, as well as Northern Africa and Turkey. Bartók's interest in ethnomusicology, particularly in Hungary, was twofold: he sought to

⁹ Lampert, Vera, "Nationalism, Exoticism, or Concessions to the Audience? Motivations behind Bartók's Folksong Settings," *Studia Musicologica* 47/3-4 (2006): 339.

promote an intrinsically Hungarian music style nationally, and also incorporate what he viewed to be a fundamentally Hungarian musical idiom into his own compositional approach. The cumulative effect he envisioned was one in which the high culture music sphere included and engendered disparate, but equally valid, permutations by region and musical culture. In folk tunes, Bartók found a wellspring of originality unsullied by exposure to the outside world. Peasant music provided a microcosmic view of pure Hungarian tradition, a sort of domestic “other” that set Hungary apart from its neighbors.¹⁰ In the words of Bartók, “The most pleasing thing of all would be if each country, each region, each county, even each village, could produce something of its own, original and unique. But this is impossible, for people—whether they speak the same language or not—come into contact with one another, influence one another—It is these interactions that we, as research workers, must endeavor to unravel with the utmost impartiality.”¹¹

Bartók clung to the idea that despite multiple, disparate influences in music, there was an “original” form indigenous to a certain group of people. He viewed his work in early ethnomusicology as a process of not only recording the musical interactions between cultures, but also of separating out the musical germ, not unlike a gold miner sifting through gravel. In a letter from 1931, Bartók wrote to Romanian folklorist Octavian Beu, “I don’t reject any influence, be it Slovakian, Romanian, Arabic, or from any other source. The source must only be clean, fresh, and healthy!”¹² For example, Bartók’s *Romanian Folk Dances* (1915) exemplify his aim to elevate Hungarian folk music to the level

¹⁰ Lampert, “Nationalism, Exoticism, or Concessions to the Audience? Motivations behind Bartók’s Folksong Settings,” 127.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

¹² *Ibid.*, 133

of art song, as the melodies come from seven authentic folk dances usually played on violin or shepherd's flute, while the accompaniment is Bartók's own composition.¹³ Bartók does not set the melodies with a diatonic chord progression, but rather a modal framework inspired by the melodies themselves. The third dance, "Pe loc", which centers around B and features trills on downbeats and augmented seconds, forgoes tonic and dominant structures in favor of a *maqam* (Arabic scale phrase) somewhat like the Aeolian mode.¹⁴

Despite the relatively unknown, "low" status of peasant music, it was the promise of "freshness" and "healthiness" that motivated Bartók's admiration of Hungarian folk tunes and hope that the Hungarian folk idiom might reinvigorate Western high art tradition. Bartók's admiration of "pure" folk tunes also prompted his strong disdain for Gypsy music. As he encountered relatively unknown folk tunes in the Hungarian countryside, Bartók lauded the purity and even "transforming power" of peasant melodies, which he claimed reflected the Hungarian national identity.¹⁵ At the same time, he initially rejected "Gypsy music," which many identified as a product of Hungarian tradition and which dominated the urban music scene in Hungary at the time. By contrast, however, many critics considered Gypsy music to represent quintessential Hungary, given its prevalence in urban centers and heterogeneous audience base of nobility and gentry alike. Gypsy music was a goulash of musical inputs, the "crossroads of folk, popular, and high art"; however, to Bartók, such a fusion was a musical

¹³ Antokoletz, Elliott, Fischer, Victoria, and Benjamin Suchoff. *Bartók Perspectives: Man, Composer, and Ethnomusicologist*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 189.

¹⁴ Yeomans, David, *Bartók for Piano* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

¹⁵ Brown, Julie, "Bartók, the Gypsies, and Hybridity," *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*. ed. Born, Georgina, and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 128.

bastardization that appropriated and contaminated styles to create what he termed “an Orientalist fantasy” and a “perversion.”¹⁶ He viewed the Roma population as racial and musical outsiders in Hungary, and condemned their dissemination of a contaminated, inauthentic Hungarian music style that he attributed to their innate greed and stood in stark contrast to peasants’ musical preservationist tendencies.¹⁷ Bartók believed that Gypsy music was a poor imitation and falsification of superior styles, and could not recognize that in many ways it fulfilled the expectations he had for peasant music to create a hybrid between folk and concert music. In his endeavors to distill Hungary to its purest musical forms, he overlooked the fact that Gypsy music actually took in multiple “pure” influences to create a uniquely Hungarian musical idiom.

With the rise of Nazism and advent of World War II, particularly the incursion of forces that threatened Hungary’s sovereignty as well as its social and musical identity, however, Bartók adjusted his views to include Gypsy music as an aspect of the Hungarian identity. He nonetheless continued to hold up folk tunes as the model of musical purity, an uncorrupted beacon of Hungarian-ness. While Bartók initially contrasted folk music and Gypsy music as polar opposites, he came to understand that the two kinds of music shared the tendency to synthesize musical influences from urban culture. He eventually accepted the latter as a legitimate Hungarian musical style. Brown speculates that the advent of American jazz and salon music, which Bartók denounced as an even more severe musical threat to Hungarian music than Gypsy music, as well as the rise of extreme racial policies under the Nazis, caused him to reconsider his previous staunch opposition

¹⁶ Ibid., 122-124, 136

¹⁷ Ibid., 127-130

and realize that Hungary was the product of cultural hybridity in many forms.¹⁸ In any case, he persistently sought a regeneration of European concert music by incorporating “legitimate” Hungarian influences, however defined. Nonetheless, Brown writes, “He was not advocating a freewheeling pluralism, or internationalism, for his own music,” but rather promoted the idea that the “spirit” of peasant music, even when exposed to outside influences, would retain a Hungarian identity and assimilate foreign musical elements. However conservative his understanding of musical and cultural hierarchies, Bartók’s self-described aspiration to widen the scope of high culture music, and his conveyance of the Hungarian countryside to the concert hall, was radical in its time. It involved a multiplicity of inputs in art music that exceeded the single Western European norm of his precursors. Bartók asserted that while music may universally exist in various cultures, high culture music could be created from a diversity of sources.

Cultural Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism in American Music

Bartók’s study and integration of regional music cultures in his compositions for the concert hall reflect increasing questioning of the idea of a uniform, evolutionary principle of Western music. The advent of ethnomusicology marked the possibility of a shift away from a strict hierarchy of music cultures. It introduced the concept that music is a product of its diverse environmental inputs, and that each region has a unique and valid musical identity. In twentieth century America, in a nation of immigrants, Lou Harrison and his forerunners took Bartók’s ideas about musical regionalism to a new level: that music could be uniquely individual while remaining connected to a wide range of cultural sources. For Harrison and his American predecessors Charles Ives and Henry

¹⁸ Ibid., 131-133

Cowell, the compositional process was not a matter of referring to isolated, compartmentalized, or otherwise “exoticized” musical elements, but rather the creation of a new musical idiom engaging different cultural sources or idioms as equal collaborators. They immersed themselves in a variety of musical experiences, and their compositions provide the listener with a window into their personal views on the world.

Charles Ives’ radical approach toward composition—questioning conventional rules of music theory and juxtaposing various musical textures and styles in unexpected ways—marked a departure from European musical trends. Ives ushered in a wave of American experimentalism in music that also helped to lay the foundation for various multicultural approaches. Peter Burkholder writes that Ives “challenges the notion that the accepted rules of music theory are founded on natural laws rather than cultural conventions....suggesting that the traditional rules are no less arbitrary and contrived.”¹⁹ This shift from nature to convention had the potential to liberate composers and listeners alike. Per Ives in his own words, “[T]he human ear...will learn to digest and handle sounds, the more they are heard and then understood.”²⁰ Ives bridged the gap between multiple musical realms; one blatant example is his orchestral work *The Unanswered Question* (1908), which layers tonality and atonality through juxtaposing an ethereal, slow and lyrical string section that anticipates Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings* (composed two decades later) with a five-note keyless trumpet melody and an agitated, dissonant flute quartet and trumpet (the question and futile attempts to answer it, respectively). Likewise, Ives’ song *They Are There!* (1917), a setting of a patriotic poem affirming liberty for the free

¹⁹ Burkholder, J. Peter, “The Critique of Tonality in the Early Experimental Music of Charles Ives,” *Music Theory Spectrum*, 12, no. 2 (1990): 203, 206.

²⁰ Burkholder, “The Critique of Tonality in the Early Experimental Music of Charles Ives,” 205.

world, indiscriminately interweaves fragments of hymns, anthems, ragtime, and dissonance, nonetheless following a standard song structure of verse and refrain. Burkholder writes, “By creating alternative structures that mimic traditional practice, Ives shows simultaneously his allegiance to the tradition and his doubts about its claim to universality. By achieving goals that the tradition assumes is essential...using tools the tradition rejects...Ives strikes at the heart of the theoretical tradition, revealing as artificial and conventional concepts others accept as natural and inviolable.”²¹ Ives abolished the hierarchy of high and low culture in his compositions, equalizing the musical inputs upon which he drew. His synthesis of multiple styles suggested that all were equally valid, and no two were mutually exclusive. The same principle might be applied to music from widely varying regions.

Like Ives, Henry Cowell found himself stretching, challenging, and redefining the expectations and rules of musical composition in ways that would inspire Lou Harrison. His teacher, Charles Seeger encouraged Cowell, who previously had received little formal musical education, to experiment musically.²² A prime example is Cowell’s piano work *The Banshee*, which does not use the piano keyboard and instead requires the player to brush and strum the piano strings. In his program notes for the work, Cowell argued that this new technique redefined the piano, an exemplary conveyor of “Western” musical structures, as an instrument (going so far as to declare he had created a new instrument, the “stringpiano”) and wrote, “New tone qualities are difficult of achievement on old instruments....It is a great pleasure therefore, to find a new instrument capable of almost

²¹ Ibid., 222

²² Miller, Leta E., and Fredric Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 10; Cizmice, Maria, “Embodied Experimentalism and Henry Cowell's *The Banshee*,” *American Music* 28.4 (2010): 438.

endless variety, which has the incalculable advantage of being already in nearly everyone's drawing-room.”²³ Maria Cizmic points out that *The Banshee* “falls within the bounds of music-making in the Western notated tradition,” yet challenges pianists whose training adheres to Western musical conventions. “Extended and prepared piano works find themselves simultaneously and paradoxically entrenched and marginalized in piano repertoire. *The Banshee* is firmly ensconced in the canon of twentieth-century piano music at the same time that it lies outside the training most pianists receive.”²⁴ Cowell’s search for new musical terrain also manifested itself in the use of tone-clusters (densely packed and simultaneously sounded pitches that create dissonant, caustic sonorities), complex rhythmic experimentation or “polyrhythms” (as with his invention of the first electronic rhythm machine, the “Rhythmicon”) and, as in *The Banshee*, the re-appropriation of existing instruments and invention of new instruments to expand the sonic world accessible to composer, performer, and listener.²⁵

Beyond these technical developments within Western art music, Cowell, like Bartók and Ives, found compositional inspiration and reinvigoration from musical sources outside the Western art music tradition (in particular, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, and African music). David Nicholls and Joel Sachs write, “Cowell’s increasing interest in world music seems to contradict his ultramodernism, but was a symptom of his resistance to following a single style, and his sense that Western musical complexity had reached its limit. Above all, it was a natural extension of his early experiences.”²⁶ Cowell increasingly immersed himself in non-Western musics, spending eight months in Berlin on a

²³ Cizmic, Maria, “Embodied Experimentalism and Henry Cowell's *The Banshee*,” 438.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 447, 438-439.

²⁵ Nicholls, David, and Joel Sachs, “Cowell, Henry,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Guggenheim Fellowship studying world music. He also endeavored to learn Indonesian gamelan and Carnatic music theory. In the United States, he taught courses on “Music of the World’s Peoples.” In his own words, Cowell sought “those materials common to the music of the peoples of the world, to build a new music particularly related to our own century.”²⁷ Cowell’s inter-cultural approach frequently involved using standard Western musical forms and ensembles in irregular and unexpected ways. For instance, his work *Homage to Iran for Violin and Piano*, with its four-movement structure, sonata form first movement, passages of lively, Kreisler-esque perpetual motion, and virtuosic theme and variations final movement that becomes increasingly technically demanding for violinist and pianist, seems an archetypal violin sonata—except for the Persian drummer the work also features throughout, and its irregular phrase lengths, complex rhythms, and Arabic-influenced scale with lowered second and raised third. Cowell viewed musical conventions of the West not as compositional confines, but rather as points of departure from which he could introduce unorthodox tonalities and foreign musical elements. In some ways, Cowell's attitude parallels that of Bartók; both looked for new musical material outside of the Western art music tradition, and in doing so expanded the scope of Western art music on the whole. However, Cowell, like Ives, was more irreverent and unconcerned with the purity of his diverse musical materials. He effectively asserted that any aspect of the world's music could be suited to the Western concert hall, and that the Western concert hall should be a platform for a wide variety of musical expression. His compositions affirmed that regional and cultural divisions and separations were artificial musical barriers. Thus, Cowell denounced many ethnomusicologists’ view “that there

²⁷ Ibid.

ought to be no interrelationship between the ‘studier’ and the ‘studied.’”²⁸ Cowell’s compositions reflected the attitude that Eastern and Western musical traditions were not mutually exclusive, and furthermore, were relevant to a Western music audience.

Lou Harrison’s Path to Musical Egalitarianism

In the works of Ives and Cowell, Lou Harrison found a model for musical cosmopolitanism that enabled him to develop a highly individual compositional style through absorbing, co-mingling, and reinterpreting the conventions and traditions of Western and non-Western musics alike. For Harrison, music was the ultimate tool for self-expression, and through his synthesis and manipulation of musical constructs from various cultures he delivered frequently politically charged condemnations of Western foreign adventurism, advocacy of pacifism, and visions of an ideal interconnected global citizenry.

Harrison came into contact with a wide variety of music as a young man in California, which laid the foundation for his later fusion of Western and non-Western music; even his early compositions reveal a nascent interest in multicultural musical integration. Harrison began taking a course in Gregorian chant in high school, and while a student at San Francisco State University, took Cowell’s “Music of the Peoples of the World” course, which provided his first formal exposure to various Asian musical traditions. Cowell also introduced him to Arnold Schoenberg, with whom he would later study composition.²⁹ Under Cowell’s guidance, Harrison inherited an open-mindedness about musical sources and how they could be merged. In his early works he experimented

²⁸ Miller, Leta E., and Fredric Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-10.

with many of the features that display prominently in Cowell's own music. For example, the *Six Sonatas for Cembalo*, which Harrison began to compose while in high school and completed in 1943, are inspired by the harpsichord sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti and feature the trilled ornamentation and contrapuntal motion found in many preclassical European harpsichord pieces. At the same time, Harrison described his "Six Sonatas for Cembalo or Pianoforte are Mission-style pieces....These Six Sonatas reflect the romance and geometry of impassioned Spain, as well as the pastoral Indian imagery of Native America in its Western life." Harrison took inspiration from a wide range of sources: Hopi ceremonial dancing, Asian music, and flamenco—musical sources especially apparent in the complex and percussive rhythms as well as the pentatonic melodies of the sonatas.³⁰

In San Francisco, Harrison experienced firsthand an array of foreign musics; he regularly attended Peking Opera performances in Chinatown, heard Balinese gamelan at the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition, and obtained *gagaku* (Japanese court music) recordings from a *shakuhachi* player performing at one of Cowell's regularly hosted New Music Society concerts.³¹ Harrison began corresponding with Charles Ives, eventually serving as his editor and developing a lifelong friendship with the older composer. Harrison was instrumental in garnering attention for Ives' music, and as from Cowell. Studying Ives' music also encouraged him to seek unorthodox musical methods and inputs in

³⁰ Kroll, Mark, liner notes, "American Harpsichord Music of the Twentieth Century," Kronos Quartet, *Albany Records*, CD, 2001; Alves, Bill, Review of "Lou Harrison: Complete Harpsichord Works by Linda Burman-Hall; Lou Harrison; William Slye," *American Music*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Winter, 2005): 536-539.

³¹ Lieberman & Miller, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*, 20.

composition. Said Harrison, “Mr. Ives...left us the most wonderful of playgrounds, a kind of people’s park in which we are all arrangers of lovely things.”³²

Harrison moved to Los Angeles for a year in 1942 and during that time studied briefly with Schoenberg, during which time he immersed himself in the composer’s twelve-tone method, adding serialism to his compositional toolbox. His move the following year across the country to New York City exposed him to the East Coast music scene, as well as his contemporaries Virgil Thomson (for whom he worked as a concert reviewer), Carl Ruggles, and Alan Hovhaness. He continued to edit and champion Ives’ work, and in 1946 premiered Ives’ Symphony No. 3, which won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize for Music.³³ Nonetheless, the demands and stresses of life in New York, a string of failed relationships coupled with stringent laws against homosexuality, and the detonation of the atomic bomb (“which, to a pacifist like Harrison, was as devastating to his private battles”) culminated in Harrison’s nervous collapse.³⁴ After recovering from his emotional instability, Harrison entered a period he termed “studies in diatonicism”; while twelve-tone music and dissonant counterpoint remained within the extent of his compositional style, he increasingly focused on melody and lyricism in his music.³⁵ Soon, a new focus replaced serialism at the forefront of Harrison’s mind: alternative tuning systems. In 1949, Thomson gave Harrison a copy of Harry Partch’s *Genesis of a Music*, which introduced to Harrison the concept of dividing the octave into forty-three equal parts, and sparked a curiosity that would mature into a fascination with Just Intonation. Harrison began his escape from city life in 1951, moving first to North Carolina to accept a faculty position at

³² Ibid., 17.

³³ Ibid., 33.

³⁴ Ibid., 37.

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

Black Mountain College (during which time he won his first Guggenheim Fellowship and composed the opera *Rapunzel*), and then back to California three years later. When *Rapunzel* was selected for, and ultimately won, an international composition competition in Rome, Harrison's lack of Italian language skills while in Italy motivated his study of the international artificial language Esperanto. This hybrid language, which he used in his travels and work for the rest of his life, was in some ways analogous to his approach to composition.

Harrison relocated to Aptos, a rural town outside of Santa Cruz, California, where he subsisted on odd jobs, including forest fire fighter and dog groomer, meanwhile composing in isolation. He made his first trip to Asia in 1961 for the East-West Music Encounter Conference in Tokyo, where he met musical figures Lee Hye-Ku and Liang Tsai-Ping. The two introduced Harrison to Korean and Taiwanese musical instruments and styles, and hosted him in their respective countries, where he immersed himself intensively in the study of each place's music. Harrison learned to play various East Asian instruments, including the Korean *p'iri* and the Chinese *kuan*, *cheng*, *ti-tzu*, and *hsiao*.³⁶ Harrison absorbed the techniques of the music he encountered, and incorporated it into his own compositions; after meeting his future partner, William Colvig, an electrician with a penchant for instrument building, the two collaborated to build their own instruments inspired by the ones Harrison had encountered abroad and in his study of non-Western music. Using an oscilloscope to accurately calibrate tunings, Harrison and Colvig constructed the first "American gamelan," a traditional gamelan-inspired percussion ensemble made with aluminium slabs, oxygen tanks and metal garbage cans.

³⁶ Ibid., 57, 59.

This gamelan became the prototype for later gamelans the pair would build, and served as the foundation for many of Harrison's pieces, including *Suite for Violin and American Gamelan*, *La Koro Sutro* (for gamelan and chorus), and *Young Caesar*, a shadow puppet opera based upon Julius Caesar's legendary affair with Nicomedes, King of Bithynia.³⁷

Harrison was invited to teach a world music course at the University of California at Berkeley in 1975; while there, he became the student of gamelan master teacher Kanjeng Raden Tumenggung Wasitodiningrat (informally, Pak Cokro). He also built a second gamelan tuned in Just Intonation, named the Gamelan Si Betty in honor of music patron (and Wellesley College alumna) Betty Freeman. After learning the traditional techniques of Javanese gamelan, Harrison began to use the musical structures and patterns in his own music, and also adapted Western music compositional concepts for the gamelan tradition; in particular, his opera from this period features many concerto-like compositions with a solo Western instrument in collaboration with a gamelan accompaniment.³⁸ In 1980, Harrison took up a teaching position at Mills College, where he built a third gamelan (Gamelan Si Madeleine and Si Darius, named for composer and former Mills faculty member Darius Milhaud and his wife). From the 1980s on, Harrison's renown grew further, and he embarked on various domestic and international residencies and tours, as well as a Fulbright Fellowship to New Zealand in 1983. During the fellowship period, Harrison visited Indonesia for the first time, and at the urging of composer Vincent McDermott, did a brief residency at Surakarta's arts academy. Gay rights activism remained an important component of Harrison's life and work, and wrote and arranged multiple works for the Portland Gay Men's Chorus and the Seattle Chorus.

³⁷ Ibid., 62-64

³⁸ Ibid., 67-69

Harrison passed away in 2003 at age 85, having suffered a heart attack en route to a festival celebrating his music.

Lou Harrison and the *Double Concerto*

Lou Harrison's *Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Javanese Gamelan* demonstrates the cultural breadth of the composer's musical vocabulary, which in turn reflects Harrison's vision of an ideal world that promoted cross-cultural exchange and mutual respect. Harrison's music unreservedly does away with any cultural hierarchy; instead, musical idioms and styles effortlessly combine to produce a sonic environment disassociated from any particular region or musical origin. Harrison's compositions thwart attempts to classify the styles they draw upon and subvert categorization or genre-fication within the world of Western art music.

Perhaps the first and most immediate indication of Harrison's vision of a cross-cultural musical exchange in the *Double Concerto* is the juxtaposition of Western classical music instruments with Javanese gamelan. The pairing is counterintuitive for a number of reasons; violin and cello are typically play with the piano, an instrument tuned in Equal Temperament, while gamelan traditionally does not adhere to a singular scale system. Rather, each is uniquely tuned to itself with the singular condition that "people can sing with it."³⁹ The violin and cello literature also usually relies upon Western music notation, which, with its key signatures and time signatures, further entrench an Equal Temperament tuning system as well as metrical uniformity alien to traditional gamelan music. The latter, if notated at all, does not account for key or measure time in the same ways. In gamelan ensembles, gongs and drumming patterns signal the *irama* (tempo,

³⁹ Diamond, Jody, interview by author, May 2013.

roughly) and melodic density rather than regular metrical phrases and bar lines. Nonetheless, Harrison did not regard these as barriers to musical collaboration between violin, cello, and gamelan: the gamelan parts are written using gamelan notation while the violin and cello parts are notated using Western music notation (and there is no composite score for the work). Drumming in the gamelan marks increases and decreases in tempo while the indications “rit.” and “accel.” signal the same for the stringed instrumentalists.

While the sparse written indications in the music and division of gamelan and stringed instrument parts may appear to engender disconnect overall, in fact, the lack of a composite score mandates that the players actively engage with and listen to one another so as to successfully interlock parts. The notated strings parts have very few dynamic directions or gamelan cues, while the gamelan part similarly provides a barebones framework, implying that the printed music is intended as a guidebook or a place of departure from which the players can find a means of collaboration rather than strict protocol from which one should not deviate. Harrison likened Equal Temperament and tuning the octave into equally proportioned segments to the dehumanization of modern industrial society, and so embraced the flexibility of tunings gamelan allows; Gamelan Si Betty is tuned to a Just Intonation system. While the instructions for performing the piece (compiled by composer and gamelan expert Jody Diamond) do not explicitly specify tuning instructions for the stringed instruments, cellist Terry King, for whom the piece

was originally commissioned, recalled tuning his instrument “out of tune” with imperfect fifths to match the Just Intonation of Harrison’s gamelan.⁴⁰

Beyond the challenges of synchronizing violin and cello with gamelan, the work itself highlights Harrison’s open-minded attitude toward fusing disparate musical inputs. The work has a three-movement concerto form pattern standard in classical instrument concertos (as found, for instance, in Brahms’ *Double Concerto* another work for violin and cello), though with slower first and last movements and a brisker, more rhythmically active middle movement. The first movement, “Ladrang Epikuros,” is dark, lyrical, and languishing, all the while urged on by the embellishments of the gamelan. The movement begins with an accompanimental introduction in the gamelan, and then follows a typical A-B-A sonata form with a coda. The title of the second movement, “Stampede,” is inspired by the *estampie*, a medieval dance as well as poetic and musical form in which each verse ends with a repeated refrain. The gamelan remains silent through the second movement save for the drum, which provides structure for the complex rhythms in the agitated and mostly-unison violin and cello line. The constantly shifting cross-rhythms infuse the work with the feeling of a vibrant flamenco dance. The third movement, “Ladrang Hephaestus,” exponentially builds upon the *balungan* (melody, roughly) in the gamelan; it is not a theme and variations as much as a lyrical and embellished expansion that gets higher in pitch, louder in dynamic level, and faster in rhythmic activity before returning to its point of origin.

In keeping with Harrison’s attitude toward composing with multiple cultural music sources, the work’s performance approach is equally egalitarian. Lieberman and

⁴⁰ King, Terry, interview by author, April 2014.

Miller write, “The violin concerto as a medium represented for Lou both the terror of solitude within an impersonal world and a vision of redemption....he likened the violin solo to a ‘singing person...pitted against or surrounded by the indefinitely large, expanded world of the modern orchestra.’...[According to Harrison,] of all instrumental forms the violin concerto was ‘most representative of the spiritual course of music during the last fifteen or twenty years.’”⁴¹ Nevertheless, the title of Harrison’s *Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Javanese Gamelan* perhaps misleadingly implies that the violin and cello are independent entities soaring above the gamelan. While the gamelan provides a necessary foundation for the stringed instruments’ melodies, those melodies highlight and embellish upon the melodic activity in the gamelan. The work is truly an egalitarian collaborative effort: without the violin and cello lines, the gamelan melodies become repetitive; without the drumming, linking the gamelan and violin and cello parts and guiding the players becomes a herculean challenge; and without the gamelan, the “solo” lines of the violin and cello become mundane, lacking the context to render them relevant to the listener.

The aspect of Harrison’s general compositional approach that is most striking, and epitomized by the *Double Concerto*, is the composer’s ability to situate, and even draw parallels between, apparently incongruent musical styles and practices. The interweaving of the concerto format with gamelan tradition, *estampie* with consideration of *balungan*, and gamelan notation (and improvisation) with Western music notation may appear counterintuitive. In fact, in doing so Harrison compels musicians and audiences alike to overcome the apparent constraints of their own traditions. The *Double Concerto* does not set up a cultural hierarchy, or even create distinctions between the “East” and “West,” but

⁴¹ Lieberman & Miller, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*, 55.

rather seeks to embody the ideal cross-cultural cooperation necessary for harmony in a globalized era.

The Performer's Experience

Upon hearing a recording of Harrison's *Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Javanese Gamelan* for the first time, I was struck by the work's singing lines and unique combination of timbres. I was drawn to the long lines and phrases that were cyclical yet somehow avoided the trap of tedium, and even more strikingly, the way that this unusual combination of instruments created a unique resonant environment. After conceiving of this project and endeavoring to understand Harrison's philosophy on cultural hybridity, I came to not only appreciate the work as a listener, but to also appreciate the composer's egalitarian approach to musical performance and culture.

Some of the challenges the *Double Concerto* poses to the performer are general difficulties found in ensemble performance regardless of musical style or culture. However, even these more general difficulties are especially challenging in this piece. One obvious example is synchronicity across an ensemble in which attack and decay characteristics and evolution are so varied. Also, as in any chamber music or orchestral ensemble, the goal is to create a cohesive, balanced, and unified sound from diverse, individually performed parts. Doing so requires constant awareness of one's own position in musical space and time in relation to all other members'. Synchronization in the *Double Concerto* is a crucial requirement for performing the piece successfully; in rehearsals, one cannot merely announce which measure to start in, but rather must determine the number of cycles of the *balungan* that have elapsed and their pulse ratio, as well as the starting point's relation to the large gong. Harmonic synchronization is also an

essential concern; beyond tuning the violin and cello A to the sixth key of the *pelog* (the seven-note scale of the gamelan), the string instrumentalists must adjust their own sense of intonation to match the rather less flexible tuning of the gamelan. This involves flattening fourths and fifths to become less than perfect. Furthermore, repeated *balungan* cycles and gong hits mark the ends of phrases, which are not primarily governed by hierarchies of consonances and dissonances as in tonal music. As such, an important focus for the violinist and cellist is ensuring that their long melodic lines meld into the texture of the gamelan without becoming monotonous. The melody must balance the players' intention to convey lyrical purpose, but without the driving and direction required in works with a structure dictated by tonal harmonies.

This spring, I had the opportunity to perform with gamelan as the violinist in Harrison's *Double Concerto*, and as a member of a string quartet with gamelan for a performance of Christine Southworth's *Super Collider*. While in rehearsals, I became acutely aware of the resonance of the gamelan. In many of the gamelan instruments, overtones linger long after a note is struck, which, coupled with the sheer volume the ensemble can produce, caused tremendous vibrations in all resonant spaces. (In fact, my violin began buzzing with vibrations of such intensity that I momentarily feared for its structural integrity.) As a result, in playing violin with gamelan, I felt obliged to create the most resonant and ringing sound I could produce. This often involved focusing my own tone and using minimal or no vibrato, treating each pitch almost as if it were an open string, and bowing with even pressure and speed.

I also had the chance this spring to perform the violin solo in Scheherazade, which I discussed earlier in this essay. Having played as the violin soloist both in

Scheherazade and Harrison's *Double Concerto*, I would note a distinction between performing the two works: the relation of soloist to ensemble. In the former, the principal violinist truly has a solo role, becoming the singular focus of attention in cadenza passages as the entire orchestra ceases to play. The soloist is both an exposed and controlling agent whom the conductor follows so as to cue a subordinate instrument, the harp, that punctuates the *rubato* melody line. In the latter work, the violinist also takes the lead, but the word "soloist" is an inaccurate descriptor of the shared role the stringed instruments have in creating an overarching sound environment. While the drummer does signal the pulse of each movement, the *Double Concerto* more explicitly relies on the players' abilities to engage with one another and perceive their own mutual roles in the musical texture. The *Double Concerto* does not showcase the virtuosity of any single player; like a Renaissance motet, the beauty of the work lies in the sum of many interlocking individual parts.

Lou Harrison's egalitarian approach to integrating musical cultures has helped to usher in a new era of cultural hybridity. His work leaves a legacy that many composers and ensembles continue to explore; among them, Christine Southworth, Evan Ziporyn, and cellist Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Project. Harrison's encouragement of cross-cultural engagement in music has helped to produce heightened enthusiasm about musical pluralism, and even more importantly, goodwill and mutual understanding between nations and cultures. In the words of Lou Harrison, "We should bring forward the good things of our separate musical cultures for the delight and help of humanity, to celebrate

than man really can ennoble life, can enjoy, and value life....Don't strike at your art, embrace that as a treasure."⁴²

⁴² Lieberman & Miller, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World*, 181.

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