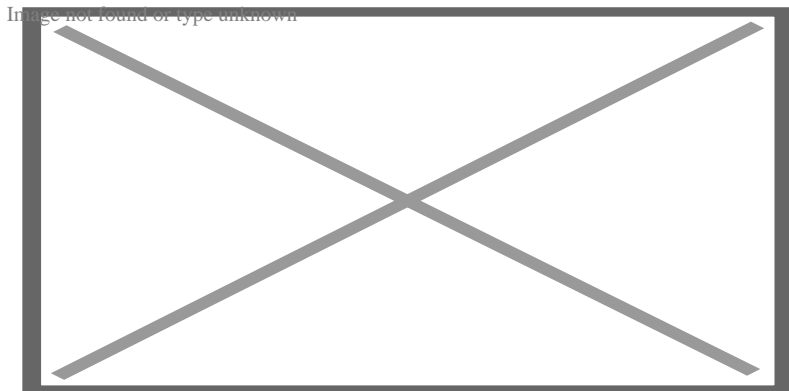


Other Minds Festival: OM 22: Concert 1, Pacific Rim Centennials, 1 of 9



Identifier

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Description

The 22nd Other Minds Festival was a special tribute to one of the most gifted and inspiring figures in the history of American classical music, Lou Harrison. In 2017 we celebrate his 100th birth anniversary with two very special concerts at the Mission Dolores Basilica in San Francisco. The first concert, Pacific Rim Centennials, was held on February 18th and paid tribute not just to Lou Harrison but to a fellow centenarian, Korean composer Isang Yun. Yun and Harrison knew and respected each other very much. Their work was previously celebrated together in 1987 on the occasion of their 70th birthdays thanks to conductor Dennis Russell Davies, then Music Director of the Cabrillo Festival. Davies worked with Other Minds this year to present the music of these two mavericks, both as performer and conductor with an incredible cast of musicians.

About the Composers:

Lou Silver Harrison was born in Portland, Oregon, on May 14, 1917. Harrison's eclectic musical style was born from rich cultural influences: Baroque, pre-Baroque, and Renaissance period music, Native American and Asian music, twelve-tone composition, historic or "just" tunings and, most notably, the gamelan music of Java and Bali. Perhaps more than any other 20th century composer, Lou had the widest ranging "wandering ear." His studies included composition with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg. From 1945 to 1948, Harrison wrote for the New York Herald Tribune under chief music critic, Virgil Thomson. He was introduced to Charles Ives and helped reconstruct that elder composer's Symphony No. 3. When he conducted the world premiere on April 5, 1946, with the NY Little Symphony, the work was awarded the following year's Pulitzer Prize.

Isang Yun was born on September 17, 1917 near the southeastern seaport Tongyông, on the Korean peninsula under Japanese occupation. Yun took part in the resistance against Japan, and in 1943, he was imprisoned and tortured. After receiving the Seoul City Culture Award in 1955, he was able to study in Paris and Berlin from 1956 to 1959. In Berlin he studied with former Schoenberg-disciple Josef Rufer, learning how to compose "with twelve tones related only to one another". From Germany, Yun was able to establish contact with and was a part

of the international avant-garde.

Concert 1 - Pacific Rim Centennials

Lou Harrison

Sonata No. 3 for piano (1938)

I. Slowish & singing

II. Fast & rugged

III. Very slow, very singing & solemn

Previously considered a “lost” work, Sonata No. 3 was rediscovered and edited in 1970 for Dennis Russell Davies. This early work, while in a thorny chromatic idiom, still bears the hallmark of Harrison as melodist. All three movements have distinct melodies, the first two accompanied or punctuated by dissonant chords while the third movement is almost exclusively a single line melody in octaves. The melodies are primarily constructed from a restricted interval motif (minor second followed by minor seventh) but not dogmatically. Harrison freely varies this pattern throughout.

Isang Yun

Kontraste I for solo violin (1987)

Kontraste I is an example of the merging of traditional Korean music and European serial technique. It also displays Yun’s Taoist beliefs: the interplay of light and dark. In other words, contrasts. Kontraste I is composed of four contiguous sections. It was premiered by Winfried Rußmann in Hamburg in 1987 as part of the set, Kontraste, Zwei Stücke für Violine solo. The use of individual violin timbres is both varied and subtle. Kontraste I opens with a pizzicato section which is more than simply plucking a violin string. The variety of techniques—normal, plucked notes with vibrato, ascending and descending slides, pizzicato on the fingerboard or the bridge, multiple stops, left hand, Bartok pizz. (the string is snapped away from the fingerboard), strumming—would be difficult to surpass. Yet the result is delicate gradations of timbre, often calling to mind Korean plucked string instruments such as the gayageum (zither). The haegeum (two stringed fiddle) is evoked in the bowed sections with extensive use of trills and glissandi (often simultaneously), grace notes, quarter tone bending, and elaborate ornamentation. As befits the title, the contrast between pizzicato and arco, wide-ranging and sudden dynamic shifts, are kaleidoscopic. Yun himself directs that the player emphasize the important note amongst the flurries of extravagant ornamentation.

Isang Yun

Gasa for violin and piano (1963)

Gasa is a Korean word meaning “Song-Words” and is the name of a Korean narrative art song form. It is sung by a woman and is accompanied by a bamboo flute, the taegum and an hour glass drum, the changgo. In Gasa, Yun combines his central-tone technique with twelve tone row composition in which one pitch serves as a nucleus around which the other 11 pitches orbit. Gasa was premiered in Prague in October, 1963 by violinist, Dusan Pandula and pianist, Ales Bilek. In Yun’s words, “Gasa exists in space. It takes no heed of time - each moment exists in space and that space is unending. Within this [space] however there exists a dramatic development.”

Lou Harrison

Grand Duo for Violin & Piano (1988), excerpts

IV. Slow and Sometimes Rhapsodically

II. Stampad., Allegro

The title, Grand Duo, is a form most often associated with 19th century salon music, implying a high degree of virtuosity, large scaled, and rhapsodic (as opposed to classic formal structures). Harrison’s Grand Duo follows in this tradition. The Duo is in a somewhat atypical (for Harrison) tuning: modern equal temperament. It was commissioned for the 1988 Cabrillo Festival, dedicated and premiered by the festival’s concertmaster, Romuald Tecco and conductor/ pianist Dennis Russell Davies. It is a large work in five movements (running about 35

minutes total), two of which are being performed. The fourth movement, “Air,” sees a return to his earlier non-Indonesian, chromatic style. However, Harrison avoids the Schoenbergian twelve tone row and fluidly moves between passages of atonal chromaticism and the clearly harmonic. As a means of unity and structural control, the violin’s melodic passages have a restricted palette of music intervals: a minor second followed by a major third and major sixth. Toward the end of the movements the initial violin melody reappears. The violin plays several passages in double stops but one particularly striking aspect is the addition of octaves. It’s virtually impossible to “warm” the tone with vibrato so they have a sort of glassy starkness.

Movement two, “Stamped.” is based upon a medieval dance form and is often known as an estampie or istampa. Harrison favored the title Stampede which is also employed in several other works. While triple metered, there are constant digressions in the form of cross meters and shifting accents that generate the headlong movement. Gradually, the piano contributes nonharmonic interjections, more in the manner of a bass drum. This starts with four note dissonant “crunches” which later grow into octave sized tone clusters produced with a wooden bar. Another means in which Harrison propels the piece is the use of energetic double, triple, and quadruple stops.

Intermission

Lou Harrison

Canticle No. 3 (1941)

Harrison’s Canticle No. 3 is scored for a unique ensemble: 5 to 7 percussionists, ocarina, and guitar. An unusual aspect of Canticle No. 3 is that while the ocarina and guitar are pitched instruments, the ocarina plays notes defined only by register and the guitar has a non-chordal /non-melodic part played bottleneck style by a percussionist rather than a guitarist. The percussion battery includes a wide variety of world instruments and “found” objects (such as elephant, cow, and water buffalo bells, brake drums), and Teponazli (Aztec slit drum) in addition to standard drum kit. The Canticle maintains a solid pulse in 4/4 but the complex polyrhythms and cross meters renders it anything but rhythmically simple. Canticle No. 3 makes extensive use of canonic and imitative counterpoint, augmentation, and diminution.

Isang Yun

Interludium A for piano (1982)

Interludium A (1982) is Yun’s last solo piano work, written for the Japanese pianist Aki Takahashi. The letter A is derived from Takahashi’s first name, and also refers to the note A which for Yun symbolized peace and reconciliation for humankind. Interludium A indirectly functions as palliative for his imprisonment and torture in his native Korea. In Interludium A the note A serves as the pitch around which all the others are oriented. The piece is in nine sections, both metric and non-metric, differentiated by contrasting timbres and dynamics. Interludium A was premiered by Aki Takahashi in Tokyo, May 1982.

Lou Harrison

Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra (1951)

I. Overture

II. Elegy

III. First Gamelan

III. Aria

V. Second Gamelan

VI. Chorale

His [Harrison’s] later works, notably the many pieces that call for Indonesian Gamelan—either alone or in combination with Western instruments—show the result of his considerable immersion in the music of the Far East. But so does the earlier, marvelously subtle Suite for Violin, Piano and an Orchestra consisting of three winds, two cellos, bass, harp, celesta, tam-tam and a “tack piano” (an upright with tacks in the hammers so as to give off a harpsichord-like clangor), composed in 1951, ten years before Harrison’s first visit to the Orient. Two of the six movements are entitled “Gamelan”; with their simple open sonorities and their accompaniment

obsessively repeating, they do indeed capture the essence of this haunting, teasing music—a “honeyed thunder,” as Harrison himself describes it. (They also prefigure, long before its time, the essence of some of today’s minimalist music.) As a whole, this unutterably charming small-scale work provides a full picture of Harrison in the early 1950s, a man who has eagerly grasped everything there is in the musical world, and now is ready to make it work for him.”Cherish, conserve, consider, create”—that he claims as his lifelong motto—and the earnest eclecticism of this music bears it out: the intensity of the opening movement and, again, of the final Chorale that trails off toward infinity, the simple melodic warmth in the two slow movements (“Elegy” and “Aria”), the delight throughout the work with tiny musical sparks, fireflies made audible.

Program text on Lou Harrison’s Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra excerpted from liner notes for New World Records album Lou Harrison: Piano Concerto/Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra (#80366-2), by Alan Rich. © 1988 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc. Used by permission.

[Notes taken from the printed program.]

Artists

Other Minds Festival (features)

Amirkhanian, Charles (features)