BALTIMORE CITYPAPER

Music

Rethinking Stravinsky

***Post-Classical Ensemble spotlights the Russian roots of the infamous composer of* Rite of Spring**

Tony Millionaire

By **Samantha Buker**

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The Stravinsky Project

April 8-10 at various locations

Visit post-classicalensemble.org for full program

Don't be embarrassed if all you know about composer Igor Stravinsky is Walt Disney's dinosaur dance to *Rite of Spring*. Post-Classical Ensemble's April 8-10 *The Stravinsky Project* can set you straight. This powerful combination of a Georgetown University symposium, Music Center at Strathmore concerts, and National Gallery film screenings reveals sides of Stravinsky that may shock newbies and music mavens alike. It's also a great occasion for any modern dance lover, since Stravinsky collaborated with everyone from George Balanchine to the Ballets Russes. And the performance repertoire features a lineup of five Russian and Georgian pianists playing Stravinsky's neoclassical works with the raw, earthy quality of *Rite of Spring*.

The *Stravinsky Project* seeks to display the unshakable influence a composer's country has on his music, contextualizing and honoring his Russian heritage. P-CE music director and 2010 Wammie winner Angel Gil-Ordóñez, who will conduct the festival, is a Spanish specialist, but his provenance is fully international. The mentor who influenced him the most was Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache, with whom he studied in Germany; in France, Gil-Ordóñez studied with Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis.

The performance's five pianists—Alexander Toradze, Vakhtang Kodanashvili, Edisher Savitski, George Vatchnadze, and Genadi Zagor—all hail from Russia and Georgia. These pianists all grew up under the Soviet system before emigrating to the United States, while Stravinsky lived first in France then in the United States. This migratory internationalism points to the crux of this festival: Does nationality matter? After all, these pianists followed a similar route that Stravinsky himself took.

Gil-Ordóñez loves the excitement of working with performers who share the same nationality as the composer. "They feel at home," he says by e-mail, "the same way, I feel at home conducting Spanish and Latin American music." There's a naturalness to the approach, a common linguistic thread that you might even hear as an outsider.

Having just heard the Leipzig Quartet execute an unearthly all-Beethoven performance with knife-point humor, levity, and darkness at the National Gallery last month, this reporter agrees there's something about localized vernacular. The April 8 concert includes Symphonies for Wind Instruments, Stravinsky's 1920 memorial work for

Claude Debussy. Listen for Russian liturgical melodies to make their appearance in the final chorale.

The richest Russian vein in the concerts will be the seminal works Danse Sacrale and Les Noces. Danse Sacrale was born first as a dream inside Stravinsky's head in 1910: A girl literally dances herself to death. Part of the inspiration came from the peasants on the estate Stravinsky had in Ustyluh where the first notes of the work were composed. Les Noces has similar roots. Sure, the subject matter is a wedding—not a sacrifice—but aurally you'd be hard pressed to think it an innocent peasant occasion of unbridled celebration. In Alex Ross' *The Rest is Noise*, music critic, Emile Vuillermoz called Les Noces "a machine to hit, a machine to lash."

"I try to blank my mind and concentrate on the music as much as I can," Gil-Ordóñez says about conducting works such as Danse Sacrale or Les Noces. "No room for daydreaming here!"

The *Stravinsky Projects*'s tale won't be told by music alone. Two amazing films have been unearthed for a free screening at the National Gallery. Filmmaker Richard Leacock will be best remembered for being one of the camera operators capturing Jimi Hendrix setting his guitar alight for D.A. Pennebaker's 1968 concert documentary *Monterey Pop*. Others remember him for his cinema vérité/direct cinema technique. Leacock died in Paris March 23 at 89, and used his friend Stravinsky as his subject.

Leacock's 1966 TV film A Stravinsky Portrait finally receives its Washington, D.C., premiere at the National Gallery in a free screening as part of The *Stravinsky Project*. The film was made for German TV, and Parisian theaters later championed this intimate, all-access portrait. But it never made it to America. "I don't think anybody will ever make a better film about Stravinsky or any functioning genius," said Pennebaker, Leacock's collaborator on the project, in a recent indieWIRE piece following Leacock's death. "The more I saw it, the more I realized what a great film it is."

In his day, Stravinsky was the Andy Warhol of classical music. Frank Sinatra wanted his autograph. Jackie Kennedy asked him to dine at the White House with Leonard Bernstein. (Stravinsky left early; he was drunk.) By the time Stravinsky came to the United States in 1939 he did far less composing and far more talking. According to Leacock's memoirs, Stravinsky had been filmed by CBS and hated it. And he'd been filmed by Canada's CBC and despised it.

Stravinsky, however, loved Leacock's *Portrait*. In it, you see interviews with Stravinsky, his wife Vera, and the dubious collaborator Robert Craft at Stravinsky's West Hollywood home. You follow along on a rehearsal with the Hamburg Orchestra, and watch Balanchine rehearse Les Noces with dancer Suzanne Farrell. Stravinsky moves from French, German, and Russian throughout, while Leacock whispers narrations along the way, layering the film with music, mysteries, gossip, and personal discovery.

Tony Palmer made *Stravinsky: Once at a Border*, the other documentary in the film program, in time for Stravinsky's 1982 centennial. Many of the figures he captured were soon to pass: the daughter of Vaslav Nijinksy (who choreographed *Rite of Spring*); Marie Rambert, who aided in the choreography of the premiere; and three of Stravinsky's children.

Palmer's film features Les Noces, which will be performed at the Strathmore, in a wonderfully danced sequence set to the original score. And it also includes rare 1920s silent film footage of Stravinsky conducting in Russia. The film climaxes when it shows a physically extinguished Stravinsky display mentally perfect acumen while conducting the Berceuse and Finale from *The Firebird*. Palmer—a filmmaker who has tackled composers from Richard Wagner to John Adams, though *Stravinsky* is considered one of his finest portraits—will be on hand to talk about his work.

For the record, Gil-Ordóñez didn't pay mind to films of Stravinsky conducting when preparing for the program, since "as usually happens with composers, they are music geniuses, but terrible conductors," he says, "most of the time the worst interpreters of their music." ?

The Stravinsky on Film screenings take place April 9 at the National Gallery from 1-6:30 p.m. The Stravinsky and the Piano music program takes place April 10 at the Music Center at Strathmore at 4 p.m. Visit strathmore.org for ticket details.

http://citypaper.com/music/rethinking-stravinsky-1.1128298

THE PINK LINE PROJECT

Classical music gets unstuck from the 19th century

 By Jon Caldwell on Apr 04, 2011 | Add a Comment (0)

If you have never heard of DC-based Post-Classical Ensemble, you should get acquainted. This group, under the leadership of Artistic Director Joseph Horowitz and Music Director Angel Gil-Ordóñez is challenging the ways in which we listen to, think about, and talk about classical music and performance. Their newest venture, "The Stravinsky Project", hosted by Strathmore, Georgetown University, and the National Gallery of Art, is sure to test even our most closely held opinions of this titan of 20th century music. Over the festival's three days (April 8-10), attendees will be treated to orchestral and chamber music concerts, films, lectures and discussions, and piano performances—it is sure to be a weekend that the musician and non-musician will not want to miss.

Post-Classical is both a term and a mindset—a way of approaching music and music performance in a new and fresh way. Classical music for a long time has been stuck in the 19th and early 20th centuries, refusing to move past the traditions and practices of the past. However, ensembles like the Post-Classical Ensemble are working to break down the barriers that have existed between musicians and audience for the better part of the last century. When asked about the term post-classical, Horowitz explains:

In an attempt to find a term for the musical world into which classical music now fits, I for a long time have used the term post-classical. Post-classical music includes world music, popular music, and classical music. I also feel that a lot of the most important activity nowadays is in between these various genres and certainly classical music has been vitally refreshed by non-Western music and popular music. We engage in a much broader world of music and spend a lot of time in between the cracks."

The case of Igor Stravinsky is an interesting one. Regarded as one of, if not the, greatest composers of the 20th century, Stravinsky left Russia at the age of 28 to move to Switzerland after being commissioned to compose for the Ballets Russes in Paris. He lived in exile in Switzerland, France, and the United States and did not return to Russia until he travelled to the then Soviet Union in 1962 at the age of 80. During his exile, Stravinsky developed into a man who shunned his Russian heritage while simultaneously rejecting any notion of interpretation of his music. The notation of the music was enough and his music was not to be influenced by the whims of individual performers and he identified himself not as Russian but as European. While Russians followed Stravinsky's early career, by the time Stalin rose to power, Stravinsky's music was no longer allowed in Russia—he was a cultural pariah. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian performers and scholars have approached Stravinsky's music with fresh interpretations and thoughts about his music leading to an explosion of new research on the composer and his music.

The Stravinsky Project is challenging these most commonly held beliefs about Stravinsky, in many ways based on this new research. As Horowitz explains: "In the case of the Stravinsky festival, we mount an argument that Stravinsky is ultimately a Russian composer and that, only because of what I call 'the psychology of exile', was he forced to deny his Russian heritage which was really a synthetic and artificial move" and going on to say that "We are interpreting Stravinsky and we are challenging his own self-interpretation."

But, for the non-musician, what does this weekend's festival hold? The films on Saturday will explain about the "psychology of exile" in Stravinsky's life and how it affected his music. His is a story about separation from the homeland and the films create a vivid picture of Stravinsky the man. But, for the non-musician, Ordóñez explains that "We want the normal person who has never heard of Stravinsky to come and say 'Oh my God--how is it possible that I haven't been listening to this music all my life?'" The unique presentation and interpretation of Stravinsky's music will almost certainly appeal to the musician and non-musician.

Every day we hear reports of classical music's demise. Orchestras are shuttering their windows (Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Syracuse Symphony Orchestra), classical audiences are getting older and older, and the common refrain is that people do not like classical music anymore. To that, Ordóñez responds:

People love classical music. What we feel is not working is the format in which classical music is presented. It is not attractive to new people, so we have to bring elements that enhance the performance, that explain the music, that bring context to the music we are performing and this is what we do. We don't create performances—we create festivals."

The Stravinsky Project will certainly challenge the musical archetypes that we have created about classical music and Igor Stravinsky. With a weekend filled with music, film, and lectures, something is sure to appeal to every kind of art lover. The Stravinsky Project will take place on April 8-10, 2011 and is hosted by Strathmore, Georgetown

University, and National Gallery of Art. You can find more information on the Stravinsky Project at http://post-classicalensemble.org/igor-stravinsky/ and http://www.strathmore.org/stravinskyproject/.

http://pinklineproject.com/article/classical-music-gets-unstuck-19th-century

The Washington Diplomat

Print this page

Stravinsky Reignited

Written by Rachel Bade

With its asymmetric rhythms, unpredictable sharps, flats and crescendos, and swift background pulse — like an adrenaline-pumping heart — Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" shattered traditional classical music in the early 20th century.

At its debut in 1913, the Russian composer's infamous work, accompanied by a ballet choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky that depicted a violent pagan sacrificial ritual, elicited boos from the audience and caused fistfights in the aisles.

Contrast that with Stravinsky's "Pulcinella," a Mozart-like rendition of neoclassic music, written during his exile from Russia around World War I.

Those didn't occur in a vacuum: The difference between Stravinsky's early folksy works, including "Firebird" and "Les Noces," and his later compositions such as "Scherzo à la Russe" and his opera "The Rake's Progress," is as stark as night and day. The early pieces are saturated with emotion; the latter, a colder execution of notes.

Credit: Tom Wolff

Post-Classical Ensemble, led by Music Director Angel Gil-Ordóñez, dissects Igor Stravinsky using its signature blend of music, film, theater, dance and discussion to examine the iconic composer's Russian roots.

"As a young man, [Stravinsky] was considered a rebellious and controversial composer but adopted neoclassicism in West," said Post-Classical Ensemble Artistic Director Joseph Horowitz. "He had a different public image, and it was in some ways more French than Russian. People expected a kind of music that is emotionally distanced and very different from his early works."

The dramatic change in the musical genius's work takes center stage at a three-day musical showcase in April staged by Post-Classical Ensemble, an orchestra that prides itself on being more than an orchestra by linking classically tinged concerts with film, theater, dance and discussion to provide a comprehensive, thematic exploration of individual composers and their music (also see "Classic Innovation" in the March 2009 issue of The Washington Diplomat).

It's concerts with context — and the context here is Stravinsky's Russian roots, unearthing them even in his later works after he resettled in Paris and then eventually Hollywood.

In collaboration with the Music Center at Strathmore, the Post-Classical Ensemble's "The Stravinsky Project" will feature concert performances, film and discussions about the torn man who inspired legions of musicians, some of the most beloved ballets, and even Walt Disney.

For years, American musicians attributed the change in Stravinsky's work to his exile, claiming the composer became an entirely different musician — more cosmopolitan French than Russian after the 1920s and '30s. But this festival challenges that notion. For Post-Classical Ensemble, Stravinsky's Russian identity was as tangible and enduring as his love for music.

"The whole festival has to do with the question of whether Stravinsky is Russian," Horowitz explained. "He tried to distance himself from his Russian roots, physically and emotionally. But toward the end of life Stravinsky discovered that he felt Russian, and this entire exercise of distancing himself was part of the trauma of exile. He had to cope with the fact that he lost his homeland."

The main event on April 8, titled "Stravinsky's Russian Accent," features five world-renowned, Russian-trained pianists joining the Post-Classical Ensemble in three major Stravinsky works.

The evening opens with "Symphonies of Wind Instruments," a nine-minute piece inspired by Debussy, which Stravinsky described as the first of his "so-called classical works," according to Horowitz.

In addition, the Russian wedding-inspired "Les Noces" will be performed by members of the Washington Bach Consort Chorus. Composed for the Ballets Russes, the dance cantata tells the story of a traditional Russian folk marriage. Guests will instantly recognize the wailing mother who fears losing her daughter, the proud papa of the groom and the hopeful young couple — as soloists belt out Stravinsky's score amid the roar of a wild wedding celebration.

It was said to be one of Stravinsky's favorite pieces and is rarely played by orchestras because it calls for four lead pianists.

The evening will end with the sacrificial dance passage from "The Rite of Spring," which catapulted Stravinsky to fame, and infamy.

Stravinsky's career though was not only revolutionary, it was wide-ranging — earning him fame as a composer, pianist and conductor (and even author) who influenced ballet, theater and opera while veering over the years from neoclassicism to modern classical music.

And there's perhaps no better medium to fully examine that diversity than the Post-Classical Ensemble. Staying true to its reputation for breathing originality and novel interpretations into the classics by interweaving dance, film, discussion and even pop music, Post-Classical Ensemble elevates the festival — as it does all of its performances — beyond just a regular night out at the concert. It presents a holistic view of Stravinsky and his talents.

The guest artists embody this approach. Horowitz said the pianists' rendition of Stravinsky is "more Russian and romantic, emotional and visceral, rawer" than people might hear from American-trained orchestras.

Trained in the former Soviet Union during the Cold War, the pianists were forbidden to play Stravinsky due to the composer's anti-communist views. But these pianists, most of whom discovered Stravinsky's work mid-career, were able to identify the Russian elements of the composer's work and claim his as one of their own.

Expanding a night of classical music into a weeklong educational series is another signature Post-Classical element.

"At the Post-Classical Ensemble, we are very obsessed with creating several events around a topic," said Music Director Angel Gil-Ordóñez. "We bring context to the performance, showing that it's not just about a beautiful piece, but it's also how it was conceived and under what circumstances."

To that end, the group hosts "Stravinsky on Film" on April 9 with three biographical screenings at the National Gallery of Art. The festival continues April 10 with "Interpreting Stravinsky" at the Strathmore, documenting Stravinsky's odyssey from Russia to Switzerland to France to California.

Gil-Ordóñez and Horowitz hope "The Stravinsky Project" will inspire Washingtonians to learn more about the musical mastermind and look beyond what they encounter in the theater or hear in a concert hall.

"This event is an extended experience," Gil-Ordóñez said. "We want people to go to the performances and the lectures and become part of a Stravinsky community."

It's a big goal for a relatively small musical group. But Post-Classical got a major boost in these tight economic times — with arts groups in particular feeling the pinch — when the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded it with a $200,000 grant in January.

Gil-Ordóñez called the grant a "big prize" — part of which funded "The Stravinsky Project" — but not so much for the money as for the prestige. He said the grant puts "us at a higher level on the musical scene map" and shows the value of the Post-Classical Ensemble's unique programming of festivals instead of isolated musical events.

"Mellon is attempting to find innovation ... and we view ourselves as an experimental laboratory in the symphonic field," added Horowitz. "In this case, the 15-hour immersion experience and allowing the audience to mingle with the performers and learn more is a new idea. It's unprecedented. I don't think anything like this has ever happened in D.C."

About the Author

Rachael Bade is a contributing writer for The Washington Diplomat.

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Lou Harrison Feted in D.C.
By Brett Campbell
MusicalAmerica.com
March 14, 2011

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The shimmering, seductive sounds of the Javanese gamelan beguiled American composer Lou Harrison (1917-2003) from the first time he heard them, in 1939 at San Francisco's Golden Gate Exposition. Harrison [Musical America's 2002 Composer of the Year] composed dozens of works for gamelan beginning in the mid-1970s, and often called its sound the most beautiful on the planet.

The Post-Classical Ensemble, of which Joseph Horowitz is artistic director, recently presented a mini Harrison festival on the campus of George Washington University, featuring two and one-third of the composer's finest works. By way of introducing Harrison's oeuvre to the uninitiated, a symposium on March 4 at the Indonesian Embassy included a brief demonstration and explanation of traditional Javanese gamelan music, drawing a capacity crowd of more than 200. The event also featured a symposium in which Wesleyan University's gamelan

ensemble director and scholar Sumarsam, biographer Bill Alves and Indonesian Ambassador Dino Patti Djalal persuasively distinguished Harrison's sensitive, thoughtful "confluence" of Western and Asian musical forms from "exotic" cultural forms appropriated by commercial interests.

The discussion/demonstration provided nourishing context for the following evening's concert in GWU's Lisner Hall. The Wesleyan gamelan performed Harrison's jubilant "Bubaran Robert," with trumpeter Chris Gekker playing his processional phrases on stage and in different parts of the hall. The gamelan ensemble was sensitive throughout, as it was to former Bang on a Can pianist Lisa Moore on the next piece, the first movement of the composer's brilliant, dramatic 1987 Concerto for Piano and Javanese Gamelan. Horowitz later told me they had decided to omit the other two movements for fear of taxing listeners' stamina, but truncating such a stirring showpiece left the concert's first half feeling imbalanced. (The complete work is available on a splendid new recording by Seattle's Gamelan Pacifica.)

The concert also offered excerpts from longtime Harrison colleague Eva Soltes' new documentary, "Lou Harrison: A World of Music," which had premiered a week earlier at the National Gallery of Art. Seeing and hearing the composer — a pioneer in restoring historical and natural tunings displaced by the severely compromised equal tempered system that conquered Western music at the end of the 19th century — rhapsodize about the importance of tuning and nature (complete with images of his lovely garden) served to connect Harrison's warm, expansive personality to his path-breaking music, which much of the audience was probably hearing for the first time. Other Harrison experts were on hand to provide illuminating insights into the composer's life and work during set changes and in a post-concert discussion.

Horowitz called Harrison's other piano concerto -- for orchestra, written a few months earlier than the gamelan concerto -- "the most formidable concerto for any instrument written by an American composer." Having heard performances featuring Keith Jarrett, Ursula Oppens, and Marino Formenti (with the Los Angeles Philharmonic last year), I can't argue. From the majestic Brahmsian opening to the tart tone clusters and prominent percussion of the piquant "Stampede" and on through the poignant Largo and final movement, P-CE and soloist Benjamin Pasternack delivered a spectacular performance that pushed audience members to the edges of their seats and the pianist several inches above his bench.

Accepting an invitation Harrison noted in the piano part, Pasternack (like Harrison, a long time improvising dance accompanist) improvised a sparkling, searching first-movement cadenza. Charismatic P-CE Music Director Angel Gil Ordonez led a taut, unforgettable reading.

The practicalities inherent in performing the Whitman-esque "Four Strict Songs"

helps explain the relative obscurity of much of Harrison's music. The first piano concerto required tuning to the gamelan's intonation; the second specified a tuning devised by one of J.S. Bach's students. "Four Strict Songs" -- set to Harrison's own poetry to celebrate his return to the pastoral beauties of his native West Coast in 1953 after a turbulent decade in New York -- required a third, natural tuning, along with a second re-tuned harp. Financial constraints evidently precluded the availability of either, and harsh dissonances occasionally emerged, somewhat vitiating the impact of a work whose beauty is largely inherent in its tunings.

The GWU Chamber Choir acquitted itself well, but its sound, while attractive, was too thin for the exultant opening song, "Here is Holiness." (This performance used Harrison's later arrangement for mixed chorus rather than the eight baritones he originally specified.) The gentler pastoral movements fared better, with young baritone Andre Lamar Smith lending a fine vocal presence despite his decidedly un-Harrisonian vibrato. Still, the engaging performance, expertly shaped by Gil Ordonez, made a strong case for "Strict Songs" to be in the pantheon of American vocal music.

That the logistical challenges of presenting Harrison's under-performed works — including others that require odd combinations of global instruments or Harrison's own American gamelan — are well worth the effort was proven by the music's insistent allure and the audience's enthusiastic response, arrived at in no small part from P-CE's smart, context-laden approach.

Brett Campbell is the co-author with Bill Alves of a biography in progress on Lou Harrison.

The Washington Post

Maverick composer Lou Harrison to be celebrated at D.C. festival

By Anne Midgette, Published: February 6

With his big white beard, twinkling blue eyes and air of affability, Lou Harrison (1917-2003) looked like a hippie Santa Claus. His music, too, has an air of clarity, as if washed and distilled in bright outdoor air. This makes him an unusually non-threatening figure among recent composers, most of whom appear to the public as thorny propagators of

difficult music. Harrison is all California, laid back and mellow - but the luminosity of his music belies the intricacy of the work, and knowledge, that underlie it.

To say Harrison is underrated is perhaps exaggerated, especially in light of the fact that the composer is getting his own festival in Washington on March 4 and 5, courtesy of the Post-Classical Ensemble. His life, certainly, reads like a Who's Who of 20th-century American music. He was a friend of John Cage and Virgil Thomson, a student of Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg, an early champion of and assistant to Charles Ives (who, when he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1947, gave Harrison half the money). And he had a profound if quiet influence on the generation that came after him. When Michael Tilson Thomas took over the San Francisco Symphony in 1995, the very first music he played was a fanfare he commissioned from Harrison for the occasion.

Yet Harrison's music is not heard enough in the concert hall these days. That, certainly, is the assessment of Angel Gil-Ordonez and Joseph Horowitz, the Post-Classical Ensemble's co-founders and co-instigators. The March festival's main concert, at Lisner Auditorium on March 5, features a range of Harrison's work, including compositions for the gamelan, the Indonesian percussion orchestra, but its highlight for the conductor, Gil-Ordonez, is Harrison's piano concerto, composed from 1983 to 1985. To him, it's one of the masterpieces of the 20th century. Yet it's not something you're likely to hear played often.

The festival actually kicks off Feb. 26 with a sneak preview of a documentary-film-in-progress by the director Eva Soltes, who focuses on under-appreciated artists and who has been working on "Lou Harrison: A World of Music" (ultimately targeted to public television) for years. The film - which is being screened for free at the National Gallery of Art - draws on a huge archive to depict a protean figure.

You could call Harrison a holistic artist. He was concerned about every side of music, not only writing it but also constructing instruments and finding different ways to tune them. He was also a published poet - his collected poems came out under the title "Joys and Perplexities," the cover inked in his own flawless calligraphy - and a social activist whose focuses included gay rights, racial equality, pacifism and the green movement. Together with his life partner, William Colvig, he built everything from a tuned percussion ensemble made of scrap metal (which they dubbed an "American gamelan") to a eco-friendly home made of straw bales by Joshua Tree National Park.

The festival's other free event focuses on the gamelan, and its influence on Harrison's music. The sounds of Eastern music offered Harrison, in the 1940s, a path to follow out of Schoenberg's 12-tone system; he was fascinated by the possibilities of timbre and intonation. A nervous breakdown in 1947, which hospitalized him for several months, represented a symbolic break with his previous explorations: He returned from the East Coast to his native California and focused more and more on music of Asia and just intonation, a means of tuning instruments based on absolute frequencies rather than the ratios used in the equal temperament that has become the standard way to tune a Western orchestra.

On March 4, the Indonesian Embassy hosts an evening, with its own gamelan orchestra, that demonstrates not only Harrison's forays into the gamelan, but the way that Western culture and music - many contemporary American composers have now embraced the gamelan wholeheartedly - has influenced Indonesia.

In a tribute written after Harrison's death, the composer David Lang summed up the influence of the man with whom he had studied at the age of 17. "He changed my idea of how a grown up composer was supposed to live," Lang wrote. "To that point I had imagined that a composer should be dark and moody and troubled and introspective. He thought a composer should live a good life. And he did."

http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/lou-harrisons-legacy-of-clean-crisp-sounds/2011/02/03/ABWBR5E_story.html

BALTIMORE CITYPAPER

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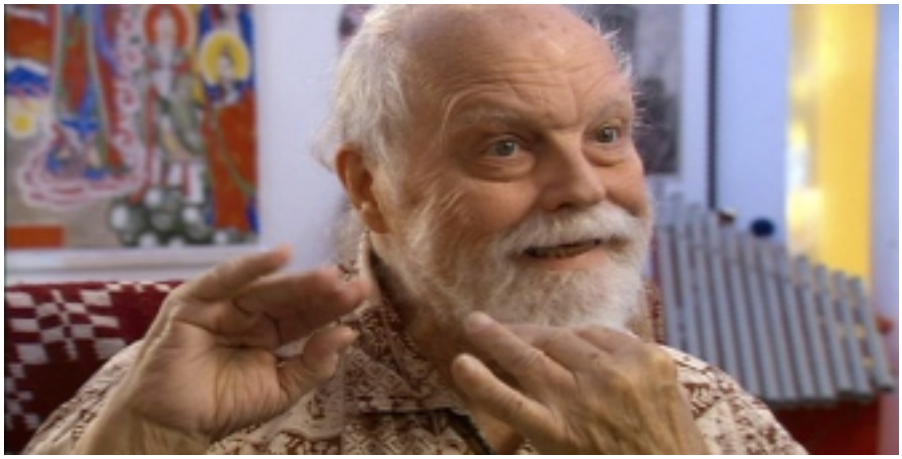
American Made

Post-Classical Ensemble spotlights the infallible imagination of Lou Harrison



Lou Harrison, as seen in a still from Eva Soltes' documentary

By **Samantha Buker**

Published: March 2, 2011

The Post-Classical Ensemble presents *Sublime Confluence: The Music of Lou Harrison*

March 5 at the George Washington University Lisner Auditorium.

For more information visit post-classicalensemble.org.

Anyone who loves Berkeley, Calif., gamelan music, modern dance, percussion, vegetarianism, Navajo religion, building instruments with junkyard finds, puppets, calligraphy, or sipping a bowl of green tea has a place for the music of Lou Harrison. He left this world in February 2003 at the age of 85. But one day, he may be known as the Leonardo da Vinci of 20th-century music—not simply of Western music, but world music. Right now, he's the secret genius of West-meets-East music. You probably know John Cage, Philip Glass, Terry Riley, and Stephen Reich—but Harrison stands apart.

He was the odd man out who loved melody best. He was as daring and demanding with rhythms and tunings as he was with his politics. Harrison approached music as the art of time awareness. He tempered his brand of "Zen" with 100 percent humor and honesty and disguised the rigor of 12-tone rows or Javanese *balungan*—ideal melody—so that you want to listen. In an age when everyone wants to tap into diversity, he's no bland Unitarian compromise. His world is ultra-specific ethnically and yet has no boundaries.

His 2003 death—at a rail stop on the California Zephyr en route to Chicago—is symbolic of how his music has never quite made the journey back to the East Coast. Post-Classical Ensemble's upcoming Washington, D.C., premiere of Harrison's Piano Concerto remedies that this weekend. The Peabody Institute's Ben Pasternack performs Piano Concerto as part of P-CE's *Sublime Confluence: The Music of Lou Harrison*, organized by Joseph Horowitz, an artistic director bold enough to risk creating an East Coast Harrison festival. This concert offers the chance to uncover Harrison's many sides, bringing Pasternack and pianist Lisa Moore to the stage, joined by the Wesleyan University Gamelan and the George Washington University Chamber Choir, with P-CE music director Angel Gil-Ordonez at the podium.

Horowitz—artistic director at the National Endowment for the Arts' Arts Journalism Institute in Classical Music and Opera at Columbia University—and Pasternack believe *Piano Concerto* is a true gem of American piano music.

Pasternack points out that Harrison "was not worried about authenticity," which is precisely why he achieved so much. "In the Concerto, Harrison is not copying or imitating," he says. "He made a deep study of many different types of music, but he created something unique."

Piano Concerto, originally written for Keith Jarrett, demands lightning virtuosity and delicacy from the pianist. It also requires the even-temperament tuning of the piano. Due to the tunings in line with those of a Javanese gamelan instrument, Pasternack is bringing his own piano.

The Concerto offers many colors and sensations. The Allegro packs racing momentum that's decidedly going somewhere, although it's not where the ear is used to heading. The Stampede is as brash as a splash of salty sea, and the Largo gives the piece welcome openness, breathing room and light. "Sublime would be the third movement—prayerful, mysterious, still," Pasternack says of the Largo. "It's beautiful to hear many chords in pure intonation, which never occurs in conventional tunings."

The Harrison you hear in Piano Concerto is "the seamless synthesis between a fully trained Western composer and a fully trained practitioner of an Eastern genre [gamelan]," Horowitz says. "The gamelan and non-Western strains are less on the surface than organically absorbed. This is real originality."

For Horowitz, Harrison's cosmic confluence depends on a paradox. He shared this nugget from ethnomusicologist Marc Perlman: "Musical boundaries can be crossed, but the value of crossing them depends on the degree to which you respect them."

That's why Harrison cherished non-Western music. The stable tradition of Javanese gamelan allows for growth within bounds. "It's like an amoebae," Harrison told John Luther Adams of NewMusicBox in 1999. "It has moving walls that reach out a little bit, crack here, expand there, and so on. Whereas Western music tends to want to do that awful business of destroying before it creates, which I think is ridiculous."

When it comes to Western music traditions, Harrison never destroyed. He embraced George Frideric Handel, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Gregorian chant, and Arnold Schoenberg with equal vigor. The medieval French dance the *estampie* became his signature in the form of his melodic-rhythmic "stampedes."

Many of Harrison's more than 50 works for gamelan were performed on his "American" gamelan instrument, which he nicknamed "Old Granddad." His longtime partner Bill Colvig helped him build Old Granddad with No. 10 cans and aluminum slabs filed to pitch. They discovered that washtubs and garbage cans offered a perfect imitation of Indonesian gongs.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Harrison never shook off the take-home pay of a memorable tune, but he didn't resist the rigors of 12-tone or Cage's composition tactics. He built music off of Dante's rhyme scheme in the *Divine Comedy* as deftly and confidently as he employed his own Social Security Number for underlying melodic structure. What he achieves is a myriad mood minimalism. Grandeur resides in apparent simplicity. His often spare music gives the impression of the monumentality of great space, conjures the sublime of temple arcades, the order underlying all teeming nature, and the magic of a trip to Angkor Wat in Cambodia. So it's no surprise that he spent his last years as an architect in the desert, building a sustainable straw-bale composer's cave at the edge of Joshua Tree National Park.

Never shy politically, Harrison was a willing composer for San Francisco be-ins. *Peace Pieces* of 1968 offers a Buddhist *metta sutta* set in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.,

followed by a work for harp, viola, violin, and voice titled, “Little Song on the Atom Bomb.” In a November 1993 lecture at University of Utah, he admitted to leaving a note to the taxman under his signature: “signed under duress.” He considered Nevada’s open-air nuclear testing in 1953 a “breach of social contract.”

In the midst of his music, Harrison painted, became known for his calligraphy, and designed his own fonts. He taught Esperanto and traveled to Korea, Japan, and Indonesia. He loved Javanese puppet plays and made his own puppet opera, *Julius Caesar*. His music backed much Mark Morris choreography. Above all, Harrison was a man serious about being playful in all things.

His KPFA-FM radio “Crackpot Lecture” of 1959 pokes fun: “I am a vegetarian . . . a speaker of the international language of Esperanto . . . I am a promoter of population restraint and sexual freedom. I am a writer of letters to the editor and a reader of science fiction . . . and not last of all, I am a living composer.”

State conservatories in Indonesia consider his Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Javanese Gamelan required listening, but Harrison’s music has gained little traction in the American concert repertoire. Google his name and you’ll find West Coast concerts—many mounted by friends who are still alive. There’s little explanation for this obscurity. Perhaps his non-Western tunings are to blame, or a lack of symphonic output. Perhaps he simply hasn’t been dead long enough to be rediscovered.

There’s no real reason for this lack of love. “Some of the best and most well-known effects in Glass and others have also been achieved by Harrison with less obvious and strict means—shimmering textures of a single harmony, static harmony with highlights, enhancing small changes,” Pasternack says.

So maybe America just needs to get to know Harrison a little better, discovering what his friends have known for years. “ I see Lou as a fish swimming upstream his whole life,” says Eva Soltes, a dancer, music producer, and documentary filmmaker who enjoyed a 30-year friendship with Harrison. “But with such a force of will and force of character . . . that he tried to make the world conform to him rather than becoming what the world wanted him to be.”

Harrison is the gentle giant of 20th-century music, producing more than 300 original works. “There is really no one else like Lou Harrison,” Horowitz says. “That he doesn’t felicitously fit any musical map is both a proof of his originality and the penalty he pays.”

Post-holiday for Post-Classical

By Anne Midgette

Tis the season of season announcements. The Post-Classical Ensemble was able to make a particularly big one today, covering programming for the next two seasons -- thanks to a very welcome piece of news, a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for $200,000.

“This feels like a big imprimatur for an organization with a budget of under $500,000,” commented Joseph Horowitz and Angel Gil-Ordoñez, the group’s founders and artistic directors, in a joint e-mail.

The grant will support a number of the small festivals in which the Post-Classical Ensemble has come to specialize, presented in partnership with Georgetown University, the Music Center at Strathmore, and the film division of the National Gallery. These will include a Charles Ives project in November with the pianist Jeremy Denk, whose luminous Ives interpretations have made him something of an Ives specialist; a Falla/Stravinsky event including a fully-choreographed production of “El Amor Brujo” in December; and, in 2012-13, an “Interpreting Shostakovich” festival and one called “Mexican Revolution.” The latter will include a live performance of the original Silvestre Revueltas score of the film “Redes,” which the group will later issue as the third in its series of DVD film scores.

Horowitz, in particular, is known for the thematic programming exemplified by each of these festivals. Yet though each is self-contained, some larger themes are emerging over more than one festival at a time. The Falla/Stravinsky project continues earlier focuses on both these composers (including the upcoming "Stravinsky Project" at Georgetown in April); and the "Mexican Revolution" project echoes the weeklong Revueltas/Chavez festival the group did in 2008.

These performances aren’t only destined for Washington, either. Thanks to the grant, the Ives events and the “Amor Brujo” are expected to tour.

The budget of a large-scale, year-round American orchestra is often $20 or $30 million. In light of this, it’s nice to remember what a huge difference a $200,000 grant can make to a smaller organization devoted to finding interesting ways to present quality work.

By Anne Midgette | January 4, 2011; 6:38 AM ET

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/the-classical-beat/2011/01/post-holiday_for_post-classica.html

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JANUARY 4, 2011

Innovation rewarded: Post-Classical Ensemble receives $200,000 Mellon grant

By Tim Smith

The Post-Classical Ensemble has done some very interesting work in the area, trying out innovative ways of re-packaging familiar works and dusting off lesser known fare, often in multi-media formats. The D.C-based organization just received $200,000 to help keep the innovation flowing.

The grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation "feels like a big imprimatur for an organization with a budget of under $500,000," says artistic director Joseph Horowitz, who co-founded Post-Classical with music director Angel Gil-Ordóñez in 2003.

The money will support programming, touring, and the making of a DVD on the Naxos label (the group's third).

Post-Classical is "establishing a triangulated relationship," Horowitz says, with the Music Center at Strathmore "as 'Artistic Partner,' Georgetown University as 'Educational Partner,' and the film department of the National Gallery of Art. Mellon sees this as a template with national implications for humanities-infused thematic programing, linking a major presenter (not campus-based) with a major university (sans major on-campus presenter)."

Horowitz also notes: "Obviously, our new relationship with Strathmore moves us closer to the Baltimore arts scene. And we expect to move into Baltimore itself." Getting Post-Classical up here -- I think it could fit neatly into one or more local concert series -- would be good news.

Among the ventures in store for the ensemble from this season through 2012-13 include: The Stravinsky Project, exploring the composer's Russian side.

A touring production of Manuel De Falla's "El Amor Brujo" choreographed by Igal Perry; Celebrating Ives, a festival with the extraordinary pianist Jeremy Denk; Interpreting Shostakovich, a festival featuring controversial author Solomon Volkov; A Mexican festival that will yield a restoration of the 1930s film "Redes" with a newly recorded performance of Silvestre Revueltas' score.

http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/classicalmusic/2011/01/innovation_rewarded_postclassi.html

BALTIMORE CITYPAPER

Music

Mellon awards $200,000 to the Post-Classical Ensemble

By **Samantha Buker**

Published: January 5, 2011

A recent $200,000 Mellon grant awarded to the Post-Classical Ensemble will bring three years of unprecedented musical adventure to the Baltimore-Washington area. Since its 2003 founding by artistic director Joe Horowitz and music director Angel Gil-Ordóñez, the Washington-based Ensemble has produced more than 50 events. Its conductor already has the Spanish equivalent of a knighthood under his belt for his cross-cultural musical triumphs. And it runs like a thoroughbred on an annual budget under $500,000.

Don't know anything about Stravinsky except for the steamy piano scene in *Coco Chanel and Igor Stravinsky*? A six-hour, three-day music and film fest April 8-10 shows you just how Stravinsky overturned "classical" and brought music into the 20th century.

Can't stay awake through a concert suite? Let the charms of singer Esperanza Fernández mix flamenco with a reimagined presentation of Manuel de Falla's *El Amor Brujo* Dec. 3 and 4.

Want to see Schubert unmasked? Compare two sides of this 19th-century composer in a face-off of two biopics at the National Gallery in March 2012: 1941's *The Melody Master* vs. 1986's *Notturno*. Then hear a Schubert lieder played like never before, through the bass trombone of David Taylor.

The Mellon grants in this competitive performing arts field, according to its web site, go to those who test "models that may serve to make orchestras sustainable in the future." In other words, grant recipients should be debt-free and cutting-edge to the core. The lean model championed by Horowitz and Gil-Ordóñez provides a multimedia festival approach to each composer on the roster. These concerts go beyond the notes on the staff to root the performances in the culture—Russian, Hungarian, German, Mexican, or Spanish—that stokes each composer's creative fires.

Horowitz—who is also the artistic director of NEA Arts Journalism Institute, Classical Music and Opera, at Columbia University's Journalism School (where this writer and CP arts editor Bret McCabe were 2010 fellows)—immerses P-CE concertgoers in a total cultural experience. Unlike the mishmash of podium talk and slapped-together slide shows you get at orchestras around the beltway, Horowitz lets cinematic lighting design do the talking. Consider this moment from its September 2010 *Rhapsody in Blue* concert. Stage lights direct your focus on the key instruments as they enter the musical fray. The stage is bathed in darkness for the radio broadcast recording of Gershwin's own playing of his Second Prelude, then a single spotlight illuminates pianist Genadi Zagor, who seamlessly takes off from where the recording left off. History becomes present in a heartbeat; prelude becomes rhapsody without time to catch your breath. (Click onmegaupload.com/?d=VR3FOA8U to download a video from the Ensemble's performance of de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* last April.)

P-CE's agile strength comes from ditching the fixed concert hall, 52-week season approach to classical programming and building strategic partnerships instead. Margaret Parsons heads up the film-related events at the Film Division of the National Gallery. Georgetown University is the education partner, integrating the vibrant energy of P-CE performances into GU's arts curriculum. The Music Center at Strathmore, the newest artistic partner, offers the greatest stage for the multi-day festivals and connects P-CE with the Maryland Youth Orchestra.

In the coming seasons, P-CE welcomes the choreography of New York's Igal Perry, the cinematography of Paul Strand in Mexico against the rich musical tapestry of Silvestre Revueltas, the tidy and tumultuous playing of young pianist Jeremy Denk, and so much

more. A private Steinway Hall performance by Denk awakened this author's ardor for American composer Charles Ives. His Nov. 3-5 "Celebrating Ives" collaboration is a don't-miss joy of the P-CE 2011-'12 season.

In short, if you're starved for the bold and the new in classical, love film and the music that empowers it, or just want a brilliant spectacle onstage, look no further.

For more information, visit post-classicalensemble.org.

http://citypaper.com/music/mellon-awards-200-000-to-the-post-classical-ensemble-1.1085658