

# Lou Harrison: The Enigmatic American Musical Maverick



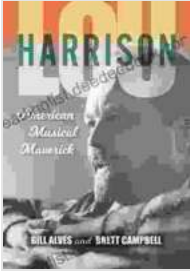
## Lou Harrison: American Musical Maverick

by Susan Shapiro Barash

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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|----------------------|-------------|
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| Screen Reader        | : Supported |
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## Early Life and Education

Lou Harrison was born in Portland, Oregon, on May 14, 1917. From a young age, he displayed a keen interest in music, studying piano and composition with various teachers. In 1934, Harrison enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, where he studied composition with Roger Sessions. After graduating in 1939, Harrison continued his studies at Mills College, where he worked closely with Darius Milhaud.

## Influences and Inspirations

Harrison's music was influenced by a wide range of sources, including American folk music, Javanese gamelan, and ancient Greek music. He was particularly fascinated by the concept of "cultural synthesis," blending elements from different cultures to create a unique and personal musical language. Harrison also drew inspiration from non-Western instruments and techniques, such as the use of drone and pentatonic scales.

## Major Works and Innovations

Harrison's body of work is vast and varied, spanning over six decades. Some of his most notable compositions include:

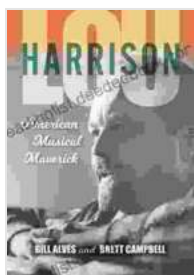
- *Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra* (1940): A groundbreaking work that combines Western and Eastern elements, featuring the use of non-traditional percussion instruments.
- *Mass for St. Cecilia* (1942): A choral work commissioned for the Catholic Church that incorporates elements of early music, American folk music, and Javanese gamelan.
- *First Concerto for Flute and Percussion* (1949): A virtuosic work that showcases the flute's capabilities and explores the interplay between soloist and percussion ensemble.
- *Song of Kali* (1980): A powerful orchestral piece inspired by the Hindu goddess of destruction and transformation.

In addition to his compositions, Harrison also made significant contributions to music theory and ethnomusicology. He developed a system of "vertical sonorities" based on the harmonic series, and he conducted extensive research on the music of Southeast Asia and China.

## **Legacy and Impact**

Lou Harrison was a true musical maverick, whose unique and eclectic style defied easy categorization. His music has influenced generations of composers and performers, inspiring them to embrace cultural diversity and explore new sonic possibilities. Harrison's legacy continues to resonate through the many organizations and festivals he founded, such as the San Francisco Tape Music Center and the Sonor Festival of Contemporary Music.

Lou Harrison was an enigmatic figure whose music reflected his deep passion for cultural synthesis and exploration. Through his groundbreaking compositions, theoretical innovations, and ethnomusicological research, Harrison left an indelible mark on the American musical landscape. His music continues to challenge and inspire audiences and musicians alike, cementing his status as a true musical maverick.



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