

JUST WEST COAST

music for guitar and harp in just intonation

Performed by **Just Strings**

John Schneider: Just Guitar and Adapted Guitar

Amy Shulman: Celtic and Concert Harps

Suite No. 2 (1972/92) (9:39)

(guitar, harp, percussion)

Lou Harrison

(b. 1917)

1 Jahla (guitar, harp, percussion) (1:51)

2 Waltz for Evelyn Hinrichsen (guitar, harp) (1:57)

3 Threnody (solo guitar) (2:33)

4 Sonata in Ishartum (guitar, harp) (1:41)

5 Beverly's Troubadour Piece (guitar, harp, percussion) (1:33)

Gene Sterling, percussion

6 ***Sarabande** (1959, rev. 1991) (1:37)

(guitar and harp)

LaMonte Young

(b. 1935)

Two Studies on Ancient Greek Scales (1946/50)

(guitar and harp)

Harry Partch

(1901-1974)

7 Study on Olympos' Pentatonic (1:14)

8 Study on Archytas' Enharmonic (2:28)

***Barstow: 8 Hitchhikers' Inscriptions** (1941) (9:58)

(baritone and adapted guitar)

Harry Partch

9 1. Today I am a Man (1:31) 13 5. Possible Rides (1:11)

10 2. Gentlemen (0:46) 14 6. Jesus was God in the Flesh (0:47)

11 3. Considered Pretty (1:04) 15 7. You Lucky Women (1:10)

12 4. A very Good Idea (0:36) 16 8. Why in Hell did you Come? (2:47)

John Schneider, baritone and adapted guitar

17 **Dream** (1948) (6:46)

(guitar and harp)

John Cage

(1912-1992)

18 **In a Landscape** (1948) (8:40)

(solo harp)

John Cage

***Six Sonatas** (1943) (20:37)

(guitar and harp)

Lou Harrison

19 1. Moderato (guitar solo) (2:36)

20 2. Allegro (3:29)

21 3. Moderato (5:23)

22 4. Allegro (1:51)

23 5. Moderato (guitar solo) (3:38)

24 6. Allegro (3:38)

* first recording

All music, except *Barstow* and *In a Landscape*, arranged by John Schneider.

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The Composers

In every century and every art, there inevitably appear those rare individuals whose creative personalities are so strong and vision so unique that they actually create a new genre where none existed before. These are the trailblazers, the pathmakers who through their intense heterodoxy, forge a new style either by combining older, more familiar elements in fresh ways, or by creating something that is entirely new. In our century, four such composers are Harry Partch, John Cage, Lou Harrison, and LaMonte Young who, before it became popular to do so, concerned themselves with music from throughout the world, creating a true 'multicultural' music before there was even a term to describe it.

No significant composer of any era has ever been able to completely ignore that palimpsest of music history which we call Tradition and simply sketch anew upon a *tabula rasa*. Nor did these four West Coast individualists achieve their unique points of view by patently *ignoring* history: rather, after years of scholarship and soul-searching, they each chose to reject much of their Western heritage in favor of an older cultural legacy—that of the East.

"In three thousand years the West has abandoned values, beautiful and significant things, that in toto are at least as important as what we have preserved. But it is tough—no instruments, the culture, the milieu are absent. But they can be recreated or imagined. With Oriental music you don't have to recreate or imagine. In either case what you come up with is something new."
(Harry Partch in a letter to Peter Garland)

Cage's Zen and use of *I Ching*, Harrison's gamelans or even LaMonte Young's singing of *raga* immediately indicate a more inclusive view of art than that held by many of their contemporaries. As Cage reminded us at mid-century:

"One of the things that is happening to society now is that the East and the West no longer are separated. We are, as Fuller and McLuhan point out continually, living in a global village. Formerly,

we thought that the Orient had nothing to do with us; that we had no access to it. We know better now."

Perhaps it is California's position as America's window on the Pacific Rim that has exerted such profound influences. Partch's parents were Presbyterian missionaries in China, and both Harrison and Partch enjoyed the Cantonese opera in San Francisco in their formative years. But then Henry Cowell's influence on both Cage and Harrison could be equally cited. Whatever the cause, the results are clear:

"The composers who today wish to imbue their music with the ineffable, seem to find it necessary to make use of musical characteristics not purely Western; they go for inspiration to those places, or return to those times, where or when harmony is not of the essence." (Cage: *The East in the West*, 1946)



Did Harry Partch set out to revolutionize music? Not at all. In the preface to his *Bitter Music* (1940), he states:

"...My seemingly revolutionary ideas in music—I say 'seemingly' because the fact of 'revolution' was determined for me by non-understanding musicians. I had never thought of my work as revolutionary, but only as evolutionary."

It began after his discovery of Helmholtz's *Sensations of Tone* in a public library in 1925, after which he was never the same. Partch burned all of his previous efforts, and began trying to return music to its basic elements (as supposedly practiced by the ancients) recreating a music born of human drama, using human speech and the pure intervals of nature.

"I came to the realization that the spoken word was the distinctive expression my constitutional makeup was best fitted for, and that I needed other scales and other instruments. This was the positive result of self-examination—call it intuitive, for it was not the result of any intellectual desire to pick up lost or obscure historical threads. For better or for worse, it was an emotional decision."

In 1934, Partch adapted a guitar by re-stringing it, and fitting it with frets that would reproduce the same non-standard musical intervals that he had been intoning with his viola. He also adapted a reed organ that would play his new scale of 43 tones to the octave. A Carnegie grant financed a trip to Europe to research intonation and meet Yeats in order to discuss a setting of *Oedipus*, but Partch returned in 1935 to the Great Depression and the beginning of what was to become his "Hobo Period"—nine years of wandering, odd jobs, and designing instruments.

In 1941 Partch composed *Barstow*, which was to become the opening section of his unique cycle of Americana pieces, *The Wayward* (1941-43). It was the first of Partch's bardic pieces to use the Adapted Guitar, and though he originally performed it alone, subsequent orchestrations added another voice and several of his newest instruments as they were invented.

Partch writes about the "text" of *Barstow*,

"The scribbling is in pencil. It is on one of the white highway railings just outside the Mojave Desert junction of Barstow, California. I am walking along the highway and sit down on the railing to rest.

Idly I notice the scratches where I happen to drop. I have seen many hitchhikers' writings. They are usually just names and addresses—there are literally millions of them, or little meaningless obscenities, on highway signs, railings, walls.

But this—why, it's music. It's both weak and strong, like unedited human expressions always are. It's eloquent in what it fails to express in words. And it's epic. Definitely, it is music..."

(from *Bitter Music*)

In 1944, Partch performed the entire cycle of *The Wayward* at Carnegie Recital Hall under the auspices of the League of Composers. The performance heard in this recording, however, is that of the original version, painstakingly re-constructed from the seemingly indecipherable manuscript. The music consists of a sparse, rather eccentric tablature for the guitar (given only in ratios), with regular notation for the singing parts, though the acoustically correct tuning for each of the notes is given in ratios below the standard noteheads.

The pitches of the speech-like singing were notated even more exactly than Schoenberg's *sprechstimme* of several decades earlier, but since the inflections of the spoken narrative were not, early private recordings of Partch were consulted whenever possible to impart the subtle inner meanings of the text, whether ironic, humorous, or even downright sardonic as in #6. Of course the original Adapted Guitar also had to be re-constructed, with its unusual stringing and patterns of fretting.

With each of Partch's subsequent re-orchestrations of *Barstow* (1942, '43, '54, '68), the score took on an increasingly playful tone, culminating in the wonderful recording by Columbia Masterworks in 1968 (currently out of print). But it is in this original version that one finds the darkness of the Depression most dramatically evoked. Taken along with the rest of his Americana from the 1940's, Partch has created a body of work that places him shoulder to shoulder with two of the best-loved storytellers of the era, John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie.

The *Two Studies on Ancient Greek Scales* (1946) were some of the only purely "abstract" instrumental music that Partch ever composed. They were written in Madison, Wisconsin for the *Harmonic Canon*, a 44-string table-like instrument he had invented to demonstrate different historic intonations. The first study employs a simple pentatonic phrygian scale which seems to exist in every culture, whereas the second explores the infamous enharmonic tetrachord of ancient Greece, whose 'blue' lowered second and sixth tones supposedly introduced 'quartertones' into Western music. Whatever their use may have been in antiquity, the expressive affect of these 'microtonal' notes is

*Partch, Folk Music Creator,
to Give Two U. W. Concerts*



HARRY PARTCH

no less powerful to modern ears.

The original *Studies* (now lost) were performed with the composer picking the melody with his right hand from those adjacent metal strings that were tuned to a scale, while strumming the accompaniment with his left on those strings tuned in chords. A few years later, he added a bass marimba part and included the pieces as the first two of his *Intrusions* (1950). In this recording the metal-strung Celtic harp plays the melody, while the guitar plays both the chords and the marimba part, achieving the low notes by lowering the pitch of the sixth string to the C two octaves below middle-C.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lou Harrison". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Lou Harrison studied composition with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg; though it is Harrison's fascination with non-Western music that has certainly exercised the more profound influence over the composer. Well known as a performer, calligrapher, artist, ethnomusicologist and instrument builder, Harrison has composed for practically every medium, including symphony orchestra, opera and the ballet, and such solo instruments as guitar and harpsichord. This rich musical background, coupled with his sensitivity and respect for music of the past is best summarized by his wonderful motto: "Cherish, Conserve, Consider, Create."

The *Six Sonatas* (1943) were originally for pianoforte or cembalo, meaning the "plucking string keyboards." The composer tells us,

"My *Six Sonatas* are Mission-style pieces. They were directly stimulated by my studies about and feelings for the land, peoples, and history of California. Indeed, they are a part of the "Regionalist"

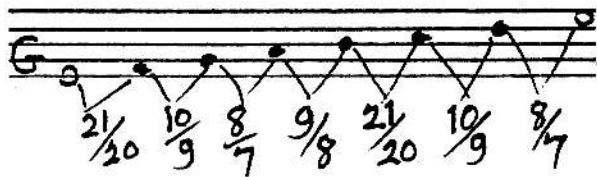
school of thought that was so prevalent and, for a young person, stimulating in the 1930s. These *Six Sonatas* reflect the romance and geometry of impassioned Spain, as well as the pastoral Indian imagery of native America in its Western life. The artistic model was, of course, Scarlatti and Manuel de Falla."

Suite No. 2 was selected from a series of occasional pieces composed for harp tuned in Just Intonation. The composer's involvement with this system of pure tuning began when he was given a copy of Partch's *Genesis of a Music* by close friend Virgil Thomson; "So I studied it, and within a day or two I bought a tuning hammer for the piano and began exploring, and I haven't looked back..."

The opening *Jahla* (sic) was written in 1972 "in the form of a Ductia to pleasure Leopold Stokowski on his 90th birthday." Here, as in so much of his work, Harrison blends medieval European music with his passion for Asia. He casts the Hindustani improvisatory style of *jhala* (performed on the sitar by alternately striking the melody string and the drone strings in rapid, repeated rhythmic figures) in a popular 13th century European form consisting of five short repeated sections. The rousing melody, accompanied by finger cymbals and tambourine jangles, is in the "Intense Diatonic" mode, which the composer tells us was first written down by Ptolemy in 3rd century Alexandria.

Though the charming *Waltz for Evelyn Hinrichsen* (1977) has become better known in either its solo guitar version or the composer's own orchestration for his *Third Symphony* (1982), it was originally written for solo piano as "an homage to a remarkable woman and friend who used to help me as music librarian when we were both young at Mills College and who is now the thoughtful, generous and endearing matriarch of the publishing house of C.F. Peters Edition." For the orchestral version of 1982, Harrison added additional harmonies in the horn parts, and it is this orchestration upon which the harp/guitar version is based.

The Greeks composed threnodies to lament the passing of those dear to them. Harrison's *Threnody to the memory of Oliver Daniel* (1990, rev. '92) uses Ptolemy's exquisite "Soft Diatonic" mode whose expressive, albeit unfamiliar intervals include the rarely heard pure minor-seventh.



Ptolemy's Soft Diatonic Mode

The pedigree of Harrison's *Sonata in Ishartum* actually spans several millenia: originally for two small harps, it fills the European binary sonata form of 18th century A.D. with a mode from the 18th century B.C., first found on a cuneiform tablet giving instructions for tuning a series of pure fifths on the ancient Babylonian harp:



"Ishartum" in cuneiform

Finally, *Beverly's Troubadour Piece* comes from a night in 1967 when Harrison and friends celebrated the arrival of a recently acquired troubadour harp

with a series of pieces written for Beverly Bellows. This time the percussionist adds bongos to the battery of tambourine jangles and cymbals.

John Cage is certainly one of the most influential American composers of the twentieth century, an artist whose work is much remarked upon but infrequently heard. Cage and Lou Harrison were fast friends during their thirties, and not only shared teachers (Schoenberg and Cowell) but also a great love of percussion instruments. Cage and Harrison's activities together included the organizing of a series of percussion concerts in California during the 30s and 40s, and the compositional collaboration *Double Music* (1941) for percussion quartet.

Dream and *In a Landscape* were both written in 1948 on the heels of Cage's masterpiece, *Sonatas and Interludes*, (1946-48) for prepared piano. In *A Composer's Confessions* (1948), Cage tells us that,

"In writing for the modern dance, I generally did so after the dance was completed. This means that I wrote music to the counts given me by the dancer. These counts were nearly always, from a musical point of view, lacking in organization...I believe this disorder led me to the inception of structural rhythm..."

A profound sense of timelessness infuses these two works, which were described quite simply by the composer in the original program notes:

"*Dream* (for piano, 1948) was written in the rhythmic structure of the dance by Merce Cunningham. It employs a fixed gamut of tones and depends in its performance on the sustaining resonances either manually or with the pedal.

In a Landscape (for harp or piano, 1948) was written in the rhythmic structure of the dance by Louise Lippold. It is similar to *Dream* but the fixed gamut of tones is more extensive. Its performances depends on the sustaining of resonances with the pedal."

Writing in 1948 Cage asks,

"To what end does one write music?...Fortunately I did not need to face this question alone. Lou Harrison and another composer were always ready to talk and ask and discuss any question relative to music with me...we met Gita Sarabhai, who came like an angel from India...her teacher had said that the purpose of music was to concentrate the mind. Lou Harrison found a passage by Thomas Mace written in England in 1676 to the effect that the purpose of music was to season and sober the mind, thus making it susceptible of divine influences...Music does this by providing a moment when, awareness of time and space being lost, the multiplicity of elements which make up an individual become integrated and he is one."

La Monte Young

Lamonte Young is considered to be the founder of the minimalist school that began in California during the 1960s. He studied at the University of California (1956-60), with Stockhausen in Darmstadt (1959) and lectured at the New School for Social Research in 1961. Though his earlier work was highly indeterminate and conceptual in nature, recent works reflect Young's interest in pure tunings and the music of Northern India, as well as improvisa-

tion, at which he is an adept.

Lamonte Young's interest in Just Intonation has not only produced some incredibly articulate (if not arcane) writings on the subject, but has also inspired him to re-tune some of his early chromatic works such as his infamous *Trio for Strings*, and *for Guitar* (1958, just version 1978), hence 'liberating' those works from equal-temperament. The well-crafted piano *Sarabande* recorded here was written as an exercise in Berkeley in 1959, and was re-tuned to Just Intonation for this recording in 1991.

THE TUNINGS

All of the music on this album is performed in Just Intonation (or "World Tuning"), a system in which pure intervals are used. Just Intonation produces more euphonious consonances and complex dissonances than the standard 'equal-temperament' to which most Western instruments are presently tuned. The secret behind these pure intervals is tuning the individual pitches of the scale to the exact mathematical ratios found in the harmonic content of the vibrating strings themselves. When this is done, the notes combine without "beating" (a fluttering, pulsing sensation that clouds the harmony), producing a transparency and clarity of harmony that is not usually heard in instruments where intonation is not adjustable.

So why isn't all music written in this beautiful tuning? The problem arises when one changes key. When a note is slightly raised or lowered in order to tune it exactly to another note, its relationship with all eleven other notes of the chromatic scale change too. For example, there can be more than one "A" for each scale, thus yielding more than the customary 12 notes per octave. To complicate matters further, there is no one Just Intonation—the composer can choose which intervals are to be tuned to simple ratios (more consonant), and those that are more complex (more dissonant).

Most of Harrison's works (*Jahla*, *Beverly's Troubadour Piece*, *Waltz*, the *Sonatas*) are tuned to a major scale in which both thirds and fifths of most chords are pure; the *Threnody* uses pure fifths and minor sevenths, while *Sonata in Ishartum*

uses only pure fifths. Cage's *Landscape* is tuned to a pure B-flat mode in one octave and G in another, while *Dream* is tuned to E-flat. Finally, LaMonte Young's *Sarabande* is a highly sophisticated chromatic tuning, while both of Partch's *Studies* use a pure minor mode, though the second study, *Archytas' Enharmonic*, adds an exquisitely flattened 2nd scale step.

THE INSTRUMENTS

Though rarely used for contemporary music, the Celtic harp was chosen for this recording not only for the beauty of its seductive, shimmering tone, but also because the brightness of its metal strings demonstrates the quality of pure intervals with even greater clarity than the gut strings of the standard concert harp.

Both harps have only seven notes to the octave and, while their tuning is easily accomplished, tuning the guitar to notes other than standard equal-temperament presents quite a challenge! The notes on the traditional guitar are determined first by the tuning of the six strings, and then by the straight frets which run underneath them. However, a separate fret is needed for *each* note, if they are tuned individually, and this has been accomplished by the Fine-Tuneable Precision Fret-Board invented by the German luthier Walter Vogt. I am grateful to Alfredo Montes and Irina Kircher for making their Vogt guitar available for this recording.

Harry Partch's Adapted Guitar not only uses unusual frets, but stringing as well. The six strings are grouped in three octave pairs, tuned in pure thirds, E-flat-G-B. The placement of the frets for *Barstow* is determined by Partch's system of 43-tones per octave, giving three choices of the note A, two C-sharps, and several F-sharps, among others, which produces an extremely versatile though very complicated fingerboard! The instrument employed on this recording is a authentic copy of a pre-WW II, C.F. Martin guitar, and was expertly re-fretted by Greg Brandt.

SPECIAL THANKS for help in re-constructing *Barstow*: Danlee Mitchell, The Harry Partch Archive at The University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana,

Greg Brandt, Thomas McGeary, Richard Kassel, Betty Freeman, Henry Brant, and in Wisconsin: Bob Crane, Warren Gilson, Stephen Sundell, U.W. Madison, and Ronald Wiecki.

—John Schneider, July 1993, Venice, California

THE PERFORMERS

John Schneider is an internationally recognized guitarist, composer, author, and broadcaster whose weekly television and radio programs have brought the sound of the guitar into millions of homes for the past fifteen years. He holds a Ph.D. in Physics and Music from the University of Wales, music degrees from the University of California and the Royal College of Music (London), and is past President of the Guitar Foundation of America. For the past decade, the artist has performed almost exclusively on the *Well-Tempered Guitar* which uses different patterns of fretting according to the key, or the tuning system required. A specialist in contemporary music, Schneider's book *The Contemporary Guitar* has become a standard text in the field. His 1990 recording of the guitar music of Lou Harrison is available on Etcetera Records (Holland). John currently resides in Venice, California with his wife Jody, children Emily and Erin, and their dog "Blue."

Amy Shulman received her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from the Juilliard School of Music. Her teachers include Marcel Grandjany, Susan McDonald and Marjorie Mollenauer. Ms. Shulman has performed as a soloist in France, Canada and the USA, making radio broadcasts in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. She performs with orchestral, chamber, opera and contemporary music ensembles in Los Angeles, and since 1984 has toured with violinist Peter Kent in the Kent/Shulman Duo. Ms. Shulman is active recording in the Motion Picture, Television and Record Industries.

Gene Sterling's musical career has spanned 25 years of performing wide-ranging styles, from Jazz, R&B, Pop, Rock & Roll and Classical. As a drummer and percussionist, performing and recording with artists such as The Don Ellis Band, Johnny Otis, and Lainie Kazan, Sterling spent 10 years touring

in North America and Europe. Gene Sterling recorded with the Harry Partch Ensemble in the late 1960s. Later tours to West Africa and Japan stimulated an interest in ethnic percussion techniques. Since 1982, he has been composing music for film and television.

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