

Two Jahlas by Lou Harrison
by
Margaret Fisher

To celebrate Lou Harrison's centennial in 2017, MAFISHCO has chosen a 1989 jahla by Harrison (from his Pedal Sonata). Lou was an avid dancer and composer for dance. Margaret Fisher, director of MAFISHCO, a performance and video group, was Lou's music copyist from 1986 to 2002. Here, Fisher adopts Lou's occasional strategy of drawing on earlier video work "The Spider and the Fly" to create new work.

To celebrate Lou Harrison's centennial in 2017, MAFISHCO In Jahla, Part 2, Fisher extends her 1994 performance work "To be seen in and out of the light, even . . ." (a collaboration with composer Charles Shere to stage his opera "The Bride Stripped Bare") to include a 1972 jahla by Harrison. Lou was an avid dancer and composer for dance. Margaret Fisher, director of MAFISHCO, a performance and video group, was Lou's music copyist from 1986 to 2002. Here, Fisher adopts Lou's occasional strategy of drawing on earlier work to create new work.

Some personal notes:

For the occasion of introducing me to Lou Harrison and his partner Bill Colvig, composer Bob Hughes prepared a Louis XIV grand supper that he served on the hand-carved dining table that once belonged to Henry Cowell and was passed down from Henry to Lou, and Lou to Bob. Conversation was over my head but the point was to bring me into the fold and Lou and Bill were extraordinarily welcoming and gracious.

Back in 1978 Bob was conducting the Arch Ensemble for New Music and our visits to Lou and Bill in Aptos were infrequent. Bob and I were touring our collaborative works in the US, or living in Japan or Italy. But after we returned from Japan in 1985, our visits became more frequent and Bob renewed their close friendship of the 1960s and early 1970s, and once again became involved in conducting, recording, and arranging Lou's music. With the help of Charles Hanson, Lou and Bill established Hermes Beard Press for the smaller ensemble works. Through Bob's intervention, I became music copyist for the Press and for Lou. We were constantly on the phone back and forth regarding the music. At first I copied out the scores in ink on vellum; among them, Grand Duo, Varied Trio, revisions to the opera Young Caesar, Summerfield Set, and many others.

The 1988 Young Caesar production by the Gay Men's Chorus in Portland, conducted by Bob, was wonderfully conceived and executed. During rehearsal, I took photographs, so I was not aware of Lou's interaction with the musicians, but I believe he was very pleased at the end of the evening's performance. The next day with Charles Shere we all toured the city to visit landmarks related to Lou's family, including an apartment complex still named for his mother's family, Silver Court.

I drove down from Portland with Lou and Bill to spell the hours at the wheel. As we passed through the glorious desert in Eastern Oregon, Lou recounted his years working with dancers. I wish had recorded those reminiscences. Lou was a graceful dancer himself. When we stopped at a Safeway for snacks, he quickly lowered himself on the asphalt in a full front to

back split to show how limber he still was.

When Lou received a commission for the Fourth Symphony, I told him we were moving on to digital engraving of the music in order to be able to extract the parts, which, knowing Lou, would undergo revision over time. To my surprise, they didn't! Learning Finale to create the score and parts was initiation by fire - the large orchestral work was done on a MAC SE!! At the time, a computer-savvy friend of Lou's was staying in a trailer on the property in Aptos, and I went down to generate the parts on his printer. It was a long day and I stayed overnight, Lou recounting his dreams and sipping whiskey before we went to bed. It was a privilege to spend some quiet time with Lou exchanging notes about the elusive nocturnal workings of the brain. I slept in Bill's room, awoke early to glorious light, and slipped out before the boys were astir.

When Lou and Bill came to visit us, we mounted private performances for them and a few mutual friends in our Emeryville studio; or they agreed to rough it overnight in our Emeryville warehouse lodgings, with communal bathroom across the hall.

As a dancer, I thought I would choreograph to Lou's music, but his dance music required a different concentration than I was after for interdisciplinary performance. I regret I did not find my way to the jahlas in these two videos while he was still alive. These two works were assembled to celebrate the centenary of Lou's birth.

We've heard wonderful concerts this centenary year in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Aptos, and Los Angeles. The music continues through the end of the year with concerts in Lapland, Germany and elsewhere. Eva Soltes at Harrison House in the desert (Joshua Tree), sponsored a 24-hour event on the birthday day, May 14th. You can see the trailer for her film on Lou, excerpts of which played at the SF Symphony's SoundBox tribute, the LA Phil's fully staged Young Caesar, and Phil Collins' New Music Works tribute to Lou in Santa Cruz. Harrison trailer is here: <http://harrisondocumentary.com/> Harrison House is here: <http://louharrisonhouse.org/>

Bill Alves and Brett Campbell just published a fabulous tome on Lou, Lou Harrison, American Musical Maverick. You can buy that on the Other Minds web page and support Other Minds at the same time. And while you're there, see the listing of past and future events: <http://otherminds.org/lou100/>

Lou and Bill together set a high bar for respect and grace in friendship, for mining the potential of the humanities informed by science, for taking personal responsibility for the direction of politics and our community. Lou's music reflects the joy, the beauty, and the seriousness of such an endeavor. He has left us many masterpieces that take our breath away, suspend time, and also move us forward to set a still higher bar.