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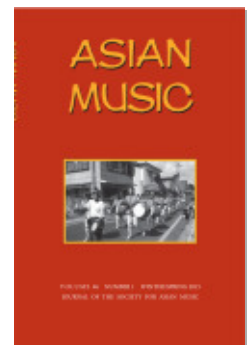
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## **Lou Harrison's Music for Western Instruments and Gamelan: Even More Western than It Sounds**

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# Lou Harrison's Music for Western Instruments and Gamelan: Even More Western than It Sounds

## *Henry Spiller*

“. . . West and East, both in Harrison's idiosyncratic style, meet in a ravishingly beautiful, unselfconscious and unforced way”

—Neil Sorrell (1992)

“Through his gamelan works Harrison completed his long-sought goal of uniting East and West”

—Leta E. Miller and Fredric Lieberman (1998, 173)

“So far I'm the first one, they keep saying, who has made—what is it?—a useful marriage between East and West”

—Lou Harrison to Richard Kostelanetz (1992, 398)

Critics and musicologists widely acknowledge composer Lou Harrison (1917–2003) as a pioneer in forging successful fusions between Eastern and Western music. Toward the end of his career, he focused much of his attention on composing music for gamelan, and among the most highly regarded of these fusion works are pieces that combine solo Western instruments and gamelan.<sup>1</sup>

Nobody—least of all Harrison himself—would characterize these fusion works as “authentic,” and Harrison's own goals in composing for gamelan were not to reproduce or even imitate traditional gamelan music. Yet Harrison relied extensively on traditional Javanese instrumental idioms, and on the competence of his musicians to fill in the details of their individual parts according to Javanese musical processes; the result was a musical surface with an exotic patina that many listeners perceived to represent authentic Javanese music. That Harrison seemed to put the Javanese elements of his music on the same footing as the Western elements led to assessments that the fusions were genuinely equitable blendings of East and West.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan Bernard attributes the appeal of Harrison's music to mainstream Western audiences to its ability to be “exotic and familiar at the same time” (Bernard 1998, 544). Much of what is familiar is rooted in Harrison's compositional process, and the contexts in which his music are performed, which, as Dwight Thomas argues, are “strongly grounded in the Western art music

tradition" (Thomas 1983, 100). What many hear as exotic—as Eastern—resides in the pieces' soundscapes: the unfamiliar instrumental timbres, tunings, and compositional forms and techniques that Harrison deploys in his work.

But do these exotic sounds really come from somewhere else? Much attention has been paid, for example, to Harrison's predilection for rational tuning systems (e.g., just intonations). In a brilliant analysis, Marc Perlman demonstrates how Harrison's superposition of just intonation onto gamelan tunings is a clear continuation of a Western discourse about tuning that has little, if anything, to do with Javanese musical aesthetics; Perlman demonstrates that Javanese gamelan tuners apply their own approaches to temperament to accommodate various Javanese vocal modes and individual musicians' personal interpretations (*embat*) of them (Perlman 1994). Harrison's reputation as a gamelan pioneer, however, has led some critics to take at face value the utterly false implication that traditional gamelan music is justly intoned.<sup>3</sup> Tuning, then, is one musical arena in which Harrison's gamelan music makes the exotic seem familiar by masking non-Western approaches to music-making with existing Western discourses—a practice which has the potential to mislead its listeners into believing they are engaging with a non-Western musical aesthetic when, in fact, they are not.

In this article, I focus on another such musical arena: Harrison's treatment of gamelan rhythm. First I describe some fundamental differences between Western rhythmic sensibilities and the treatment of time in gamelan music. Next, I discuss how Harrison treats this rhythmic sensibility in two of his pieces for solo Western instruments and gamelan to favor the Western rhythmic sensibility. Finally, I examine the significance of this Westernization of gamelan musical processes such as tuning and rhythm; I contend that it misleads many listeners to attribute a quality of authenticity to Harrison's gamelan music that overstates the equity of the works' fusion of West and East. Simply put: even the parts that Western audiences hear as authentic gamelan music are more Western than they sound.

### End-Weighted Rhythmic Groupings

Many well-read Western musicians have learned that the complex layers of polyphony in gamelan music arise from the simultaneous playing of many elaborations on a slow-moving skeleton melody (which has come to be known by the Javanese term *balungan*; see Sumarsam 1995, 144–53). The rhythmic coordination between the skeleton melody and its elaborations is not the way a typical Western musical sensibility might expect them to be, however. Ethnomusicologists such as Benjamin Brinner (1995, xxi; 2001) and Marc Perlman (2004, xvii–xviii), who bring a deep performing knowledge of Javanese gamelan music to their research, use the term *end-weighted* to characterize this difference

in rhythmic sensibility and to contrast it with typical Western front-weighted rhythms. To explain the difference, it is helpful to start with the distinction that some theorists of rhythm, such as Kramer<sup>4</sup> and Lerdahl and Jackendoff, make between *beat* (or *timepoint*) and *timespan*. Lerdahl and Jackendoff explain:

... beats, as such, do not have duration. ... To use a spatial analogy: beats correspond to geometric points rather than to the lines drawn between them. But, of course, beats occur in time; therefore an interval of time—a duration—takes place between successive beats. For such intervals we use the term *time-span*. In the spatial analogy, time-spans correspond to the spaces between geometric points. Time-spans have duration, then, and beats do not. (Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983, 18)

Lerdahl and Jackendoff subsequently define timespan as “an interval of time beginning at a beat of the metrical structure and extending up to, but not including, another beat” (1983, 18, 146). To most people trained in the Western tradition, this definition sounds unremarkable. Western music notation, for example, assumes this way of conceiving beats and timespans: a half note begins with its articulation on a beat and includes the timespan that follows it. It does not, however, extend to an understanding of the rhythm of gamelan music, which instead associates a given timespan with the beat that *follows* it, rather than with the beat that precedes it. An appropriate paraphrase of Lerdahl and Jackendoff to express this understanding of musical time would be to define a timespan as “an interval of time beginning just after, but not including, a beat and extending up to, and ending with, another beat.” Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of these concepts.

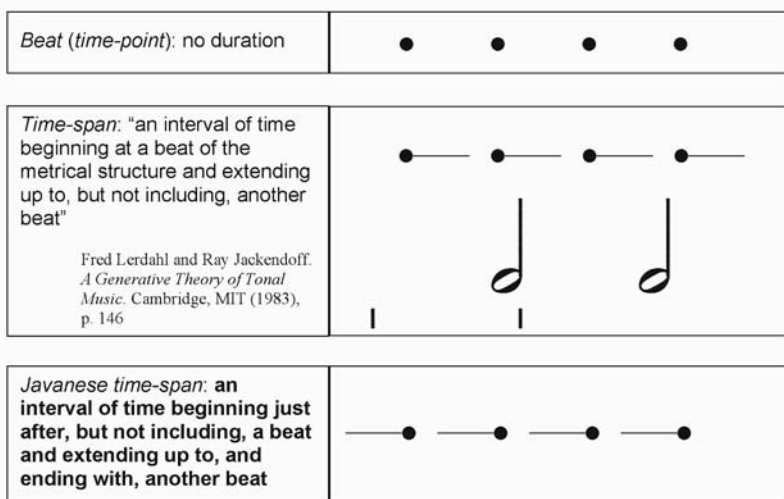


Figure 1. Front-weighted versus end-weighted meter.

A Western example might help clarify the distinction. Consider, for example, J. S. Bach's extremely well-known "Prelude" in C Major (No. 1 from *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, BWV 846; see Figure 2). Each measure begins with a bass note on the downbeat, which is sustained throughout the measure. It is subsequently decorated with an arpeggiated chord that relates harmonically to the sustained bass note. For example, the first measure has a C on the downbeat, which is then decorated with the note of a C-major triad in the following order: *egcege*. One way to hear the piece is as a slow-moving bass melody, each note of which is decorated by the arpeggiated harmony that follows it. The piece represents well the principle of elaboration following the sounding of a skeleton melody note—each measure stands as a unit, with its main note at the beginning, followed by figurations (see Figure 2a).

Hardja Susilo, the eminent Javanese musician and dancer and University of Hawai'i Professor Emeritus of Music, once confessed to me that this Bach Prelude sounded hopelessly illogical to him when he sang Gounod's "Ave Maria" (which co-opts the prelude as an accompaniment) as a student member of the chorus at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in the 1950s. His Javanese ear's predilection was to end-weight the figurations—to associate each arpeggiated elaboration with the bass note that follows it, rather than the one that precedes it. The first couple of measures sounded fine—he heard the first measure's *egcege* ineluctably and satisfyingly lead to the C at the beginning of the second measure (see Figure 2b), and the *dadfadf* lead to the third measure's first B. The next figuration, a dominant-seventh sonority, however, ended jarringly with the bass note C at the beginning of the fourth measure (see Figure 2c); after that, the piece continued to defy his expectations as it progressed. At some point during his studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the 1960s, however, Susilo experienced an epiphany—an "aha moment"—in which it became clear to him that his American colleagues were interpreting the



Figure 2. Excerpt from "Prelude" in C Major (No. 1 from *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, BWV 846). (a) Western "front-weighted" sensibility, (b) gamelan music "end-weighted" sensibility, (c) dissonant result of end-weighted sensibility.

“Prelude” quite differently. In that moment it became possible for him to hear the elaboration's rhythm as front-weighted rather than end-weighted, and also provided for him an explanation of why many of his gamelan students at UCLA were misinterpreting the Javanese melodies he was teaching them.

One of the consequences of this rhythmic sensibility in gamelan music is that the decorating figurations that instrumentalists play to elaborate important notes of the skeleton melody *precede* the actual sounding of that melody note—contrary to a Western predilection to elaborate in the timespan *following* a note's attack. Most Westerners who study gamelan performance long enough eventually experience a comparable “aha moment” with regard to the way they conceive, hear, and internalize how elaborations relate to the slow-moving skeleton melody of gamelan music. What at first may have seemed illogical or dissonant (in a way analogous to the way a G dominant-seventh chord is dissonant to a C bass note) suddenly makes perfect sense when the relationship of elaboration to main note is reversed. Like those optical illusions in which a shift in focus transforms a vase into two faces and vice versa (see Figure 3), a deceptively simple adjustment in perspective results in an entirely different engagement with the exact same stimulus. Before one learns how to make the mental adjustment, however, it is difficult to fully comprehend how one thing can have two different interpretations.

This end-weighted approach to rhythm applies to all levels of Javanese metric and rhythmic organization. Judith Becker bases her entire “theory of Javanese gamelan gongan forms” on the axiom that

The Javanese recognize two levels of stress, called *dhing* and *dhong*. . . . *Dhing* is a secondary level of stress, *dhong* is a primary level of stress. Thus the second of two elements is termed D (*dhong*), or strong stress, and the first is termed d (*dhing*), or weak stress. The *dhing-dhong* stress unit always occurs in the order, *dhing* followed by *dhong*. The *dhing-dhong* stress unit applies at every level of subdivision of the gongan. (Becker 1980, 108)

Becker is stating that all Javanese rhythmic units—whether very short or very long—begin with a less-stressed unit (beat, grouping, phrase, etc.) and end with a stressed unit. Although Western music frequently includes large-scale *dhing-dhong* stress units—an antecedent/consequent pair of phrases, for example—Western beats and measures are exclusively front-weighted (*dhong-dhing*, to extend Becker's terminology).

A very practical manifestation of the end-weighted *dhing-dhong* stress unit is apparent when one listens to a gamelan musician count a music (or dance) phrase. In Indonesian languages (such as Javanese, Sundanese, and the national language Indonesian), the numbers one through four have two syllables each; for example, in Sundanese, counting from one to four is *hiji dua tilu opat*. When

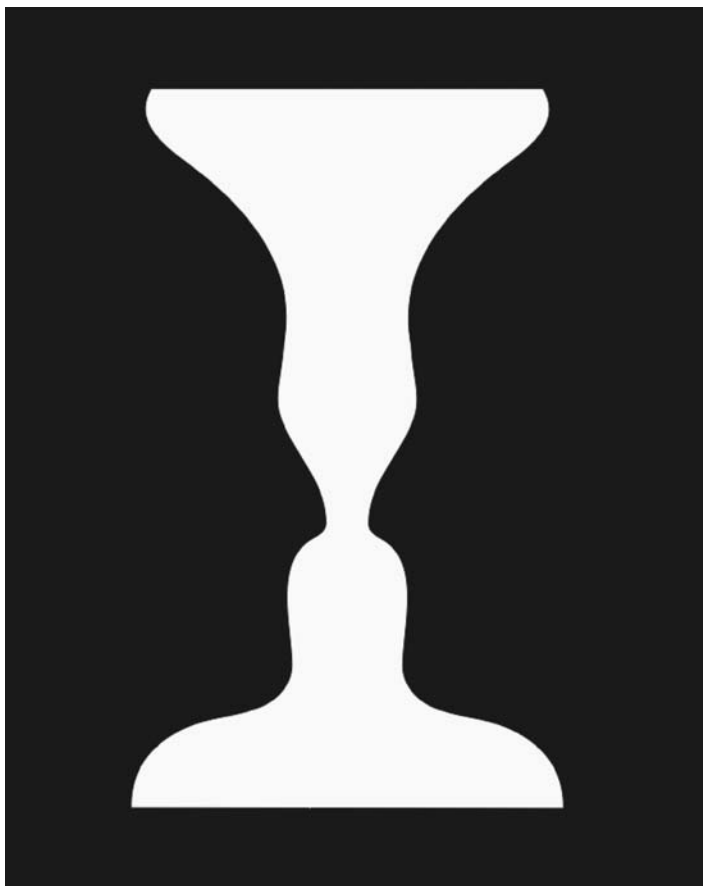


Figure 3. Vase or faces? If the white is perceived as the foreground, it is a vase; if the white is perceived as the background, it is two faces looking at each other.

marking off musical counts, the stress is placed on the second syllable, while the first syllables are vocalized before the beat: *hiji dua tilu opat*. In English, only the number seven has two syllables; when counting an eight-beat phrase, an American musician generally will place the accent on seven's first syllable, relegating the second syllable to the timespan following the beat ("seven"). A Javanese gamelan musician counting in English, however, is more likely to place the second syllable on the beat and put the first syllable in the timespan before the beat ("seven").

A gamelan-oriented sensibility places the metrical emphasis in any rhythmic grouping at the end of the group rather than at the beginning, and associates

any rhythmic subdivisions with the beat that comes after, rather than before, the subdivisions. Given 4-beat metrical groupings, most people familiar with Western music would regard the beat with the strongest accent as the first beat; they would count two 4-beat measures as “**one** two three four **one** two three four.” An Indonesian listener familiar with gamelan music is likely to hear the same accents, but if pressed to count it out, would be more likely to regard the strongest accent as the last beat in a group of four rather than the first, and count the same pattern “**four** one two three **four** one two three” (and mourn the absence of a stressed beat **four** to bring things to an end).

Javanese *kepatihan* notation, which specifies pitches in the anhemitonic pentatonic *slendro* or heptatonic *pelog* tuning systems with the numerals 1–7 (see Figure 4), facilitates this approach to counting by indicating metrical units of four beats by grouping them together visually and separating each grouping with white space (such a grouping is often called a *gatra*). A gamelan musician would count each 4-note grouping as 1-2-3-4, with the strongest beat—the metrical “accent”—understood to fall on the fourth beat of each grouping (see Figure 4a). To count such a grouping in a Western way and maintain the metrical accents would require counting across groupings (see Figure 4b).

Musicians providing elaborating parts do not always elaborate each and every note in the skeleton melody; rather, they regard pitches that are stressed (i.e., *dhong*) as “goal” pitches (sometimes called *seleh*), and choose an appropriate figuration (*cengkok*, *sekarang*, *kembangan*) to lead rhythmically and melodically to the goal pitch.

Some argue that this difference in rhythmic sensibility is merely a matter of semantics—the stresses are in the same place, so what difference does

Ledriang **Pangkur**, laras pelog pathet barang

*Buka*

• 3 • 2 • 3 • 2 3 3 2 2 • 7 • ⑥

*Trama lancar*

[ 3 2 3 7 3 2 7 ⑥ 7 6 3 2 5 3 2 7 3 5 3 2 6 5 3 2 5 3 2 7 3 2 7 ⑥ ]

a. gamelan-style counting: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

b. Western counting: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1

c. Harrison's "compromise": 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1

Figure 4. *Kepatihan* notation (the numerals stand for pitches) with (a) gamelan-style, (b) Western, and (c) Harrison's “compromise” counting.

Source: <http://www.calarts.edu/~drummond/pdf/p7/Pangkur.pdf>.



it make how it is counted? In a discussion on the gamelan list email group, Hardja Susilo related a helpful metaphor for how profound this subtle difference actually is:

The way I explain this musical practice is by making an analogy. Let's say a number of us are in Rotterdam and thinking about going to Amsterdam. Your percussionist friend asks "what time are we leaving?" His Western musician friends would say "At one o'clock." Realizing that some of you are walking, running, riding a bike, motorcycles, and that I am more interested that you all be in Amsterdam by eight o'clock, my answer would have been "It doesn't matter what time you leave, one, or two, or three o'clock, as long as we all get there by EIGHT." It would make no sense if you guys were leaving at the same time, like one o'clock. . . . In other words Javanese music is anticipatory. The end determines what you are doing leading to it. . . . It is goal oriented.<sup>5</sup>

Susilo's explanation suggests that this difference is quite significant and extends beyond mere labeling to a realm of fundamental musical conceptualization—perhaps beyond the realm of music as well. Subdividing before, rather than after, the beat draws attention to the imminent arrival of that beat; melodic figurations that lead to stressed beats create a sense of anticipation for them, and contribute to the perception that those stressed beats are marking important temporal milestones. Some scholars, including Judith Becker (e.g., 1979, 1980, 1993), Stanley Hoffman (1978), David Goldsworthy (2005), and myself (Spiller 2004), have proposed the organization of much Javanese gamelan music into cyclical forms. These forms, often called *colotomic* forms or structures in ethnomusicological discourse on gamelan music, are articulated by regular interlocking patterns of strokes on various gongs and gong chimes of contrasting timbres, and reinforce a social emphasis on a concept of time as a series of repeating events. The predictable coincidences that occur as the different strands of melody and colotomic markers converge are homologous to a perception that history repeats itself on many levels: observable cycles, such as the generational cycle of social roles individuals play as their lives progress, agricultural cycles, temporal and astrological cycles, as well as matters of faith, often associated with Hinduism and Buddhism, such as reincarnation of souls and large-scale temporal epochs.

The nature of time is a difficult philosophical problem, and it is absurdly reductive to suggest that Easterners conceive time exclusively as cyclic while Westerners see time as linear. Such concepts of time are not mutually exclusive, and all humans, I suspect, rely on both models to order their lives. I do not think it is reductive, however, to argue that an aesthetic appreciation of gamelan music's end-weighted approach to rhythm helps to construct a particular way of engaging with time and space and exerts some influence on the ways in which individuals conduct themselves through the universe. To my mind, this difference

in rhythmic understanding is among the subtlest yet most significant differences between gamelan music and Western music. Western students of gamelan music who minimize the significance of this difference, I suspect, have yet to experience the “aha moment.”

### Lou Harrison and End-Weightedness

Like other diligent Western students of gamelan music, Lou Harrison eventually became aware of this difference in rhythmic sensibility. He addressed the notational issue once in a 2002 interview with Alan Baker; the “Nothing” to which he refers in the following quote is the white space that separates 4-note groupings in kepatihan notation (see Figure 4; Figure 4c is a rendition of the compromise counting system Harrison proposes):

There are groups of four [beats] and then a gap. Nothing. The accent is just before the nothing. So it's hard for people to think one, two, three, four, but I thought of an answer for that . . . it's a countdown: four, three, two, one. Away we go! And that works—[students] get over their fear of the four right away. That's the only difference, otherwise everything is the same. (Baker 2002)

These comments demonstrate Harrison's intellectual understanding of the issue, but also a fundamental discomfort with it. He also expressed this discomfort with end-weighted rhythm in a letter he sent to Jody Diamond on the topic:

ear] ody, A sy ouc ans eef romt hisl etter, t hes trongb eata tt hee ndi ss omewhatu nsetting<sup>6</sup>

(Dear Jody. As you can see from this letter, the strong beat at the end is somewhat unsettling.)

Diamond's clever response to Harrison's end-weighted letter “was to send him a Bach chorale, with the resolution and fermata on the *fourth* note of the measure” to demonstrate that end-weightedness is not a completely foreign concept in Western musical aesthetics. Certainly most Western cadences are end-oriented, even those which are not emphasized with fermatas. This does not, however, mean the Western-trained ears apprehend the stress patterns of such cadences as *dhing-dhong*, and it is at that level of comprehension where I believe a most significant difference in musical sensibilities lies. Some theorists might explain this in terms of rhythm versus meter; Schachter (quoted in Hasty 1997, 17) asserts that “one of the most obvious aspects of metrical organization [is that] the emphasis [is] on beginnings.” Rhythms, however, are often goal-oriented and end-oriented. Kramer might characterize this difference as rhythmic accent versus metric accent: “A composition's first complete (hyper)measure usually begins with an accented beat that is truly in, not prior to, the music, and it contains several subsequent timepoints, usually evenly spaced, of varying but lesser

accentual strength,” whereas “Rhythmic groups move toward their primary accent or away from it; metric units do not move, even though their constituent music may be pushing away from the preceding or toward the upcoming rhythmic accent” (Kramer 1988, 96). Chris Miller argues that there is no real Javanese concept of “meter” as such: “Rhythmic regularity is so pervasive on all levels, and explicitly pervasive through multiple levels of pulsation and multiple levels of phrasing, that there is no need to conceptualize an underlying metric grid” (Chris Miller 2001, 44).

In any case, Harrison found it challenging to engage with a Javanese rhythmic sensibility on its own terms; instead, he found ways to approach it using compositional techniques that supported his own aesthetic sensibilities.

### ***Main Bersama-sama***

Some of Harrison’s earliest compositions for Western instruments and gamelan were intended for performance on the set of Sundanese *degung* instruments from West Java he acquired around 1975. Undang Sumarna, a Sundanese musician lecturing at the University of California, Santa Cruz (near Harrison’s Aptos home), arranged for the purchase of the instruments and taught Harrison some basic *degung* repertory—pieces such as “Catrik” and “Lalayaran,” which have truly skeletal basic melodies that consist of as few as only four goal pitches. Musicians playing *degung* instruments such as *bonang* (14-pot gong chime), *panerus* (lower-pitched metallophone), and *peking* (higher-pitched metallophone), flesh out the basic melody by performing stereotyped melodic figurations that lead up to and end with each goal note; the goal note itself is usually played on the *jengglong* (low-pitched gong chime). Sundanese theorists sometimes call pieces of this type *sekar alit* (“small piece”).

The idioms of many instruments involve creating melodies that move in primarily stepwise motion toward the upcoming structural pitch (see Figure 5a). A typical *bonang* idiom in *sekar alit* is to anticipate the upcoming structural pitch by iterating it off the beat in broken octaves (see Figure 5b).

Figure 5 consists of three musical staves. The top staff, labeled '(a) panerus', shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The melody is stepwise, moving from a low pitch to a higher structural pitch. The middle staff, labeled '(b) bonang', shows a treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. The melody consists of repeated eighth-note patterns that anticipate the structural pitch by playing it in broken octaves. The bottom staff, labeled 'structural pitch', shows a bass clef with the same key signature, indicating the target notes on a lower register.

Figure 5. *Degung* instrumental parts: (a) *panerus* (stepwise) and (b) *bonang* (broken octaves) (transnotated from Burhan Sukarma’s cipher notation).

Figure 6 consists of three musical staves labeled (a), (b), and (c), each showing a different section of the score for *Main Bersama-sama*. The staves are labeled on the left as follows: *swling*, *saron*, *panerus*, *bonang*, *rinaike*, *gambang*, *kendang*, *syamping gong*, and *gong*.

- (a)** Shows the last few measures of the first (unison) section, measures 5-12. The tempo is marked *Allegro*. The music is in a unison texture.
- (b)** Shows an excerpt of the second (sekar alit) section, measures 13-20. The tempo is marked *Allegro*. Several notes in the *bonang* and *saron* parts are circled, indicating specific rhythmic or melodic features.
- (c)** Shows bonang's broken octave figurations following the skeleton melody pitch, measures 21-28. The tempo is marked *Allegro*. Several notes in the *saron* part are circled, indicating specific rhythmic or melodic features.

Figure 6. Excerpt from score of *Main Bersama-sama* (source: Harrison 1985): (a) last few measures of the first (unison) section, (b) excerpt of second (sekar alit) section, and (c) bonang's broken octave figurations that follow (rather than anticipate) the skeleton melody pitch.

Harrison diligently transcribed the parts he learned for each instrument into staff notation. Several years later, in 1978, Harrison composed several pieces for soloists and degung, including *Main Bersama-sama* for degung and French horn.<sup>7</sup> *Main Bersama-sama* has two sections; the first section (Figure 6a includes the last few measures of the first section) is a melody that all of the melodic gamelan instruments play in unison. The second section (see an excerpt in Figure 6b) is reminiscent of a sekar alit; in *Main Bersama-sama*, there is generally one skeletal note per measure, marked by a jengglong stroke. Harrison wrote out complete parts for each of the gamelan instruments, for the most part based on the idiomatic stereotyped patterns that Undang Sumarna taught him. In most cases, these parts follow the conventions of “traditional” degung figurations, that is, stepwise figurations anticipating the upcoming goal pitch. The notated bonang part includes the typical idiomatic broken octaves; instead of anticipating the upcoming structural pitch, however, the part directs the bonang player to *sustain* the previous structural pitch instead (see Figure 6c). The result is not especially dissonant to Western sensibilities, but it utterly confounds normative Sundanese expectations.

The explanation for the adjustment seems obvious to me: The melody that Harrison composed for the *suling* (bamboo flute) and horn has clear harmonic implications. The first few notes imply a G major triad; the first 4 measures of the solo part imply a chord progression from G major to B minor (at m. 11) back to G major (at m. 13). The second half of the solo part also implies a chord progression, this time ending with B minor (at m. 17).

I believe that Harrison conceived the gamelan part he composed as a kind of chordal accompaniment that explicitly supports the melody’s implied harmony, with the structural pitches providing a kind of bass line (ironically analogous to that of Bach’s “Prelude” in C), and the other gamelan instruments providing similarly analogous decorating figurations that prolong the bass note’s harmony. Although these figurations are stepwise, they outline triads; the effect of triadic harmony is further strengthened because “stepwise” in the context of the hemitonic pentatonic degung tuning, which can be roughly approximated with the Western pitches G–F#–D–C–B, includes a couple of major thirds (D–F# and G–B), which again supports a harmonic hearing of the figurations. A conventional bonang part, in which the instrument anticipates the upcoming structural pitch, however, would have had the opposite effect—a repeated note that is dissonant to the implied harmony.

Harrison explains the genesis of the piece’s title: “There is a charming and heartwarming phrase in Indonesian—‘main bersama sama’—which means ‘playing together,’ and it carries the full sense of transcultural warmth and understanding.”<sup>8</sup> And, indeed, *Main Bersama-sama* gives the *suling* and horn, acting as metonyms of East and West, essentially the same parts, creating the impression that they are engaged in an equal dialogue, which projects Harrison’s “sense of

transcultural warmth and understanding.” However, as I have shown, the piece makes the gamelan’s rhythmic sensibility conform to Western expectations, which in turn transforms gamelan music’s layered, goal-oriented, end-weighted approach to polyphony into a sort of Western homophonic, front-weighted, harmonic accompaniment. In combination with the piece’s tuning anomalies—Harrison “clarified” (as he put it) his gamelan’s tuning to a rational Pythagorean system of his own design (Harrison and Colvig 1983)—and the bamboo flute’s distinctly non-Sundanese idiom,<sup>9</sup> it becomes clear that any “playing together” we hear takes place on exclusively Western terms, despite the exotic sound and the appearance of equity.

### “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel”

Harrison’s “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel” for concert harp and Javanese gamelan, one of the movements in the 1991 suite *Homage to Pacifica*, presents a different take on end-versus front-weighted rhythms. It also reflects well over a decade more of deep engagement with gamelan music on Harrison’s part. The piece, like many of Harrison’s gamelan pieces from this period, makes use of central Javanese kepatihan notation rather than Western staff notation for the gamelan, and relies for the most part on the ability of the musicians to craft idiomatic instrumental parts based on their knowledge of Javanese instrumental techniques rather than on their ability to read detailed parts rendered in staff notation.

Harrison regarded Handel as a principal influence; he admired Handel’s melodies because they are “at once arbitrary and inevitable. At any one point they could go in any direction,” and identified with Handel himself because “he was an immensely imaginative composer with a cosmopolitan outlook too” (Kostelanetz and Harrison 1992, 398–9). Harrison told me that the inspiration for “Mr. Handel” was the four-note opening motif of the first movement of Handel’s *Harp Concerto* (Op. 4, No. 6) in B-flat major (see Figure 7).

He was delighted to learn that he could play the motif in the pelog tuning of “Si Betty,” one of the aluminum gamelan sets he and William Colvig built, if he



Figure 7. Opening bars of Handel’s *Concerto* (Op. 4, No. 6) for harp (or organ) in B-flat major.

transposed the motif to end on F rather than B-flat.<sup>10</sup> The 4-note motif serves as a thematic cell for the entire piece. I suspect Harrison was drawn to the Handel motif because it sounds like a Javanese embellishment both melodically and rhythmically—a 4-note, stepwise pattern that leads to and ends on the accented, structural goal note. Yet, it also sounds like a Western rhythmic and melodic gesture—a scalar anacrusis, starting on the dominant and establishing the tonic on the first beat of the measure. Harrison hit upon an isolated “homophone” that makes sense in both Javanese and Western musical idioms.

Once again, the work’s surface presents a seemingly equitable mix of East and West; many aspects of the work celebrate other “homophones” of central Javanese gamelan style and Baroque orchestral music: (1) the Baroque contrast between solo and tutti textures is mirrored by Javanese *gadon* (soft) and *soran* (loud) styles; (2) the Baroque outline of melody/bass is reflected by the Javanese notion of skeleton melody played on the keyed metallophones punctuated by low-pitched gongs and gong-chimes; and (3) the grand ritardando at the end of both Baroque and central Javanese pieces.

Is the homophonous 4-note motif rhythmically front- or end-weighted? Disambiguating it depends not only on how one’s ear has been trained, but on the surrounding musical materials as well. And by taking the melody in different directions, in homage to that characteristic of Handel’s melodies he so admired, Harrison changes the listener’s perceptions of the motif’s weightedness.

“In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel” has three sections. The A section is comparable to the tutti sections of a Baroque concerto. The gamelan introduces the A melody (most of the phrases of which begin with the homophonous motif; see Figure 8 for the first few measures of the harp’s version of the melody); after the first iteration, the gamelan repeats it with variations specified by Harrison in rehearsals (but not in the score), including *imbal* (interlocking figurations) on some of the metallophones, which anticipate the next structural pitch and thus strengthen a Javanese end-weighted interpretation of the rhythm (see Figure 9a). A bonang figuration (which, again, Harrison did not notate in the score but specified verbally during rehearsals) in this second iteration, however, contradicts a

Figure 8. “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel”: Excerpt of A section (harp).

The image displays four systems of musical notation. Each system consists of four staves: (a) saron imbal, (b) bonang, skeleton melody, and kempul (bassline). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C).

- System 1:**
  - (a) saron imbal: A complex, fast, interlocking rhythmic pattern.
  - (b) bonang: A melodic line with a circled section of notes.
  - skeleton melody: A simple melodic line with a square box highlighting a specific note.
  - kempul (bassline): A bass line with fingerings 7 1 2 3 7 5 3 7 3 3.
- System 2:**
  - (a) sn: A complex, fast, interlocking rhythmic pattern.
  - (b) bn: A melodic line with a circled section of notes.
  - sn: A melodic line with a square box highlighting a specific note.
  - kp: A bass line with fingerings 1 6 7 2 7 7 1 2 3 7 5 3.
- System 3:**
  - (a) sn: A complex, fast, interlocking rhythmic pattern.
  - (b) bn: A melodic line with two circled sections of notes.
  - sn: A melodic line with a square box highlighting a specific note.
  - kp: A bass line with fingerings 7 1 1 6 4 5 7 5.

Figure 9. (a) End-weighted saron imbal (interlocking) figurations—one saron (metallophone) anticipates the goal pitch (indicated with squares in the skeleton melody part), while the second saron plays its neighbor note on the offbeats to produce a very fast oscillating figuration; and (b) special front-weighted bonang figurations (circled) following the “goal” tones (indicated with squares in the skeleton melody part). The *kempul* (low-pitched gong chime) parts specified by Harrison in rehearsals provide a subdominant-dominant-tonic bass line.



Figure 10. “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel”: B section, mm 1–4 (harp); numerals between staves indicate the gamelan’s skeleton melody notes.

Javanese interpretation of the rhythm by embellishing a structural pitch after it has been sounded (see Figure 9b). In the third repetition of the A section, the harp enters, playing the melody along with a bass line; the harp, too, embellishes some of the structural pitches after they have been reached.

In the B and C sections, the harp dominates and most of the loud gamelan instruments drop out (while the harp has distinct B and C sections, the gamelan accompaniment for both sections is the same). In the B section, the harp part starts out with the now familiar 4-note motif. Instead of stopping at the top of the motif and descending (as the melody did in the A section), however, the B section melody barrels on in a continuous stream of eighth notes. By the third measure of the B section, the harp part has quite literally “turned around” the rhythmic sense of the homophonous motif—it begins to play sustained melody notes decorated by descending figurations consisting of 3 eighth notes that *follow* the “goal” pitch (see Figure 10, m. B-3). The anacrusis notes (or figurations leading to a goal pitch, depending on how one looks at it) have been transformed into a decorative gesture that unambiguously trails the melody, with no possibility for an end-weighted interpretation.

Figure 11. “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel”: C section, mm 12–14 (harp).



Figure 12. “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel”: Grand V–I cadence (harp).

After repeating the B section, the gamelan reenters with a thunderous A section, which the harp then repeats (an octave higher). In the C section, once again, the harp immediately turns the motif around, but this time with arpeggiated decorations that can be interpreted as chordal embellishments that follow the main melody notes (see Figure 11). The harp part in the C section is, in effect, even more indisputably Western than it was in the B section because it not only reverses the motif’s weightedness, it reinforces the rhythmic reinterpretation by providing figurations that relate harmonically to the main notes as well. To my ear, most of m. C-12 implies an A-minor triad; the first part of m. C-13 implies an F-major triad. In m. C-14, the implied harmony moves from an A-minor triad to an E-minor triad.

The presentation of various homophones in “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel” once again invites interpretation as an equitable mix of East and West. But, as in *Main Bersama-sama*, in the long run the East’s contributions make sense only in Western terms. Over the course of the piece, the various contexts in which the homophonous 4-note motif appears diminish the possibilities of hearing it as a Javanese-style end-weighted motif. The last thing that rings in the listeners’ ears is something undeniably Western—Harrison tacked on a grand coda with the bass line of an incontrovertible perfect authentic V–I cadence at the end of the piece (see Figure 12).

## Conclusion

In his book *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*, Tim Taylor points out that in spite of collaborators’ best intentions, “When western musicians appropriate music from somewhere else and use it in their music, or even work with non-western musicians, the old subordinating structures of colonialism are often

reproduced in the new music” (Taylor 1997, 40). I argue that this is indeed the case with Harrison’s music for Western instruments with gamelan; although he presents the gamelan-derived materials in a way that seems to grant them equity with his own Western compositional processes, it strikes me as naïve to suppose that they represent only the “transcultural warmth and understanding” with which Harrison and his fans imbue them. I contend that much of what appeals to Western audiences in Harrison’s pieces, in fact, lies precisely in the way they *seem* to meet other musical worlds more than halfway while covertly asserting Western musical sensibilities, making the music comfortably (again, in Jonathan Bernard’s words) “exotic and familiar at the same time” (Bernard 1998, 544).

This analysis is, in Steven Feld’s terms, an “anxious narrative,” which emphasizes how musical hybrids “incite or erase musical diversity,” as opposed to more “celebratory” narratives that see “fusion forms as rejections of bounded, fixed, or essentialized identities” (Feld 2000, 152). Harrison’s own vision of the world of music was unabashedly celebratory; Lieberman and Leta Miller characterize his concept of the world as “one ‘big culture’ with a rich palette of subgenres from which to choose” (Lieberman and Leta Miller 1999, 173). Leta Miller also writes that Harrison “often compares the compositional process to a ‘delightful game,’ choosing from toys he has ‘spread out over a wide acreage’ and mingling them in novel combinations” (Leta Miller 1999).

We should not forget, however, that it was Harrison’s roots in a powerful Western hegemony that enabled his easy access to this palette and provided the freedom to pick and choose from among these “toys.” Detached from awareness of the power structures that enabled his liberties, Harrison could guilelessly conflate Western rhythmic sensibility into an otherwise gamelan-like musical texture to create what seemed to be a true hybrid. But these hybrids’ reliance on hidden Western rhythmic sensibilities makes them examples of what James Boros has characterized as misleading “emblems of cultural diversity . . . which are in fact simple and safe icons of compliance with the representational norms imposed by the sanctioning culture” (Boros 1995, 541).

Feld suggests, and I agree, that both anxious and celebratory narratives “embrace musical plurality” (Feld 2000, 154) and, in doing so, comment on the inevitable process of musical change. It is not my intention to discredit Harrison or his music by exposing him as some kind of colonial overlord—there was no malevolence hiding behind that well-known jolly façade. Rather, I hope to encourage those who find beauty and meaning in Harrison’s music to interrogate more closely their own values about music, identity, and power. What elements of it do we accept? Which do we reject? Do we receive Harrison’s works differently from hybrids generated by Indonesian composers? I assert that the taking-for-granted of musical processes—such as a front-weighted approach to rhythm—is directly analogous to accepting the easy way in which those with power blindly allow their own values to trump the values of Others, all the while

patting themselves on the back about how well they have achieved some sort of equity. Harrison's music is even more Western than it sounds—not only in the way it treats rhythm, but in the way it contributes to perpetuating Western musical hegemony in the name of hybridity as well.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leta Miller and Lieberman list the following works in the category “Gamelan and Western solo instrument”: *Suite for Violin and American Gamelan* (1974); *Main Bersama-sama* (for Sundanese gamelan degung and French horn, 1978); *Threnody for Carlos Chávez* (for gamelan degung and viola, 1978); *Bubaran Robert* (originally composed in 1976, solo piccolo trumpet part added in 1981); *Double Concerto* (for violin, cello, and Javanese gamelan, 1982); *A Cornish Lancaran* (revised to include saxophone solo in 1987); *Philemon and Baukis* (for violin and Javanese gamelan, 1987); and *Concerto for Piano with Javanese Gamelan* (1987) (Leta Miller and Lieberman 1998, 278). A 1992 compilation of Harrison's *Music for Gamelan with Western Instruments*, distributed by the American Gamelan Institute, includes, in addition to most of the pieces listed above, *Coyote Stories/The Foreman's Song Tune* (for Javanese gamelan with tenor voice) and *Gending in Honor of Aphrodite* (for Javanese gamelan, harp, and chorus). Some of the movements from Harrison's *Homage to Pacifica* (1991) should be added to this list, including “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel” (for harp and Javanese gamelan) and “In Honor of Mark Twain” (for chorus and Javanese gamelan). Choreographer Mark Morris used three of these pieces—“In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel,” “In Honor of Mark Twain,” and *Bubaran Robert*—for his 1991 choreography entitled *World Power*. It should be noted that the author was the harp soloist for the premiere performances and the recording of “In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel” (*Gamelan Music*, MusicMasters 01612-67091-2).

<sup>2</sup> In some respects it may even appear that Harrison was bending over backwards to privilege the Indonesian over the Western. He was adamant that any Western instruments he employed must conform to gamelan tunings, rather than the other way around. He said, “I never combine a Western instrument unless . . . it can play pitches that can correspond with gamelan tuning” (Cizmic 1999). In a similar vein, he is quoted as saying, “I would not write for a gamelan with a western orchestra—that is to say, the gamelan as soloist, and the western orchestra as accompanist. I couldn't do that because there is no congruence in the tuning systems” (Baker 2002).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Wilfrid Mellers wrote, “It was in 1960 that Harrison made his first extended visit to Java, sketching out on the boat the score of a *Concerto in Slendro* for solo violin, two tack pianos, celesta and percussion, in which the three movements are strictly tuned to Javanese *slendro* modes—the Prime Pentatonic (‘the most common and generally loved of all man's modes—practically the Human Song’) and its associated Minor Pentatonic” (Mellers 1997, 34). David Nicholls, too, takes Harrison at his word that the two just anhemitonic pentatonic scales prescribed for his 1961 *Concerto in Slendro* are, in fact, *slendro* tunings (Nicholls 1996, 574).

<sup>4</sup> Kramer makes the same distinction between timepoints and timespans: “Whereas a timespan is a specific duration . . . a timepoint really has no duration. We hear events that start or stop at timepoints, but we cannot hear the timepoints themselves. A timepoint is thus analogous to a point in geometric space” (Kramer 1988, 82).

<sup>5</sup> Hardja Susilo, message “Fw: ‘gamelan’ in other places” to Gamelan Listserv dated April 30, 2005 (<http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/archives/gamelan.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Jody Diamond, message “Re: end-weightedness” to Gamelan Listserv dated May 5, 2005 (<http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/archives/gamelan.html>). In the message, Diamond acknowledges that this is an approximation of the actual letter’s text.

<sup>7</sup> The other two pieces are *Serenade for Betty Freeman and Franco Assetto* for degung and suling (Sundanese bamboo flute) and *Threnody for Carlos Chávez* for viola and degung. All three pieces were recorded under Harrison’s supervision and released by Composers Recording, Inc., as *American Masters: Lou Harrison* on LP (SD-455) in 1981 and CD (CD-613) in 1991. A new recording of *Threnody for Carlos Chávez* was released by New Albion (NA122) in 2003.

<sup>8</sup> In liner notes for the CD entitled *Gamelan Music* (MusicMasters 01612–67091–2).

<sup>9</sup> Harrison’s long, breathless phrases are at odds with the Sundanese suling idiom, which is characterized by relatively short motifs, separated by brief silences, that are strung into longer phrases.

<sup>10</sup> Si Betty’s pelog tuning is a just intonation approximation of pelog which, according to Harrison, had been approved by his Javanese gamelan teacher, K. R. T. Wasitodipuro, known at the time of his death as K. P. H. Natapraja and more familiarly called Pak Cokro (see Harrison and Colvig 1983). On paper the intonation of these 4 pitches is quite far from any believable diatonic whole-step/whole-step/half-step tuning:

C	[8/7]	D	[13/12]	E	[14/13]	F
	231.2		138.6		128.3	(cents)

However, Harrison admits in the liner notes to *Gamelan Music* that he “raised the second pitch [i.e., the ‘E’] a little,” so that the D–E interval would be closer to a major second, and the E–F interval closer to a minor second. In any case, the fourth between C and F is a truly perfect fourth by just intonation standards ( $8 * 13 * 14 / 7 * 12 * 13 = 1456 / 1092 = 4 / 3$ ), setting up the all-important dominant-tonic relationship.

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