

JUST GUITARS

John Schneider, adapted guitars

Suite for National Steel (1952/2002)..... Lou Harrison

Jabla • Solo • Palace Music • Threnody • Serenado por Gitaro

Men are Men & Mountains are Mountains (2007)John Schneider

*In Memoriam James Tenney
electric guitar*

Tombeau for Lou Harrison (2006).....John Schneider

Plaint • Passacaglia • Valse Triste • Jabla

♦ intermission ♦

Quando Cosas Malas Caen del Cielo (2003).Terry Riley

• National Broadstreet March • Quando Cosas Malas Caen del Cielo

The Tavern (1998) Ben Johnston

(1926)

1. *Prelude*
2. *Who Says Words With My Mouth*
3. *A Community of the Spirit*
4. *A Children's Game*
5. *The Many Wines*
6. *Special Plates*
7. *Burnt Kabob*
8. *The New Rule*

Lou Harrison was one of the most extraordinary musical minds of the 20th century. Poet, dancer, calligrapher, maker & player of many instruments, fluent in Esperanto & American Sign Language, ardent Pacifist, voracious reader, his music is as bold, expansive, and elegantly singular as his personality. Having worked closely with such luminaries as Henry Cowell, Arnold Schoenberg, Charles Ives, Harry Partch & John Cage, Harrison went on to embrace non-Western traditions, integrating the music of other cultures into his robust musical output. I had been playing the music found in the ***Suite for National Steel Guitar*** for many years on various refretted just intonation guitars, but the creation of an 11-limit

just National Steel guitar for Lou's *Scenes from Nek Chand* (2002) inspired a new set of arrangements that put familiar works in new modes. These new interpretations delighted the composer so much that he requested charts for the tunings for his personal records.

Men are Men & Mountains are Mountains – Motto: *After James Tenney, men are men & music is music, only the feet are a little bit off the ground.*

A tuning/arpeggio study where the left hand never touches the fingerboard but serves only to retune the open strings in a series of modulating just intonation harmonies. It begins with the G-major triad found on the open 2nd, 3rd & 4th strings of a standard equal tempered guitar, but returns some twelve minutes later to the same chord which, somehow, is now slightly higher than before (and perfectly in tune).

Tombeau for Lou Harrison - This musical 'tombstone' marks the passing of the divine Mr. Harrison in a manner reminiscent of the lute or harpsichord *tombeaux* of the French Baroque, and was written specifically for the refretted National Steel Guitar.

The initial keening of the *Plaint* is followed by descending repetitions of a *Passacaglia* (with nods to both Purcell & Harrison's teacher Schoenberg), which itself begins to descend as the movement progresses. The grieving gradually subsides with the *Valse Triste*, whose bittersweet harmonies remind us that the dance of life continues in spite of loss, while the spritely *Jabla* varies a theme from Harrison's lovely *Music Primer* and is resplendent with the energetic inertia of Harrison's final decades, only to be cut short, mid-leap, as was the composer's life. The final measures are in keeping with the onomatopoeic images of several 17th century predecessors which represented a soul's upward journey towards heaven with a final ascending scale (or the infamous descending scale which, rather than condemn the deceased to eternal damnation, simply described one composer's ultimate corporeal demise, caused by the artist unintentionally descending a staircase, headfirst).

Mix unequal parts of jazz pianist, raga singer, seminal minimalist, tabla player, saxophonist, tape composer and world traveler, and one begins to get an idea of the myriad influences that have inspired Terry Riley's singular music. The London Sunday Times recently named the composer "one of the 1000 makers of the 20th Century." Riley's initial interest in the guitar was doubtless inspired by his son Gyan's virtuosity on the instrument, and has thus far resulted in the huge cycle *The Book of Abeyozzud*, begun in 1993. The recent entry, ***Quando Cosas Malas Caen del Cielo*** (When Bad Things Fall From the Sky) was written for John Schneider's National Steel Guitar. A deeply committed pacifist, Terry Riley's objections to American involvement in the Middle East were clearly articulated in *Baghdad Highway*, which he premiered at MicroFest 2003. The buoyant opening of this work remembers a Nevada City antiwar march (in which the composer was arrested), while the subsequent meditation on the horrors of war are depicted by the slow, agonizing dissonances of the descending 3rds of differing sizes, separated by a faster & louder barrage from above.

"We set out to do ***The Tavern*** as a collaboration, because John Schneider knows the guitar as very few (maybe not any) know it. I was long ago convinced that the fingerboard which is removable and based on deciding upon a set of pitches needed for each particular tuning ought if possible to become the next step in the history of the guitar in performance. Our work to make ***The Tavern*** is a major step toward this goal.

I bring to our collaboration a concept of pitch organization based on pure, simple pitch ratios like those used by Harry Partch but freed from the limitations imposed by his instrumental designs. As he knew and agreed to from our earliest contact onward, our ways of using these fresh tuning possibilities imply and in practice produce very different kinds of music, but with common roots. I am a very different kind of artist from Harry Partch but what matters most is the results of each approach. Let's let our musics speak for themselves. A major figure in this peace-making is John Schneider. We must be careful to see this role as liberating—not as a breaking of tradition. Tradition?? Harry Partch?? What a self-contradiction! The question is not "How do we keep it going?" It is "Where do we go from here?".

The choice of writings of Rumi, one of the greatest Sufi poets and a teacher in the Moslem religion, is like refusing to throw out Japanese or German contributions to our common world because of wars and/or war-like attitudes. Rumi is presenting a Way of spiritual growth and now, centuries after his actual physical presence among us, he is both liberating us and reminding us of the individual nature of spiritual growth. The translator, Coleman Barks, brings this, maintaining it as great literature, into our linguistic world.

My approach to making music bases itself upon my wish to grow into a better human being. I see Rumi as an ally. I see John Schneider as an ally. But not AGAINST, rather in SUPPORT: of life and wholeness."
- Ben Johnston (Nov 2009)

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. He holds a Ph.D. in Music & Physics 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. A specialist in contemporary music, Schneider's *The Contemporary Guitar* (University of California Press) has become the standard text in the field.

Schneider has performed in Europe, Japan, Vietnam & throughout North America, and been featured by New Music America, New York's American Festival of Microtonal Music, Denver's Microstock, California's Mozart Festival, the DaCamera Society, Grammy Award Winning Southwest Chamber Music, New American Music Festival, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Other Minds and *The Outsider*, BBC's documentary film on Harry Partch. John Schneider made his Disney Hall debut with his chamber group *Partch* premiering Harry Partch's complete *Bitter Music*, and has returned every year since to perform this singular repertoire with replicas of Partch's extraordinary instruments.

He is the founding artistic director of MicroFest, an annual festival of microtonal music [www.MicroFest.org], and his radio show *Global Village* can be heard weekly on Pacifica Radio's KPFK at 90.7-fm in Los Angeles & worldwide at www.kpfk.org. His recording of Lou Harrison's guitar music ***por Gitaro*** was released in March 2008 on Mode Records.

"A delight." - *New York Times*

"Of a caliber that kept this listener in a state of continual astonishment" - *Los Angeles Times*

"Microtonalist Maven" - *Wall Street Journal*

Discography

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