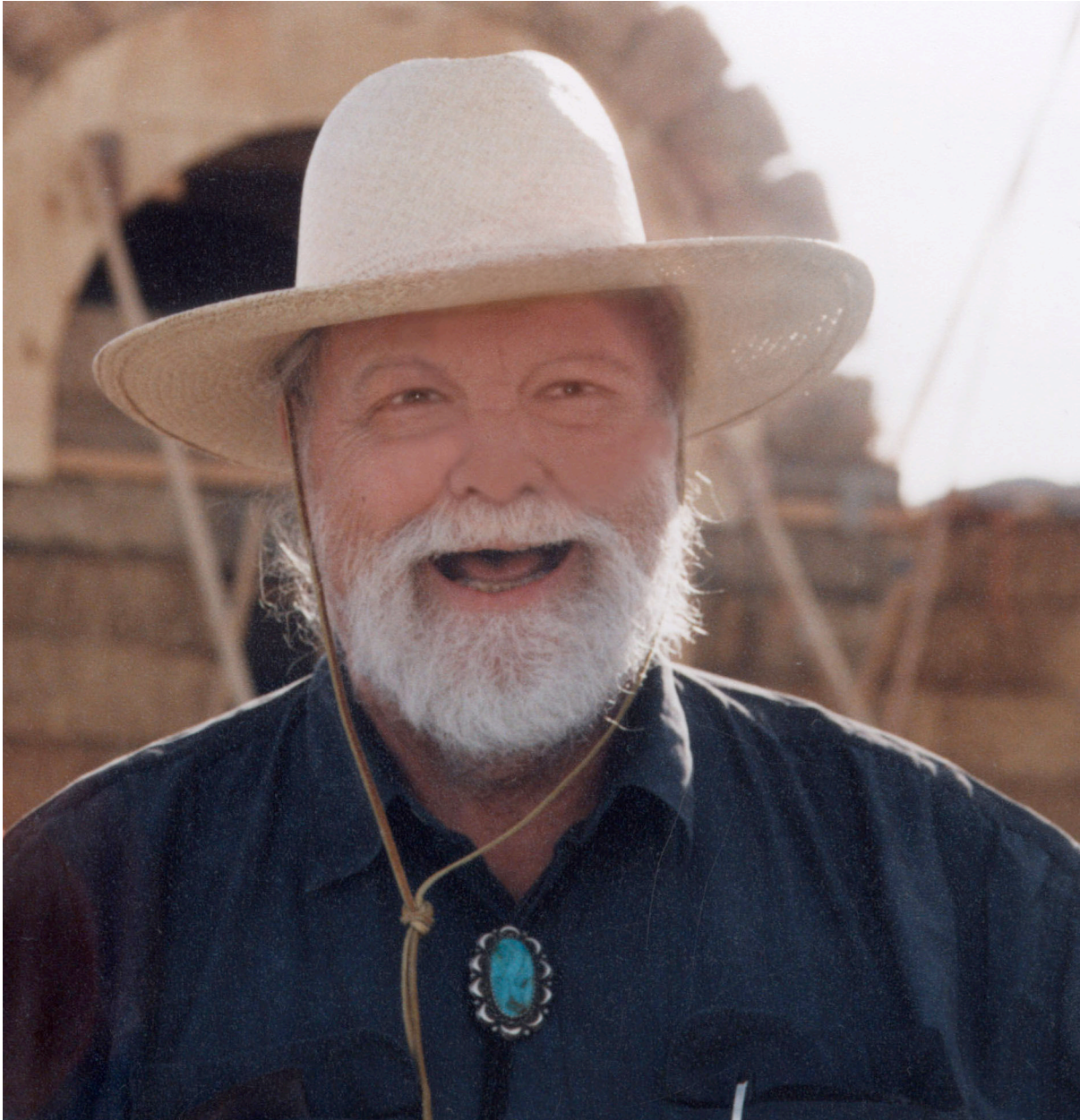


LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC

a film by Eva Soltes



EVA SOLTES PERFORMANCE & MEDIA ARTS
P.O. Box 416, Joshua Tree, CA USA 92252
760.366.4712 - 415.602.6152
www.harrisondocumentary.com

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LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC
TRT 92:00

Short Film Synopsis – 79 Words

LOU HARRISON: A World of Music paints an intimate portrait of a legendary artist and activist who was ahead of his time. One of the great visionaries of the twentieth-century American avant-garde, Lou Harrison (1917-2003) began his own musical revolution by freely combining Western and Eastern sounds and inventing new instruments to create them. Drawn from 300+ hours of material and interviews collected over two decades, this film offers a rare glimpse into Harrison's rich history and personal life.

Short Film Synopsis – 142 Words

LOU HARRISON: A World of Music offers a rare glimpse into the intimate personal struggles and artistic courage of the legendary American composer, writer and activist Lou Harrison (1917-2003). Trading a fast-paced New York career for a remote cabin in the woods to recover from a breakdown, Lou Harrison confronted his demons by writing beautiful music. Bucking the dissonant sound of the times he embraced "delight over duty," freely combining western, eastern and custom-made instruments built by him and his life partner, William Colvig. Harrison's unbridled curiosity and command of musical language produced one of the great cross-cultural legacies of the 20th century. Directed by filmmaker and music producer Eva Soltes, who was closely associated with Harrison, this feature-length documentary is drawn from over 25 years and 300 hours of performances, rehearsals and interviews conducted with Harrison and his contemporaries.

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC

Film Synopsis

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC paints a lucid portrait of one of the most unconventional and visionary composers of the 20th Century. Throughout his life Lou Harrison (1917-2003) embraced artistic playfulness over the rigid rules of classical composing, studying and experimenting freely with western, eastern and custom-made instruments. A passionate advocate of alternative tuning systems as a means to social change, his sixty-plus-year career encompassed opera, ballet, Indonesian gamelan, junkyard percussion, impractical ensembles and Esperanto in his search for an inclusive musical language. Harrison's unbounded thinking blossomed into the creation of a profound body of work that dissolved ethnic boundaries.

Verité footage shot by filmmaker Eva Soltes encompasses nearly twenty years of "poetic moments" in Harrison's professional and private life. Soltes first began videotaping Harrison and his life partner William Colvig in the early eighties and continued through 2002, capturing the contrast between a public persona and a private life of reflection, work and play. Her professional and personal association with Lou Harrison spanned over thirty years, and lends a uniquely insightful and intimate perspective to this film.

Lou Harrison, as the ebullient storyteller, guides us into his music, art and original writings as woven threads that inform an historical chronology of his life and times. We learn first-hand of his mentors, muses, inventions, relationships and emotional struggles with mental illness. Above all, because the interviews were conducted over many years, the viewer experiences Harrison's evolving creative process firsthand.

Unlike many of his peers in the emerging 1930s and 40s modern music scene who remained closeted, Lou Harrison was openly gay throughout his entire career. Interviews with his former partners animate Harrison's personal and private history. They include the artist, Remy Charlip, astronomer John Dobson, and especially William Colvig, with whom Harrison spent nearly thirty-five years inventing and building hundreds of musical instruments. As Lou remarked after Colvig's death "We lived, loved and worked together."

Notable contemporaries of Harrison add insight into the man, his music, and his times. Choreographers loved his work. Merce Cunningham reflects on the inner-circle of artists who together created a new cultural era in mid-twentieth century America, "As Rauschenberg said we had our poverty and our ideas." Mark Morris explores his artistic collaboration with Harrison, "He grilled me in a way that was so scary!" Conductors Dennis Russell Davies and Michael Tilson Thomas provide a contemporary context for Harrison's music, "The greatest artists have the ability to make us really understand what it's like to be in their skin," Tilson Thomas opines, "and what makes [Lou] such a treasure is that when you do realize what it's like to be in his skin you say: Gosh! What a great place to be!"

Harrison's hauntingly expressive music is the key underlying element interwoven throughout the film, and includes a formidable list of compositions and performances that capture the essence of his extraordinary and unbridled musical style, and reveal clusters of innovative works building on successive areas of interest.

From his earliest mentor Henry Cowell, Harrison learned to appreciate music from the "whole world." And through Cowell, Harrison met a young John Cage. Together Harrison and Cage created a percussion ensemble of junk instruments, accompanying many of the most important modern dancers of the day. Harrison's unquenchable quest for musical knowledge led him to continue studying with Cowell even after his teacher was sent to San Quentin prison in the late 30s for homosexual activity, and he received "lessons through bars" during their prison visits. It was again through Cowell that Harrison made contact with Charles Ives and ultimately completed many of Ives' compositions, leading to Ives receiving a Pulitzer Prize.

After a tumultuous decade in 1940s New York writing music criticism for the New York Herald Tribune and composing music for dancers such as Merce Cunningham, Jose Limon and Jean Erdman, Harrison traded his fast-paced East Coast career for a remote cabin in the Northern California woods to recover from a breakdown. He confronted his demons by writing beautiful music and bucking the dissonant sound of the times. Embracing "delight over duty" Harrison flew in the face of tradition, vexing ethnomusicologists with his hybrid compositions.

Unstoppable in his quest for social justice Harrison's work was often a response to the political atmosphere within which he lived, for example pacifist pieces written in response to Hiroshima and the Vietnam War. He also composed works on overtly gay themes, as in the opera *Young Caesar*.

Well into his eighties Harrison continued to push boundaries and realized his long-time dream of building a straw bale house in the desert. His Joshua Tree retreat with an acoustically perfect "great room" was perhaps his last and finest instrument. It stands as a testament to the boundless creativity, wild imagination and love of beauty that inspired Harrison's astonishing legacy.

At film's end, we are left to wonder how the story of this musical maverick, gifted artist, and dedicated humanitarian has remained virtually untold until now.

LOU HARRISON: A World of Music

Reviewer Comments

"Eva Soltes' lovely documentary, based on years of footage, provides an intimate and varied look at the life of this important composer."

~ San Francisco Chronicle / SFGate

"Engagingly pays homage to a composer who remains perhaps the most warmly accessible figure in the American musical avant-garde."

~ Variety

"...After seeing 'LOU HARRISON: A World of Music' by Eva Soltes...you will feel as if you knew [Harrison], and you will want to hear much more of the music that flows throughout this engaging, warm and lively film."

~ Chicago Sun Times

"Eva Soltes' long-awaited film is just as charming, playful and soulful as its titular subject...[She] has not only managed to capture Harrison's impish personality and fierce professionalism, she has also created a visual composition that is wonderfully rich, colorful and layered...Soltes' cinema concerto beautifully compliments Harrison's music as small, telling details are caught by her lens to be sewn into a visual sonata of shapes and light."

~ The Berkeley Daily Planet

"A lively and succinct documentary by Eva Soltes...'Lou Harrison' delivers."

~ The Seattle Times

"A warm, loving tribute to one of America's most original musical minds with a depth beyond most films of its kind...a portrait of a lone wolf, fully engaged with everything around him, and using it to create a life and art unique to his own vision."

~ A Beast In A Jungle

"As this documentary makes clear, Harrison deserves recognition as both a leading pioneer of 'maverick thinking' and a major force in establishing San Francisco itself as a 'mavericks city'."

~ Examiner.com

"So lovely that Lou is finally getting his due."

~ The Bay Area Reporter

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC

Cast List

Interviews:

Lou Harrison - Composer

Michael Tilson Thomas - Conductor

John Dobson - Astronomer

Merce Cunningham - Choreographer

Vivian Perlis - Historian

Remy Charlip - Writer/Artist/Choreographer

Judith Malina - Actress

Robert Hughes - Conductor/Composer

Dennis Russell Davies - Conductor

Ned Rorem - Composer/Writer

Sidney Jowers - Inn Keeper

William Colvig - Instrument Maker

Jody Diamond - Director, American Gamelan Institute

Janice Giteck - Composer

Nyoman Wenten - Dancer/Musician/Composer

K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat - Gamelan Master/Composer

Mark Morris - Choreographer

Robert Gordon - Writer

John Rockwell - Music Critic

Nigel Redden - Director, Lincoln Center Festival

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC
Crew List

Producer/Director/Cinematographer:

Eva Soltes

Additional Camera Operators:

Eli Adler

Emiko Omori

Jerry Slick

John Miglietta

Scott Sinkler

Witt Monts

Post Production:

Eva Soltes

Editor/Sound Editor

Robbi Robb

Editor/Digital Effects

Earwax Productions

Jim McKee

Andrew Roth

Sound Designers

NBC Universal

Chris Jenkins

Frank A. Montano

Re-Recording Mixers

Bill Meadows

Recordist

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC

Eva Soltes – Director’s Statement

I acquired my first camera because I felt an urgency to document the phenomenal artists with whom I was associated. Early in my career I realized I was amongst the first generation of filmmakers to have at our fingertips the technical capability to preserve our “cultural treasures” in their own words and pictures, for posterity.

The first video camera I purchased in 1984 was an industrial VHS model. Being a petite female, it was the highest quality video camera on the market that was possible for me to handle. As time went on I chased the better, cheaper models and tried to upgrade my “small” camera whenever possible. In taking 20 plus years to collect the footage for my documentary about composer, Lou Harrison the technology developed to the point where I could eventually afford to hire camera operators with broadcast-quality cameras and to combine high-definition images shot with a smaller camera. I finally completed the documentary by weaving in the earlier footage I’d amassed in previous formats as “archival.” The new, better and smaller cameras have changed the face of filmmaking in many ways—one of which is the ability for women to handle broadcast-quality equipment easily and therefore make our points of view more accessible.

In addition to capturing the extraordinary musical works and dynamic artistic style of a man whom I believe will emerge as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, I felt there was also another important story to tell about his life. I began documenting Lou and his partner Bill Colvig before there was any talk of same-sex marriages. Gay couples had to hide their affections in public. I spent so much time traveling with these two ‘love-hate-birds’ during performing arts tours that I felt I had an unusual window into their relationship.

Lou Harrison and William Colvig, with their matching shirts and bolo ties, “lived, loved and worked together.” They had a more committed “marriage” and family life than most heterosexual couples I knew. As a straight woman I felt compelled to tell their story with the hope that my point of view could resound in a new way within our culture as a whole.

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC

Eva Soltes Biography

Eva Soltes - Filmmaker/Performing Arts Producer has, over the course of her decades-long career, produced, directed and/or written nearly one thousand music, dance, theater and media works for national and international audiences. Soltes has also facilitated the creation of new work by gifted artists and documented historic figures who would otherwise have been underrecognized.

As a filmmaker her projects include: Producer/Director of **LOU HARRISON: A World of Music** a biography of the acclaimed American composer Lou Harrison (1917 –2003); American Producer of **WEST COAST STORY: Frontiers of New Music** a three-part BBC TV production featuring the history of California composers including John Adams, John Cage, Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell and Harry Partch; Co-Producer/Editor of **CIRCLES AND CYCLES, KATHAK DANCE** an award-winning documentary that aired internationally; Tour Producer/Co-Producer of **SAXOPHONE DIPLOMACY** a broadcast work featuring The Rova Saxophone Quartet performing in the former Soviet Union during the Regan era; Producer/Director/Editor of **ON CONLON NANCARROW** a multi-image short portraying ex-patriot composer Conlon Nancarrow (the first artist to receive a MacArthur award) which Soltes completed as an Artist-in-Residence at *The Centre Pompidou*; Producer/Director of **MADAM DAI ALENE, BEIJING BALLET** a rare glimpse into the public and private life of Madam Dai, Founding Director of The Beijing Ballet and key proponent of cultural revisionism in China; Producer/Director/Editor of **BUILDING A DREAM** a documentary on Frank Lloyd Wright-trained architect, Lois Davidson Gottlieb, through the process of building an ecologically sound home with her son.

Eva Soltes currently lives and works in Joshua Tree, California where, in addition to her work as a filmmaker, she has created an artist residency/performance program at Harrison House, the landmark straw bale music studio built by Lou Harrison near the end of his life. Also housed at this location is Soltes' media archive that is available to select music students and other researchers.

www.harrisondocumentary.com

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC
Eva Soltes Filmography

LOU HARRISON: A WORLD OF MUSIC
Producer/Director

2012 (92 min.) A feature length documentary painting an intimate portrait of a great American composer. Worked with Lou Harrison over a period of thirty years as a music producer and documentarian.

BUILDING A DREAM, A FAMILY AFFAIR Producer/Director/Witer/Editor

1998 (43 min.) An insightful & touching documentary tracing the creative process of home design through the eyes of Frank Lloyd Wright's former apprentice, as she builds an ecologically sound home from concept through completion.

JAZZ TAP SUMMIT
Producer/Director

1998 (90 min.) A once-in-a-lifetime lively gathering of jazz tap masters including Jimmy Slyde, Dianne Walker, Brenda Bufalino, Baakari Wilder, and Yvette Glover perform for a packed audience of 4,000 people. Live performance.

GARY SNYDER AND LOU HARRISON
Producer/Director

1994 (1 hr.) In an historic meeting of the minds, poet Gary Snyder and composer Lou Harrison collaborate on stage as Snyder recites the world premiere of his epic work, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* while Harrison accompanies him on flutes and drums. Live performance.

IN XANADU
Producer

1993 (90 min.) A critically acclaimed music theater work based on Balinese Shadow Puppet theater with members of the Tibetan Dance and Opera Company. Live performance.

MADAM DAI ALENE, BEIJING BALLET
Producer/Director/Camera

1991 (10 hrs. unedited) A rare glimpse into the public and private life of Madam Dai, Founding Director of The Beijing Ballet and key proponent of cultural revisionism in China.

CIRCLES & CYCLES, KATHAK DANCE
Co-Producer/Editor

1987 (20 min.) A pithy and informative examination of classical dance of North India. Winner of Silver Apple Award, National Education Film Festival. Broadcast on select PBS stations.

GARY SNYDER, POET/NATURALIST**Producer/Director/Camera**

1987 (1 hr.) A day-in-the-life portrait of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and naturalist Gary Snyder at home and work deep in the foothills of The Sierras.

VIRGIL THOMSON, COMPOSER**Producer/Director/Camera**

1986 (3 hrs. unedited) A verité-style chronicling of an aging American icon on one of his last visits to the Bay Area.

WEST COAST STORY: FRONTIERS OF NEW MUSIC**American Producer**

1985 (180 min.) A three-part series for BBC-TV prime time broadcast in Great Britain that explores the question: "Is there a West Coast aesthetic?" Composers included in the program: Lou Harrison, Henry Cowell, John Cage, Harry Partch, John Adams, Daniel Lentz, and Paul Dresher.

SAXOPHONE DIPLOMACY**Co-Producer**

1983 (30 min.) The first nationally broadcast (KQED) documentary made on location in the Former Soviet Union, this film follows The Rova Quartet, San Francisco's famed avant garde saxophone group on tour through Russia and Romania. Culmination of two years of work by Eva Soltes Associates and The Rova Saxophone Quartet to obtain permission and funds to perform and bring a documentary crew into the USSR.

NEW MUSIC AMERICA**Producer/Director/Camera**

1983 (20 hrs. unedited) A caravan of performers and artists reflect on their careers and the changing landscape of American music as they travel by train up the East Coast attending a five day festival of new music and exhibitions. Artists documented include Terry Riley, Krishna Bhatt, Pauline Oliveros, and Fred Frith.

CONLON NANCARROW**Producer/Director**

1982-1985 (30 hrs. unedited) Feature-length documentary studying the life and work of reclusive ex-patriot American composer Conlon Nancarrow shot on location in Mexico City at his studio and on tour in Germany, France, New York, and California.

ON CONLON NANCARROW**Producer/Director**

1982-1983 (12 min.) A short subject slide-tape documentary produced on location in Mexico City with post-production in Paris as artist-in-residence at The Centre Pompidou. Presented at festivals and concerts throughout the U.S., Europe, and Japan. U.S. venues include The Kennedy Center, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and The Exploratorium.

MASTERS OF SOUTH INDIAN MUSIC AND DANCE

Producer/Director/Camera

1982-1999 (40 hrs. unedited) A careful tracing of the passage of ancient traditions from one generation of Indian musical masters to another, featuring Karnatic masters T. Viswanathan and T. Balasaraswati and their disciples.

HULA DANCE

Producer/Director/Camera

1985 (15 hrs. unedited) Islanders from throughout Hawaii gather for the annual Merry Monarch Festival of ancient and modern Hula.

CROSSOVERS

Producer/Artistic Director/Host

1984-1988 (90 min. each) 15-part series of performance interviews featuring traditional master artists from China, Japan, Indonesia, and India along with their American students. Live performances.

AMY RADUNSKAYA

Producer/Director/Editor/Camera

1983 (20 min.) World premiere performance of composer and cellist Amy Radunskaya's original work. Live performance.

RELATED MEDIA PROJECTS:

YALE UNIVERSITY, ORAL HISTORY, AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT

Interviewer

1997-1998 Conducted extensive oral histories with American composers for this historic collection. Interviewees include Henry Brant, Robert Ashley, William Kraft, and Paul Dresher.

BREAD AND ROSES RADIO PRODUCTION

Associate Producer/Unit Manager

1989 An American Public Radio broadcast featuring Joan Baez, Jennifer Warren, and Bonnie Raitt. Winner of Gold Medal, Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

SOUND DESIGN

Producer

1989 The first ever national conference on the creative use of sound in media at Skywalker Ranch, California. Featured guests: John Cage and Academy Award-winning sound designer Ben Burt.

KEYBOARD INNOVATIONS

Producer/Director

1981 An NPR radio documentary studying the history and evolution of 20th century keyboard music in America. Commissioned by National Public Radio for 13-part series, *Radiovisions*.

1750 ARCH CONCERTS

Concert Director/Host 1972-1980 Produced 800+ live music concerts including 100+ live radio broadcasts (KPFA) with interviews of important local and national musical figures.

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PROGRAM/PUBLICITY:
info.harrisonhouse@gmail.com

FILMMAKER: EVA SOLTES
Eva.harrisonhouse@gmail.com

