Compositions for Gamelan by Lou Harrison

by Jay Arms and Jody Diamond

Java, Bali, Sunda, Cirebon—areas of Indonesia with distinct gamelan traditions, and all styles of music that the American composer Lou Harrison (1917–2003) explored in his compositions for gamelan. In the mid 1970s, Harrison embarked on a lifelong study of Indonesian gamelan music. Later, he began to compose for Indonesian ensembles; he would go on to create music for these instruments and styles for the rest of his life, and was known for saying that "the gamelan is the most beautiful single musical ensemble on the planet" (Baker, 2002). Harrison's centennial marks an international occasion for performances of many of his gamelan works.

The catalog of Harrison's gamelan compositions continues to grow, as more works are discovered, shared, and remembered. Presented here is a current accounting of all his known gamelan works, composed for various ensembles. These titles of these pieces were drawn from four sources: the score catalog of the American Gamelan Institute, items in the Lou Harrison Papers at the University of California Santa Cruz, and two previous chronological listings of Harrison's collected works: in *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* by Leta E. Miller and Fredric Liebermann (1998), and in *Lou Harrison: American Musical Maverick* by Bill Alves and Brett Campbell (2017).

Many of these pieces were first played on two Javanese-style gamelan built by Harrison and his partner, William Colvig: Gamelan Si Darius/Si Madeleine (at Mills College), and Gamelan Si Betty (bequeathed to Jody Diamond). Earlier, Harrison and Colvig had built a percussion ensemble in a tuning described by Ptolemy as "syntonic diatonic." As a "nickname" those instruments were called "An American Gamelan," but they bear little resemblance to the Indonesian gamelan ensembles for which all the pieces listed here were composed.

The titles are in chronological order by date of composition, or by date of the first version if there were later revisions. Additional information—such as co-composers, dated revisions, dedications, and featured instruments—is shown in parentheses. Some items on this list may seem similar, but represent distinct compositions (like *Gending Jody* and *Ladrang Jody*); others were based on existing works (e.g. *Lancaran Samuel* became the balungan for *A Cornish Lancaran*). Several suites and theatrical works, such as *Homage to Pacifica* and *Faust*, contain pieces that are also listed individually since they may be performed independently of the larger work.

Harrison's gamelan compositions are published by the American Gamelan Institute (AGI), (BMI). Most scores can be obtained from AGI or Frog Peak Music (a composers' collective). Some of the titles exist only in manuscript form, and may be sketches rather than completed compositions. There are still some unidentified fragments of gamelan notation with no titles or dates in the Lou Harrison Papers Special Collections of the McHenry Library at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and in the Lou Harrison Archives at Harvard University. ◗

Catalog

As of the date of this publication, 86 compositions for gamelan by Lou Harrison have been identified. While most are for Central Javanese gamelan, other regions (in brackets) are represented to varying degrees.

Bali: kebyar (1 piece)
Cirebon (4)
Central Java (76)
Sunda: degung (3)
Sunda: salendro (2)

1. Lancaran Samuel, 1976
2. Ladrang Samuel, undated sketch ca. 1976
3. Gending Samuel, 1976, revised 1981
4. Gending Pak Chokro [sic], 1976
5. Lancaran Daniel, 1976
6. Lagu Sociseknum, 1976 (kendhangan by Daniel Schmidt)
7. Bubaran Robert, 1976 (optional piccolo trumpet part added, 1981)
8. Gending Paul, 1977
9. Gending Jody, 1977
10. Music for the Turning of a Sculpture by Pamela Boden, 1977
11. Main Bersama-sama (French horn, suling), 1978 (for Bill George) [Sunda: degung]
12. Threnody for Carlos Chavez (viola), 1978 [Sunda: degung]
13. Serenade for Betty Freeman and Franco Assetto (suling), 1978 [Sunda: degung]
14. Scenes from Cavafy (baritone, male chorus, harp), 1980
15. Gending Cavafy, 1980
16. Gending Ptolemy, 1980
17. "Gangsaran" to Ptolemy, 1980

18. The Procession of Bacchus, 1980
19. Gending Alexander, 1981
20. Ladrang Epikuros, 1981
21. Gending Hephaestus, 1981
22. Gending Hermes, 1981
23. Gending Demeter, 1981 (revised 1983)
24. Gending in Honor of the Poet Virgil, 1981 (revised 1985)
25. Ketawang Pluto, 1981 (composed with members of Gamelan Si Betty)
26. Lancaran Jody, 1981
27. Movie Musics, 1982
28. Gending Claude, 1982
29. Lancaran Molly, 1982
30. Bubaran in Honor of Sinan, 1982
31. Ketawang in Honor of Sinan, 1982
32. Gending Dennis, 1982
33. Gending Pindar, 1982
34. Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and [Javanese] Gamelan, 1982
35. Stampede (violin, cello, kendhang, bedhug, gong), 1982
36. Gending in Honor of Herakles, 1982
37. Ketawang Whittington, 1982
38. Slendro Yardage, 1982
39. Ladrang Lafehnaktinangingan, 1982 (a "co-op piece" [sic] by Philip Corner, Jody Diamond, Will Ditrich, Linda Dobbins, Lou Harrison, Erik Marin, and Stuart Somer)
40. Gending in Honor of Palladio, 1982–83
41. Gending in Honor of Sinan, 1983
42. Ketawang Wellington (voice), 1983
43. Gending in Honor of James and Joel, 1983
44. Ladrang in Honor of James and Joel (suling), 1983
45. Coyote Stories/Foreman's Song Tune (voice), 1983
46. Lagu Lagu Thomasan, 1983 [Cirebon]
47. Lagu Cirebon, 1983 [Cirebon]
48. Lagu Victoria, 1983 (for Allan and Jennifer) [Cirebon]
49. Lagu Elang Yusuf, 1984 [Cirebon]
50. For the Pleasure of Ovid's Changes, 1983 (revised 1986)
51. Gending Max Beckmann, 1984 (revised 1991)
52. Gending Vincent, 1984
53. Ladrang in Honor of Pak Daliyo, 1984/86
54. Philemon and Baukis (violin), 1985–87
55. Ibu Trish, 1987–89 [Sunda: Salendro]
56. Lagu Pa Undang, 1985 [Sunda: Salendro]
57. Faust (soprano, tenor, bass, chorus, chamber orchestra), 1985 [Sunda: Salendro]
58. Gending in Honor of Aphrodite (chorus, harp), 1986
59. A Cornish Lancaran (saxophone), 1986/89
60. Concerto for Piano with Javanese Gamelan, 1987
61. Saron Ricik-ricik, ca. 1987
62. Gending Bill/Bill in the Moonlight, 1980–2002
63. A Soedjatmoko Set (solo voice, chorus), 1989
64. Homage to Pacifica (solo voice, chorus, narrator, bassoon, "Ptolemy Duple," harp, psaltery), 1991
65. Prelude, 1991
66. From the Testimony of Chief Seattle (harp, chorus), 1991
67. In Honor of the Divine Mr. Handel (harp), 1991
68. In Honor of Mark Twain (chorus), 1991
69. A Round for Jafran Jones, 1991 [Bali: kebyar]
70. Gending Moon (male chorus), 1994
71. Dartington Hall, 1996
72. In Honor of Munakata Shiko, 1997
73. A Dentdale Ladrang, 1999
74. Ladrang Carter Scholz, 1999
75. For the Repose of My Friend James Broughton, 1999
76. Orchard, 1999
77. Another Orchard, 1999 (revised 2002)
78. To Honor Mark Bullwinkle, 2002
79. Filleran, undated
80. The Family, undated
81. Prelude or Postlude, Tone 6, undated (to Betty Freeman)
82. Prelude on 6 (harp), undated
83. Lancaran Antony, undated
84. Gending Richard, undated
85. Gending Valentine, undated
86. In Spendoribus, undated (transcription of a 9th century Gregorian chant)

References

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