

## A Requiem for Lou Harrison

I. on 14-16-19-21-24\*

Said Lou: No garden is complete without a muse. Here's mine.  
She's Euterpe or maybe Terpsichore, Polyhymnia's yours.  
The garden stretched beyond the house and vanished in redwoods and Pacific fog.  
The man had no edges. His spinet sat over a gong. The soup pot never emptied.  
Yankee patchwork and flannel met batik and silk. Failing Roman liquamen:  
use some Thai fish sauce.

Partch did wood and bamboo, Lou did aluminum and iron.  
Aluminum oxide shines like silver (Lou's middle name) in air.  
And air was Lou's element, each word out of his mouth resonant, measured,  
round.  
Large in every format. He never lost his dancer's step, his zorries snapping  
anapests,  
Crashing down from a near perfect pirouette, shouting: "Whatever happened to  
ballet for fat men?"

Thomson's Solitude: a portrait of Lou in New York. Lost.  
Later, warm of welcome, generous, enthused, but troubled at core.  
Another artist (Pynchon) exiled to Aptos preached the creed "Keep cool, but  
care."  
New York was not Alexandria, but Aptos became Alexandria dreamt new.  
And Lou's dreams of Alexandria's fall, and a fall to come, were meant to trouble  
our sleep as well.

II.

Lost wax. The discipline of a form to be filled. A rhyme to keep. A control to  
chance. The unexpected curves taken by a tune fit to a rule. Ratio. Everything  
out of order brought in again, but newly aligned. A new melody is a new line.  
There on the coast that does not face the old world, a chance to realign, to sing a  
new song, or the old song sung anew, the old psaltery restrung. The canon  
remeasured. A chance to realign the old canons. Dreaming of Ptolemy in a  
newfoundland.

Missing Robert Duncan and John Cage, now Nobbie Brown and Lou Harrison. Waiting for war. Waiting for a new song to break this speechlessness. A need for sounds, instruments, of metal. Of spectra cracked, fractured. A need for counterpoint, for differences made plain and clear. A need for a new ratio.

Missing my teachers. And so far away from home. Making a new home in the old land: Emma, now 11 months, cries at five past midnight. Echolocation. She falls quickly back to sleep, comforted that the dark is not so deep. Every night the same. Every night a new cry, a new song. Can I give her a sense of ratio, a sense of proportion? Will she, too, learn to dream of Alexandria?

Daniel Wolf

Budapest, Hungary 7 February 2003

\*NB  $14:16:19:21:24$  is the original tuning for Gamelan Si Betty.