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HI-FI RECORD

Leopold Stokowski

CONDUCTS



Cornell
Persian
Set

Harrison
Suite

FOR VIOLIN, PIANO
AND SMALL ORCHESTRA

COMPOSERS RECORDINGS, INC.

HENRY COWELL:

"Persian Set"

Dedicated to His Excellency
Mohamed Hejazi Matidowle

Four Movements for chamber orchestra:
Moderato; Allegretto; Lento; Rondo

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At the special invitation of the government of Iran, the Cowells spent the winter in Tehran. Intrigued by the special qualities of the music he heard there, Cowell decided to compose a work which would express something of the characteristic quality of Persian or Iranian music. Though he has long been interested in the folk expression of other countries, Henry Cowell has never incorporated direct quotations into his works. After completing his *Persian Set*, which was written between November 18, 1956 and February 8, 1957, he sent the score to Leopold Stokowski who, like Cowell, has long been a student of the music of other cultures.

The composer writes of his score from Tokyo (May, 1957):

"This is a simple record of musical contagion, written at the end of a three-months' stay in Iran, during which I listened for several hours nearly every day to the traditional classic music and the folk music of the country — at concerts, at private parties, at the National Conservatory for Traditional Iranian Music (where the instructors gave wonderful demonstrations of virtuosity for my benefit), and at Radio Tehran. Tape recordings at the Department of Fine Arts were especially helpful in displaying the rich variety of music in regions too difficult to visit in mid-winter.

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In his book called *Music for All of Us*, Stokowski expressed something of his credo, saying: "I believe that music can be an inspirational force in all our lives—that its eloquence and the depth of its meaning are all-important, and that all personal considerations concerning musicians and public are relatively unimportant—that music comes from the heart and returns to the heart—that music is a spontaneous, impulsive expression—that its range is without limit—that music is forever growing—that music can be one element to help us build a new conception of life in which the madness and cruelty of wars will be replaced by a simple understanding of the brotherhood of man."

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"One of the traditional musical styles heard in Iran today is a quiet, improvisatory one, a-rhythmical, like a prose invocation. Traditional Persian music was a great classic art which is said to have spread westward into many parts of the Arab-speaking world, reaching Greece about 600 B.C. In the 7th century A.D. the Arabs returned it to Persia in somewhat altered form as Islamic music. Moslem distaste for music had much less effect on the peoples of Iran than it did upon the Arabs, so that the practice of the art of music was never quenched in Persia after the Moslem Conquest. A few melodies surviving today are believed by Iranian students to be pre-Islamic, and certain types of mordents, and particularly the trill across a tone and a half, widespread today over the whole Middle East, are commonly called "Persian" by musicians of other countries. The elaborate Persian drumming techniques have been admired for generations, and even today in Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul most drummers will claim to be Persian — and sometimes are."

Iran is the old name of a large region in the Middle East. It has been revived as the modern name of the country long known to the West as Persia. *Fars* (Anglicized as *Persia*) is a comparatively small province somewhat west of the center of Iran; Darius built his capital there, and it is the ancient cultural and political center of this part of the world.

Iranians are Indo-Europeans. Their language and alphabet are Farsi, not Arabic. Modern Iran is a Moslem country, but it is not one of the Arab nations. It owes its characteristic historical culture,—music, art, customs, language,—to ancient Fars, or Persia. However, because its border populations have always been nomadic, the influence of neighboring cultures is often conspicuous, especially in the four corner provinces of Iran.

LOU HARRISON:

"Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra"

LOU HARRISON is today one of the most important of America's Pacific Coast composers. Born in Portland, Oregon, in 1917, he studied with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg. Like Cowell, he has drawn heavily from the culture and music of the East, and unlike Schoenberg, he has sought and achieved a simplicity and beauty in his music that is unique in our time. Harrison lives today in a California ranch-style house overlooking the Pacific, in the shadow of red-wood trees that have been growing since the days of the Roman Empire. He has at times worked as a florist, a librarian, a music reviewer (for the New York Herald-Tribune), a teacher, and even as a forest firefighter. He has been the recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships, and like Cowell has been commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra under its Rockefeller grant, and was awarded a Twentieth Century Masterpiece Prize during the 1951 International Composers Conference in Rome.

Lou Harrison's Suite was commissioned by the Ajemian sisters in 1951. P. Glanville-Hicks has written, among notes describing this suite, that "the Harrison Suite is one of the most delicate and lovely American works of recent years. The sheer grace and joyousness of its style, reminiscent of India—both sacred and secular modes—cannot fail to charm all who hear it."

"Its opening Overture is an Allegro in a festive mood of rejoicing; the solo violin draws long, clean lines across a scintillating backdrop of piano, tack-piano, celesta, tam-tam and harp, playing in Gamelan style. Formally, this Overture—as indeed all six sections of the suite—is quantitative music rather than climactic, though high tension points are reached by exciting handling of the melodic curve or by elaboration, and sometimes sudden simplification of the instrumentation. Such devices take the place of the constructed climax of Western musical thought."

The succeeding movements alternate between elegiac pieces of hushed tranquility and more busy movements which Harrison calls "gamelans." The slow and quiet sections have been compared to the "acute stillness of high altitudes and their utter removal from time and place. The gamelans are brilliant with jangling sounds and suggestions of classic Indonesian and Balinese music. The six movements are labeled: Overture: Allegro; Elegy: Adagio; First Gamelan: Allegro; Aria: Lento espressivo; Second Gamelan: Allegro; Chorale: Andante.

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The soloists in this recording are Maro Ajemian, pianist and Anahid Ajemian, violinist.

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Without forsaking the classical masters, the Ajemians have also broadened the literature of their instruments by championing the work of contemporary composers. In 1952 they became the first instrumentalists to receive the Laurel Leaf Award of the American Composers Alliance, for meritorious service to American music.

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(Original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)