



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Method and Madness in Lou Harrison's "Rapunzel"

Author(s): Leta E. Miller

Source: *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter, 2002), pp. 85-124

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3252318>

Accessed: 11/01/2011 00:00

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucal>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Musicology*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Method and Madness in Lou Harrison's *Rapunzel*

LETA E. MILLER

In August 1952, amidst the idyllic scenery of rural North Carolina, Lou Harrison began his first opera, *Rapunzel*. Within two months he had completed the entire piano-vocal score, setting to music a poetic reinterpretation of the Grimm brothers' fairy tale by the 19th-century polymath, William Morris (1834–96). By 1952 Harrison (b. 1917) was a seasoned composer;¹ yet *Rapunzel* in many ways represents a watershed in his career. Its composition culminated a period marked by the most serious crisis in his life—a debilitating mental breakdown that required hospitalization for nearly nine months. Equally important, he came to grips with the promises and problems of serialism, with which he had harbored a love-hate relationship for nearly two decades. That Harrison was able to create a successful, lengthy work following Schoenbergian practices while fulfilling his own bent for lyricism—and that he did so using a text whose references to imprisonment and liberation, dream and reality, war and love spoke to his own recent brush with insanity—released him from a disabling self-criticism that had constricted his musical growth during the 1940s and freed him to pursue with confidence a radically new direction.

Harrison's prior relationship to the stage had been both protracted and ambivalent. An early childhood theatrical experience that included tours around the Northwest had provoked in him a decided insecurity, which was reinforced by the birth of his brother soon thereafter. "Since my brother was born when I was three and I'd been given away to another lady on the stage . . . there were psychological complications," he

85

Volume XIX • Number 1 • Winter 2002

The Journal of Musicology © 2002 by the Regents of the University of California

¹ A works-list appears in Leta E. Miller and Fredric Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998). Research for much of the background material in this article (such as several interviews with Harrison cited herein) was conducted jointly with Prof. Lieberman, whom I would also like to thank for reading a preliminary draft. I would also like to thank Prof. Paul Nauert for his close reading of the analysis and his excellent suggestions.

recalls.² At the same time, however, the experience stimulated a life-long fascination with the theater.

During Harrison's San Francisco years (1935-42), the largely self-taught composer learned his trade by analyzing scores he found in libraries. He became particularly fascinated with Schoenberg's work and studied every composition he could locate.

During my own adolescence, I went through a period, perhaps several periods, during which I would barely study or listen to any other music than Schoenberg's. So powerful and exclusive was the attraction that all other musicians seemed somehow quite minor. . . . What I liked about the music was its intense self-contained musicality. For it seemed to me that those small mobile melodies, so swiftly and adroitly developed, imitated, inverted, retrograded, collapsed into chords, augmented, ornamented, contracted, or otherwise treated, did create a closed garden of purely musical interest, purely musical existence.³

Harrison tried his own hand at 12-tone composition beginning in 1937;⁴ among his collection of San Francisco juvenilia are many pages of experimental tone rows.

Thus, when the opportunity arose in 1942 to compose for the Lester Horton dance troupe in Los Angeles,⁵ Harrison moved there, hoping to study with Schoenberg. During his single year in southern California (1942-43), he taught classes at U.C.L.A.⁶ and participated in Schoenberg's weekly composition seminar. Although Schoenberg rarely discussed serialism in class (and made known his reluctance to critique serialist pieces), Harrison nevertheless brought him a 12-tone *Suite for Piano* with which he was struggling. To his surprise and delight, Schoen-

² Harrison, interview with Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, 29 December 1993. At the age of two-and-a-half, Harrison was cast as the "littlest orphan" in a Portland, Oregon production of Jean Webster's *Daddy Long Legs*. Although "Buster" Harrison was the hit of the show, prompting admiring reviews in the local press, the theatre troupe's subsequent tour found him clinging fearfully to the director.

³ "Schoenberg in Several Ways," *National Centre for the Performing Arts (Bombay), Quarterly Journal* 4 (1975): 21. Harrison expounded at length on Schoenberg's skill in form and counterpoint in the article "Homage to Schoenberg: His Late Works," *Modern Music* 21 (1944): 135-38.

⁴ Manuscripts of two 12-tone keyboard pieces from that year are extant: an untitled piano sonata and *Slow (Symphony for Organ)*. Both works are unpublished, and neither is authorized for performance.

⁵ Harrison had previously worked with Horton at the Mills College summer sessions in 1938 and 1940. As the regular accompanist in the Mills dance department, he composed music for Horton's *Conquest*, *Something to Please Everybody*, and *16 to 24*. Harrison moved to Los Angeles in August 1942 with a partner, William Brown (later Weaver), a dancer who joined Horton's company.

⁶ Specifically Labanotation, and a course in music history and form for dancers.

berg responded with advice and encouragement.⁷ Nevertheless, Harrison remained uncomfortable with this compositional process. Though he periodically flirted with the 12-tone system during the 1940s, he found himself increasingly attracted to other compositional approaches, particularly that of Carl Ruggles, in whose music pitch-class repetition is infrequent but not forbidden.⁸ Harrison experimented with the “Ruggles style” as early as 1937 (*Sarabande* for piano) and continued to find it attractive well into the 1970s.⁹

When the Horton dance troupe moved to New York in 1943, Harrison followed them. There he reconnected with his former teacher, Henry Cowell, who initiated him into the circle around Virgil Thomson.¹⁰ Soon Harrison was writing regularly for *Modern Music* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, and conducting performances of his own music and that of others. To judge by outward appearances, he was very successful: His music was performed regularly; he was called on to write essays for various periodicals; and he made contact with most of the prominent composers and performers in the city. Building on a long-distance relationship he had established with Charles Ives in the 1930s, Harrison studied, edited, and conducted the world premiere of Ives’s Third Symphony on 5 April 1946. The following year, this work, which Harrison had revived from a neglected manuscript, won the Pulitzer Prize.

Below the surface, however, the stress of New York life was taking its toll. The financial and social pressures were overwhelming and Harrison found the noise nearly unbearable. Though he took odd jobs as an elevator operator, a music copyist, and a teacher, it was nearly impossible to make ends meet. To heat his cold-water loft, he lugged canisters of kerosene across the street and up four flights of stairs. And to compose in his small apartment without disturbing his neighbors, he

⁷ Schoenberg even included Harrison in a list of the most promising young American composers (letter, Arnold Schoenberg to Roy Harris, 17 May 1945; see Erwin Stein, ed., *Arnold Schoenberg: Letters* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964], 234).

⁸ Harrison extolled Ruggles’s counterpoint in the pamphlet *About Carl Ruggles* (N.Y.: Oscar Baradinsky, 1946). The text is reprinted in *The Score* and *I.M.A. Magazine* 12 (June 1955), 15–26, and in Garland, *A Lou Harrison Reader* (Santa Fe: Soundings Press, 1987), 39–45.

⁹ Movement 2 of the *Concerto for Organ with Percussion*, 1973, is a revision of the *Double Canon for Carl Ruggles* (a piano work from 1951); and movement 4 of the *Elegiac Symphony*, 1975, is a revision of *Praises for Michael the Archangel* (an organ work from 1947 inspired by Ruggles’s counterpoint and harmonic language).

¹⁰ Cowell had been living in New York since 1940. Harrison also reconnected with friend and colleague John Cage, who had moved to New York in 1942. Cage and Harrison had met in 1938, had produced percussion concerts and recordings in San Francisco in 1940–41, and had jointly composed the quartet *Double Music*. For an account of their interaction, see Leta Miller, “The Art of Noise: John Cage, Lou Harrison, and the West Coast Percussion Ensemble,” in *Perspectives on American Music, 1900–1950*, ed. Michael Saffle (New York: Garland, 2000), 215–63.

constructed two clavichords. In addition, he was lonely. The marriage of his younger brother in September 1943 only highlighted his own isolation and his lack of an enduring relationship. Harrison's ten years on the East Coast were marked by several serious but ultimately broken partnerships.¹¹ The "psychological complications" that had characterized his early feelings toward his brother resurfaced.

By 1945 Harrison's self-esteem reached an all-time low. He wrote to Ruggles that he was "tortured and distressed" during performances of his own music¹² and confessed to Ives that he was "unsure that anything I have written is yet ready for the unblushing declaration of print."¹³ Harrison developed an ulcer; his former effervescence gave way to an overriding melancholy; and friends found him quiet and withdrawn. He began to seek comfort in religion and even told colleagues that he had seen visions of angels on the walls of his apartment. His anxiety translated into an intensely dissonant contrapuntal language in works such as *Praises for Michael the Archangel* (1946–47),¹⁴ and his self-doubt is reflected in the disheveled condition of his manuscripts, many of which are blackened by extensive erasures.¹⁵

In May 1947, the increasing tension exploded in a nervous breakdown. Friends and colleagues came to Harrison's aid. John Cage took him to a treatment center in Ossining-on-the-Hudson; Ives sent him half the money from the Pulitzer Prize. Harrison eventually entered the Psychoanalytic Clinic of Presbyterian Hospital in New York, where he underwent intensive therapy. Yet impediments to his compositional career proved temporary. In fact, immediately after his hospitalization he seems to have been charged with renewed creative energy. The years 1947–50 saw the composition of some of his most frequently performed works (e.g., *The Perilous Chapel*, *Solstice*, the *Suite for Cello and Harp*, four of his seven *Pastorales* for orchestra, and the *Marriage at the Eiffel Tower*). In the hospital he began the 12-tone *Symphony on G*, in many ways a companion work to *Rapunzel*. Harrison used his therapy as a stimulus to re-evaluate his style, rejecting many of his pre-breakdown works and turning with exuberant energy to explorations of melodicism and diatonicism, as well as to investigations of alternative tuning systems. "I had

¹¹ In addition to Brown/Weaver (n5), Harrison established serious but short-term relationships with Methodist minister Edward McGowan and (in the years following his illness) with choreographer-artist-writer Remy Charlip.

¹² Letter, Harrison to Ruggles, 1 March 1945. Quoted by permission.

¹³ Letter, Harrison to Harmony Ives (undated; summer 1946). Quoted by permission.

¹⁴ For a score and a discussion of this piece, see Leta Miller, *Lou Harrison: Selected Keyboard and Chamber Music, 1937–1994*, in *Music in the United States of America* 8 (Madison: A-R Editions and the American Musicological Society, 1998).

¹⁵ A facsimile of a manuscript from this period is included in Miller, op. cit.

a second chance at life," he says, "and I assembled a new person out of the remains."¹⁶

Although Harrison was composing furiously in these post-breakdown years, the fragility of his mental state demanded relief from the pressures of New York. He spent the summers of 1949 and 1950 as music director of the Reed College summer festival of dance and theater in Portland, Oregon, and in 1951 accepted a faculty position at Black Mountain College, an experiment in educational reform located in a dreamy hideaway in North Carolina.¹⁷

At Reed College, Harrison became fascinated with calligraphy¹⁸ and purchased a copy of Edward Johnston's *Writing and Illuminating, and Lettering* (1906)¹⁹ in which he read about William Morris, who "began the renaissance of calligraphy in the West."²⁰ Browsing in a second-hand bookstore in Portland, Harrison discovered several volumes of Morris's poetry. In the first was Morris's penetrating reinterpretation of the Rapunzel story.

Although Harrison had always been an avid and eclectic reader, Morris presented a challenge, particularly during this period of mental instability. In New York following his first summer at Reed, he undertook an intensive study of Morris's epics and found them a barometer of his recovery process: "I knew I was of good spirit and calm mind," he says, "when I could sit and read *Earthly Paradise*."²¹

Morris's life and works held a strange fascination for Harrison. Perhaps it was Morris's breadth of interests—his forays into typeface design, bookmaking, textiles, woodworking, and wallpapers, as well as the literary arts—that caught Harrison's fancy, for Harrison, too, had pursued multifaceted artistic interests. In his youth he had wavered between careers in poetry and music; during the 1930s he aided in the set design for his dance works. Harrison's poetry has been published and his paintings exhibited worldwide; the calligraphic script he developed in the early 1950s became renowned for its beauty; and his prose continues to be vivid and entertaining.

¹⁶ Harrison, interview with Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, 21 October 1994.

¹⁷ After two years in North Carolina, Harrison moved back to Aptos, California, where he has lived ever since. For more information on Black Mountain College, see Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (1972; repr. New York: W. W. Norton, 1993) and Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

¹⁸ He was attracted to the elegant lettering on posters prepared by the college's Scribe Club that advertised a washing machine service. ("Let Daisy do your dirty work!" they urged.)

¹⁹ London: Isaac Pitman and Sons, first printing 1906 with numerous reprints in subsequent years.

²⁰ Harrison, phone conversation with Leta Miller, 5 January 2001.

²¹ Harrison, phone conversation with Leta Miller, 30 December 2000.

Or perhaps Morris's social conscience was the lure: "In helping build a socialist party in Britain, his basic idea was a decent polity through work you could do that was beautiful and good."²² Harrison's creative work, too, had often been inspired by political and social causes. In San Francisco he had composed works occasioned by the Spanish Civil War and a West Coast dockworkers' strike; and Hitler's invasion of Poland prompted the composition of his first Mass.²³ The atomic bomb attacks on Japan at the end of World War II particularly unnerved him (in Los Angeles he had read Lester del Rey's *The Eleventh Commandment*, a science fiction novel about nuclear holocaust).

Moreover, Morris's personal life struck a sympathetic chord. Morris "was a mad and marvelous genius who had terrible emotional troubles, which he tried to solve largely by overworking," says Harrison.²⁴ The poet's refuge in intensive work as an escape from destructive romantic entanglements reminded Harrison of his own search for a stable partnership. Harrison's romantic insecurity in the post-breakdown period emerges clearly from the diary entries of Judith Malina, co-founder with her husband Julian Beck of the Living Theater. Although Harrison had never made a secret of his homosexuality, Malina seduced him and then was bemused by his morning-after panic. Shortly before his move to Black Mountain College, he was even engaged to one of his female students for several weeks.²⁵ Thus the Prince's opening lines in Morris's *Rapunzel* must have struck Harrison as particularly apt: "I could not even think/What made me weep that day/When out of the council-hall/The courtiers pass'd away. . . . And left me there alone,/To think on what they said;/ 'Thou art a king's own son,/ 'Tis fit that thou should'st wed.' " Harrison frankly admits that during this period he felt a need to combat society's intolerance for homosexuality by cultivating a stereotypically "virile" musical image. Examples include the forceful melodic and contrapuntal language of *Rapunzel* and the *Symphony on G*, and *Rapunzel*'s orchestration, which is weighted toward the low strings: its instrumental ensemble includes violin, viola, four cellos, and two

²² Harrison, interview with Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, 21 November 1995.

²³ A score and discussion of *France 1917–Spain 1937* appears in Miller, *Lou Harrison: Selected Keyboard and Chamber Music*. Harrison's percussion work *Waterfront—1934* commemorated the San Francisco general strike of July 1934, which culminated a widespread and long-lasting work stoppage by West Coast longshoremen. A photograph of the dance for which this work was written is found in Miller and Lieberman, *Lou Harrison*. Harrison began his *Mass to St. Anthony* on the day Hitler invaded Poland. He later changed its original scoring for voices and percussion to voices, strings, and trumpet. In 2000, he revived and updated the percussion parts for the Kyrie and Gloria, which will appear on a recording to be issued by Mode Records in 2002.

²⁴ Harrison, interview with Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, 21 November 1995.

²⁵ Judith Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 157–58.

contrabasses. (Statements in Harrison's letters and recollections by friends confirm that this effort was quite deliberate.)²⁶

But Harrison's primary interest in *Rapunzel* stemmed from the text's concentration on the psychological struggles of the two protagonists. Forty years after the opera's composition, Harrison reflected that the tale held "implicit in it some of the problems, tortures, and false rapture that I was myself experiencing in analysis."²⁷ On the surface, the fairy tale tells the story of a traditional masculine hero, who defeats supernatural evil (the witch) in pursuit of the feminine ideal. But Morris's retelling follows a very different path. The author omits nearly all the events of the original tale, including the witch's discovery of the pair's secret trysts, the Prince's blindness on the thorns, and the ultimate restoration of his sight by Rapunzel's tears. Instead Morris probes the ambivalent hopes, dreams, and fears of the Prince and Rapunzel, providing the barest thread of a simplified, and at times altered, narrative. No explanation is provided for Rapunzel's imprisonment by the witch, for example; nor does the Prince ascend the tower multiple times to meet his love. He greets Rapunzel in her chamber but once. We are not shown by what means he ascends the tower nor how he and Rapunzel escape from it. Instead we find ourselves peering into the minds of both characters as they reflect—sometimes independently, sometimes interactively—on their past experiences and future hopes.

Both protagonists strive for release from their individual hells. The Prince should delight in war, but instead is given to dreaming, subjecting him to "scoff . . . from any knave or coward." As he departed the court to seek a mate, "Men did not bow the head,/Though I was the king's own son;/ 'He rides to dream,' they said." Rapunzel, we discover, has lost her identity completely. In a grotesque twist on the original tale, she bears an assumed name—that of the witch. The restoration of the Prince's sight through Rapunzel's tears is replaced in Morris's text by the re-establishment of Rapunzel's identity (as the beautiful Guendolen) by virtue of the Prince's love. Throughout the opera, the witch stands between them, a barrier to their union in the beginning and still a potent threat at the end. Though the lovers are united in the finale, the vindictive specter has the last word, as she mocks them from hell: "Woe! That any man could dare/To climb up the yellow stair,/Glorious Guendolen's golden hair."

Morris's poem is not divided into formal scenes or acts, but five temporal changes are specified in the text: "In the wood near the tower,

²⁶ For a discussion of Harrison and homosexuality, see Miller and Lieberman, *Lou Harrison*, chap. 10.

²⁷ Undated letter, Harrison to Peter Oskarson in Bonn, in preparation for the German performance in 1993.

in the evening," "In the morning," "Evening in the tower," "Morning in the woods," and "Afterwards, in the palace." These changes in time formed the basis for Harrison's division of the text into operatic acts.

The poem opens with the Prince in the wood, Rapunzel in the tower. Though they independently describe their histories, Morris interweaves their soliloquies in alternating quatrains, suggesting their impending union. Between their individual reflections, however, the witch intervenes with her mantra: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair."

In the morning, the Prince recalls his departure from court and his apparent dream of a beautiful maiden in a mysterious tower. But "on all sides" he senses "a great loneliness that sicken'd me." The witch's reappearance awakens him to reality:

Ah Christ! it was no dream then, but there stood
(She comes again) a maiden passing fair,
Against the roof, with face turn'd to the wood,
Bearing within her arms waves of her yellow hair.

As the Prince watches, the witch ascends the tower, taunting: "Is there any who will dare/To climb up the yellow stair?" Rapunzel's response is religious: she utters a prayer taught her by her mother.

Christ, bring me to thy bliss.
Mary, maid without wem,
Keep me! . . . Give me a kiss,
Dear God, dwelling up in heaven!
Also: Send me a true knight,
Lord Christ, with a steel sword, bright,
Broad, and trenchant; yea, and seven
Spans from hilt to point, O Lord!
And let the handle of his sword
Be gold on silver, Lord in heaven!
Such a sword as I see gleam
Sometimes, when they let me dream.

The next scene finds the two lovers alone in the tower, Rapunzel urging escape before the witch finds them together:

It grows half way between the dark and light;
Love, we have been six hours here alone,
I fear that she will come before the night,
And if she finds us thus we are undone.

But the Prince hesitates, quizzing her about her knowledge of death. Have you ever "seen a man take mortal harm?" he asks. Rapunzel tells him of two knights who battled below her tower until one was killed and "lay there for days after the other went." He was "such a batter'd

thing," she moans, "His mother had not known him on that day." The Prince sighs: "Ah, they were brothers then . . . and were loyal men. . . . O child, I should have slain my brother, too . . . , had I not ridden out to look for you."

Morning finds them in the wood, Rapunzel marveling at the wet grass and the blue flowers. The Prince sings the song of a "dreamy harper" who years earlier had predicted his meeting with the maid Guendolen. Responding to his bewilderment that her name does not match that in the minstrel's song, Rapunzel reveals that through his love "me and my unknown name you have well won;/The witch's name was Rapunzel; eh! not so sweet?"

The final scene ("afterwards in the palace") mirrors the opening. Again the Prince (now King Sebald) and Rapunzel (now Guendolen) speak independently in interlocked quatrains. The people praise Sebald with a gold crown and "gold-hung streets" and Guendolen revels in his adoration; yet Morris continues to separate the lovers in independent reveries. Between them lurks the threat of madness in the form of the witch: "Guendolen! Guendolen! One lock of hair! . . . Woe is me! Guendolen/Sweeps back her hair." As Guendolen shivers ("even now a harsh voice seems/to hang about my hair"), Morris recalls the witch's earlier threat, which Harrison set in a stark recitative that concludes the opera (Ex. 1).

Morris's tale spoke eloquently to Harrison's New York troubles: his "imprisonment" in the mental hospital, his loneliness, his ambivalence toward his brother's happiness, his search for romantic partnership, his despair over war, his turn toward religious consolation, and his apprehension about his future stability. Harrison did not identify with a single character, but rather with the psychological struggles of both protagonists: Prince Sebald's demonstration of virility (rescuing the damsel from the tower) prompted by charges of unmanliness; and Rapunzel's escape from an oppressive living situation. Like the characters in Morris's tale, Harrison sought both a stable partnership and a distinctive musical identity—his true name, so to speak. In Morris's hands, the Rapunzel story had become a tale about the complexity of relationships—the Prince and Rapunzel progress from separation with the promise of union to union with the lingering dread of separation.

Harrison set nearly every word of Morris's text, using the time changes in the poem as divisions between the acts. However, he broke Morris's long second scene ("in the morning") into two acts by dividing the Prince's reflections in the woods from Rapunzel's prayer in the tower, thereby emphasizing their spatial separation (see Table 1).

The entire opera lasts just under an hour (see the timings in Table 1) and calls for three solo singers (without chorus) and an orchestra of about twenty players (strings, a small wind section, piano, celesta,

EXAMPLE 1. *Rapunzel*, end of the opera

(All musical examples in this article are reprinted by permission of the publisher: *Rapunzel* by Lou Harrison, © 1992 by Peer International Corp.)

199

Witch *ff* *a piacere, ma feroce* ,

Woe! _____ that an - y man could

l.v.

202

dare To climb up the yel - low stair, Glor - ious Guen - do - len's gol - den hair. _____

lunga *Curtain* *Fine*

Deo Gratias

tack-piano, and harp). To provide greater instrumental richness, Harrison frequently subdivides the strings, creating a dense texture with a luxurious lower-string timbre. The witch's part (for contralto) consists only of occasional—though crucial—interjections, featuring her oft-repeated theme, shown in Example 2. Thus Harrison's opera is basically an extended duet for two solo singers (soprano and baritone) and orchestra. Though score and parts are available for rental,²⁸ the opera is still relatively unknown, and performances are rare. Part of the reason is the very challenging vocal writing, requiring singers with a wide range and secure sense of pitch to negotiate the difficult, often disjunct melodic lines, particularly in the extended unaccompanied recitatives.

Rapunzel is one of only a handful of works by Harrison that is strictly 12-tone throughout. In contrast to Morris's poem—which evoked for

²⁸ From Peer Music, New York.

TABLE 1

Morris's time/place	Act in the opera	Plot	Musical form	Row forms used	Length (from recording)
Evening Woods	Act 1	Prince and Rapunzel reflect independently on their histories	ABA w/instrumental intro and epilogue	A: P ₆ , P ₁₁ B: P ₇ , P ₆	7:21
Morning Woods	Act 2	Prince's monologue (he watches the witch ascend the tower)	Prince: unaccomp. recit; arioso Witch: brief interjection Prince: arioso; unaccomp. recit	all transpositions of the row used	11:44
Morning Tower	Act 3	Rapunzel's prayer	Recitative Prayer: w/orchestral ritornello Recitative	introductory recit: P ₆ prayer: P ₁₁ , P ₄ ritornello: P ₁₁ final recit: P ₅ , P ₆ , P ₄	7:12
Evening Tower	Act 4	Prince and Rapunzel meet in the tower	Air Recitative Air	Air 1: P ₂ , P ₁₁ , P ₃ , P ₇ Recit: wanders through most transpositions; then settles into P ₆ and P ₈ Air 2: P ₆ , P ₆ , P ₇	13:43
Morning Woods	Act 5	Prince and Rapunzel after their escape	Instrumental introduction Accompanied recitative Air	Introduction: P ₉ , P ₈ Recit: P ₄ , P ₇ Air: P ₁ , P ₇ , P ₈ , P ₆	5:37
Afterwards Palace	Act 6	Sebald and Guendolen arrive as King and Queen	A-A'-A'' with instrumental introduction and interludes	A: P ₂ , P ₈ , P ₆ A': P ₂ , P ₁ , P ₁₁ A'': P ₇ , P ₁ , P ₆ instr: various row transpositions	7:59

THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 2. *Rapunzel*, Act 1, mm. 67–77 (middle C sounds as a drone in the cello throughout)

67

Witch

Ra - pun - zel, _____ Ra - pun - zel, _____

Let down your hair!

96

70

74

Rapunzel

When I un-do the knot - ted mass,

f

sfz

Harrison the madness of his New York years—Schoenberg represented the stability of coherent method. The question, however, was how to reconcile the 12-tone technique with his renewed commitment to diatonicism. In this endeavor, he drew inspiration from the works of Alban Berg. In 1947, Harrison had published an article on the modern violin

concerto in which he portrayed the solo violinist as “a singing person . . . pitted against . . . an indefinitely large, expanded world of the modern orchestra.”²⁹ Among modern composers, Harrison found that only Berg was able to discover an “intuitive rebirth and the sense of continuity with things past and future” in a genre replete with “heavy and depressing thoughts . . . about the . . . troubles of the modern person and his world.”³⁰ “Berg was deep within me when I wrote *Rapunzel*,” says Harrison, “especially the *Lyric Suite* and the Violin Concerto.”³¹ Passages such as the excerpt from Act 4 shown in Example 3 pay homage to the rich romanticism and sweeping melodic lines of the Violin Concerto.

Berg’s works in general, and the Violin Concerto in particular, stimulated Harrison to use the 12-tone system to create effects of tonal centrality. He admired Berg’s ability to reconcile the competing demands of serialism and tonality by manipulating the tone row in inventive ways, such as creating a row from overlapping triads, extracting sub-units of the series, or using interval cycles. The Violin Concerto’s row, for instance, is built from concatenations of major and minor triads (with three notes left over; Ex. 4a). Harrison’s row in *Rapunzel* has similar tonal implications (interlocking major and minor triads with two notes left over; Ex. 4b).³² The opera’s basic row (Ex. 4c) features six pairs of notes; five express semitone relationships and one is third-related. The intervals separating these six pairs are those crucial to tonality: fifth- and major-third relationships. Furthermore, the outer notes of the row—which are frequently emphasized agogically in the melodic lines—are also fifth-related.

Harrison often compares his compositional process to a challenging game of solitaire: the composer pre-determines rules for each work and then agrees to abide by them without cheating. *Rapunzel*’s rules are based on Schoenberg’s principles, but, like Berg’s, they permit variants. In particular: (1) individual tones can be extracted as drones or ostinati, thus permitting Harrison to omit them (when he wishes) in the melodic line; (2) the row is treated in a rotational fashion, so that a phrase might begin on any note within any row form as long as Harrison cycles back to the beginning to encompass all 12; and (3) repetition of row segments (typically two to four notes) is allowed, as long as the series is completed thereafter. Example 5, from *Rapunzel*’s prayer in Act 3, uses all three techniques. D, E, and G are held as drone tones in the viola and cello throughout the aria (mm. 1–117). Beginning in

²⁹ Lou Harrison, “The Violin Concerto in the Modern World,” *Listen: The Guide to Good Music* (March 1947): 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Harrison, conversation with Leta Miller, 9 October 2001.

³² I am much indebted to Prof. Paul Nauert for pointing out to me the overlapping triads in *Rapunzel*’s row.

EXAMPLE 3. *Rapunzel*, Act 4, mm. 12–23

98

12

It grows half - way — be - tween the dark and light; —

mf

16

mf

20

half - way be - tween

mp

measure 74, an ostinato figure begins in the piano using the retrograde form of P_{11} , beginning on the row's tenth note and then cycling back to the end after reaching note 1. (In this discussion, P_0 is defined as the row form that appears at the beginning of the opera. In order to more clearly demonstrate the relationships among various row forms, I use $\leftarrow P$, rather than R , for the retrograde forms.) In measure 78 Rapunzel enters (imitated by the flute), using the same row as the piano, but with

EXAMPLE 4. Comparison of Berg's row in the Violin Concerto with *Rapunzel's* row

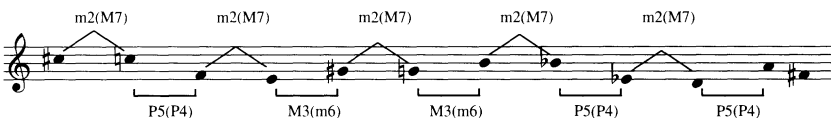
a. Berg, Violin Concerto, tone row (concatenated major and minor triads)



b. Harrison, *Rapunzel*, tone row (interwoven major and minor triads)



c. Interval classes in *Rapunzel's* row



the drone tones omitted (these tones are shown in boxes in Ex. 5). Notes 10–8 are repeated internally.

After Harrison was well into the process of composing *Rapunzel*, he discovered that he had fewer row choices than normal. Only then did he realize that he had inadvertently devised what he calls a “trick row”: the first ten notes of its inversion, transposed up a semitone, are a retrograde of the first ten notes of the original (Ex. 6). Since Harrison could start anywhere within any row and circle back to its beginning, the related forms (P_0 and I_1 , P_1 and I_2 , P_2 and I_3 , etc.) became indistinguishable, and he was left with only half the usual number of forms. The compositional game, then, became that much more challenging.

Harrison's strategy for creating contrast in *Rapunzel* involved deliberate juxtaposition of sections that are tonally centered with others that are tonally diffuse. Diffusion is created by cycling through numerous row forms without privileging one transposition over another. Tonal centricity, in contrast, is created by focusing on a few selected transpositions through which he can forefront crucial pitches. The highlighted pitches in such sections are independent of any drone tones, which frequently function as a means of disposing of inconvenient pitches. (The drones are not always present; when they are, the pitch classes vary

THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 5. *Rapunzel*, Act 3, mm. 74–88. Numbers in boxes represent drone tones

74

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 12 11

P_{11}

f

77

P_{11} 10 (D) 9 8

Lord, _____

(flute)

mp *sempre*

80

(10) 9 8 10 9 8)

give Mar - y a dear kiss,

83

7 6 (G) 5 4 (E) 3 2

And let _____ gold Mi - chael,

EXAMPLE 5. (continued)

EXAMPLE 6. *Rapunzel's row*

a. P_0

b. I,

retrograde of the first ten pitches of P_{10}

between, or even within, movements.) One of Harrison's oft-repeated frustrations with 12-tone serialism was that "the last three, and sometimes four tones more often than not don't want to be there." By extracting such notes as drones, he could construct a melody line that would enhance his desired tonal center.

The clearest example of tonal diffusion is found in Act 2, the Prince's soliloquy in the woods.³³ After an introductory instrumental flourish that settles on F# (one of the main tonal centers of the previous act), the Prince cycles through every transposition of the row. At first his wanderings are accompanied by interjections of the remembered F#, but soon he is left on his own to meander through the various transpositions (Ex. 7).

³³ The analysis presented in the following section is my own. After completing it, I discussed it with Harrison and he acknowledged that it captured the essence of his compositional process in this work.

THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 7. *Rapunzel*, Act 2, beginning

In the morning.

Allegro maestoso (♩ = 80)

Curtain

Tempo il voce *parlando, ma poco ritmico*

Prince

P₆ 3 4 5 6 8 9 11 12 2

ff 7 10 3 1

sffz

P₀ 12 11 10 9

I have heard tales of men, who in the

8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 12 11 10 9 8 7 6

night Saw paths of stars let down to earth from heav-en, Who fol-low'd them un-til they reach'd the

P₃

5 4 3 2 1 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

light Where-in they dwell, whose sins are all for-giv-en; But who went back-ward when they saw the

P₈

EXAMPLE 7. (continued)

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line features a series of notes with numbers 1-12 indicating pitch classes. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with various chords and melodic fragments.

System 1:

- Vocal line: $\overset{\text{P}_9}{\text{gate Of di-a-mond, nor dared to en-ter in; All their life long they were con-tent to wait,}}$
- Piano line: $\text{Purg-ing them pa-tient-ly of ev-ery sin. I must have had a dream of some such thing, And now am}$

System 2:

- Vocal line: $\text{just a-wak-ing from that dream; For e-ven in grey dawn those strange words ring Through}$
- Piano line: $\text{heart and brain, and still I see that gleam. For in my dream at sun-set time I lay Be-neath these}$

System 3:

- Vocal line: $\text{beech-es, mail and hel-met off, Right full of joy that I had come a-way From court; for I was pa-tient of the}$
- Piano line: $\text{beech-es, mail and hel-met off, Right full of joy that I had come a-way From court; for I was pa-tient of the}$

At the re-entry of the orchestra, however, a drone E_b-A_b begins in the cellos, its notes sometimes, but not always, eliminated from the melodic lines in the other parts (Ex. 8). Here Harrison creates greater tonal centricity both by beginning the Prince's melodic line on a unison with one of the drone tones, and by pausing at pitches 8 and 9 for an extensive internal repeat (mm. 4ff.). In fact the notes C and G

a. Mm. 3-9

(3) **Poco lento, in tempo**

was a tow-er fair, The mar-ble cor-ners faint a-against the sky; And dream-i - ly I won-dered

drone holds to m. 22

P_5 10 9-8 7 (10 9-8 7) 6

P_5 10 9-8 7 (A \flat -E \flat) (10 9-8 7) 6 5 4

7
9 8 9
what lived there; Be-cause it
5 4 3
seemed a dwell-ing for a queen, No
2 1 12 11
3 2 1 12 11

EXAMPLE 8. (*continued*)b. P_5 with drone tones extracted

become a vocal ostinato over a canonic rendition of P_5 retrograde (rotated to begin with note 10) in the strings and harp.

Furthermore, by eliminating the drone tones $E\flat-A\flat$ from the orchestra's rendition of P_5 , Harrison isolated the major triad $C-E-G$ (Ex. 8b), reinforcing the $\hat{C}-G$ ostinato in the voice. This change from diffusion to centricity is driven by the text, for here the Prince recalls his first impression of the gleaming marble tower, a "dwelling for a queen." At the end of this section, however, as he sees "the proofs of a great loneliness," his diffuse wanderings resume. Four times during this act—always in recitative sections—Harrison cycles through every transposition of the row. Though short contrasting sections (such as the one illustrated by Ex. 8) momentarily hint at greater centricity, this act for the most part leaves the listener with a sense of instability.

Act 2 stands in striking contrast to its surrounding (tonally-centered) movements. Act 1 sets forth the tonal framework of the opera. Its opening orchestral introduction (Ex. 9a) introduces the two dominant row forms of the act (P_0 and P_{11}). By extracting the drone tones F and C from P_0 , Harrison created a ten-tone row that is perfectly balanced in terms of intervallic structure (Ex. 9b): a m_3/M_6 on each end, three semitone pairs in the center, and connecting intervals of two P_4/P_5 s and two M_3/m_6 s. The opening gesture, treated canonically, presents this balanced ten-tone row in a dramatic descent that settles on a satisfying $F\sharp$ cadential arrival in measure 5.

The bass instruments respond with an imitative answer at the fifth, moving in two broad downward gestures from $G\sharp$ to a cadence on the original $C\sharp$ (mm. 5–8). Harrison carved this parallel structure not from P_7 (which might seem the obvious choice), but rather from P_{11} , beginning on the 11th note and cycling back to the beginning to finish on the 10th (with the drone tones again removed; see Ex. 9c). Had he chosen to use P_7 (Ex. 9d), which features $G\sharp$ and $C\sharp$ as its outer notes, the imitation would have been compromised; there was no way to preserve the melody's opening minor third and its pairs of descending semitones. Instead, he located a version of the row in which $G\sharp$ and $C\sharp$ were adjacent, but which could also be used to create a recognizable melodic rhyme. The act's opening contrapuntal theme recurs periodically, as does a

EXAMPLE 9. *Rapunzel*, Act 1

a. Mm. 1–8

106

Poco lento ($\text{♩} = 72$)

mp *pp* *p*

Ped. sempre

Drone continues throughout Act I.
(C is held throughout.)

$P_0: 1 \overset{(C-F)}{\boxed{2-3}} 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11$

$P_{11}: \boxed{12-1} 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9$

b. Ten-tone row created by extracting the drone tones (C–F) from P_0

$m3(M6)$ $M3(m6)$ $m2(M7)$ $M3(m6)$ $P5(P4)$ $P5(P4)$ $m3(M6)$

c. P_{11} with drone tones in boxes

d. P_7 with drone tones in boxes

EXAMPLE 9. (*continued*)

e. Mm. 207–17

207

mp

210

p *pp*

214 Curtain

ppp

107

rising eighth-note figuration leading from C \sharp to F \sharp . The movement ends with a juxtaposition of these two motives (Ex. 9e), its melodic line concluding on the cadential F \sharp .

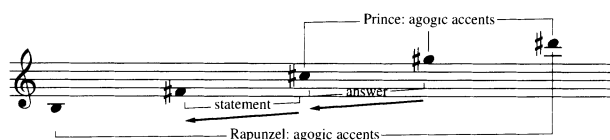
The three pitches that stand out in the opera's opening instrumental introduction are F \sharp , C \sharp , and G \sharp (the opening and concluding notes of each phrase), a fifth-related group that forms the tonal basis for the opera. This trio is frequently expanded outward in both directions—to B on the one hand and D \sharp on the other (Ex. 10a). The opening melodies of the Prince and Rapunzel (which Harrison intended as imitations of simple folk tunes), take us from B to G \sharp and then back from G \sharp to B with agogic emphasis on C \sharp and D \sharp (Ex. 10b). The extension downward to B was perhaps suggested by the structure of P $_{11}$, whose the outer notes become B and G \sharp with the drone tones removed (Ex. 9c above).

These two related tunes are segregated by the witch's first interjection (shown in Ex. 2 above). Though drawn from P $_o$, her line begins on F (note 3), a dissonant relationship with the notes of the central tonality

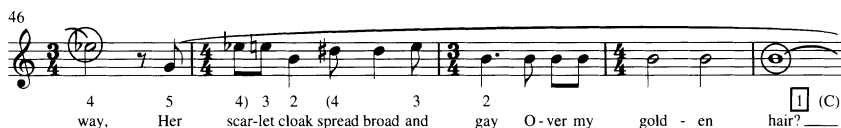
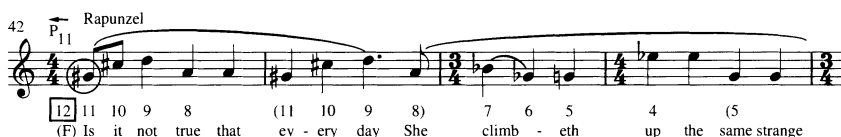
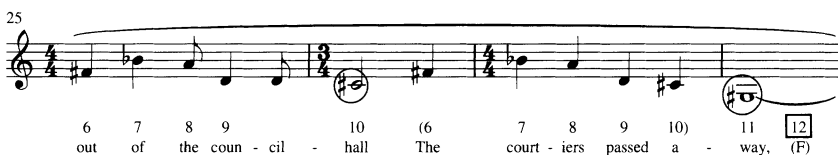
THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 10. *Rapunzel*, Act 1

a. Expansion of the original fifth-related group



b. The opening melodies of the Prince (mm. 20–28) and Rapunzel (mm. 42–50)



(though consonant with the drone). However, her theme also emphasizes G# and D#, and its instrumental extension cycles us back to C#, leading smoothly into Rapunzel's response a fifth higher.

Act 1's central tonality, F#–C#, is thus related by half step to the double drone F–C. The semitone relationship of these two fifth-related pairs recalls the predominant characteristic of the row itself: that is, its five pairs of semitones. Furthermore, this chromatic harmonic language

is consistent with Harrison's interest in "secundal counterpoint,"³⁴ a focus of a number of his works immediately preceding his breakdown. (A striking example is the organ work *Praises for Michael the Archangel* cited above.)³⁵ The double drone in the opening act of *Rapunzel* functions "as a shadow" of the central tonality, says Harrison, providing a "resonant background" for the melody in the foreground.³⁶ As shown below, the first act unfolds as a classic arch form, with an instrumental introduction/epilogue and a vocal statement/recapitulation surrounding a central section in a contrasting "key" (P_7 and P_6).

Instrumental introduction	Vocal section 1	Vocal section 2	Vocal section 3	Instrumental epilogue (=introduction)
P_0, P_{11}	P_0, P_{11}	P_7, P_6	P_0, P_{11}	P_0, P_{11}

Act 3, Rapunzel's prayer scene, is even more tonally centric than Act 1. It opens with a ringing $C\sharp$ in the harp and a brief recitative that leads to $F\sharp$, the same two notes emphasized in the introduction to the first act (Ex. 11a). A triple drone in the strings (D–E–G) then sets up an instrumental ritornello that recurs periodically (recall, as well, Ex. 5 above). This drone is maintained uninterrupted throughout the prayer that follows, stopping at measure 117, six bars before Rapunzel's concluding recitative. In the final recitation, the drone changes first to B–D and then to A–D. Harrison intended the drone tones of this movement (D E G A B D) to outline the type of pentatonic mode that increasingly appealed to him in this post-breakdown period.³⁷ His interest in Asian musics—and especially in gamelan (which he had heard as early as 1939)—began to emerge as a more and more prevalent influence in his compositions after 1950. His earliest efforts in this direction involved imitation of gamelan modes (*pélog* and *sléndro*) and gamelan timbres (which he mimicked by instrumental combinations such as celesta, harp, and tack-piano—what he calls "the gamelan section of the orchestra"). For instance, in his *Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra*, written only one year before *Rapunzel*, Harrison included two movements entitled first and second gamelan. The "First Gamelan" approximates a *pélog* tuning system (seven tones including some semitones) and the

³⁴ Harrison discusses octaval, quintal, tertial, and secundal counterpoint in his *Musical Primer* (New York: C. E. Peters, 1971; repr. with Japanese translation and appendices in 1993). He claims as influences for these terms not Charles Seeger, but rather Joseph Yasser and Virgil Thomson.

³⁵ See n14.

³⁶ Harrison, conversation with Leta Miller, 17 January 2002.

³⁷ Harrison, conversation with Leta Miller, Fall 2001.

THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 11. *Rapunzel*, Act 3

a. Opening recitative and beginning of the instrumental ritornello

Poco lento
Rapunzel P_0

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
My moth-er taught me man-y prayers To say when I had need; I have so man-y

Harp f *let sound*

P_0

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
cares, That I can take no heed Of man-y words in them; But I re-mem-ber this:

Air
Allegro moderato ($\text{♩} = 92$)

8
 P_{11}

mf *sempre ritmico*
drone continues to m. 117

ff

7 6 5 3 4 2 1 12

EXAMPLE 11. (*continued*)

b. Beginning of Rapunzel's prayer (mm. 7–16)

7 flute

violin

P₁₁

Rapunzel

10 (D) 8 (10) 9 8 7

Christ bring me to thy bliss, Mar -

12

(G) 6 5 4 3 (E) 2 1 12 11

y maid with-out wem keep me!

c. Omitting the drone tones D, E, and G exposes triadic relationships in P₁₁

“Second Gamelan” suggests *sléndro*, an anhemitonic pentatonic.³⁸ Though *Rapunzel* can hardly be claimed as Asian in inspiration, the combination of harp, celesta, and tack-piano, and the pentatonic drone structure of Act 3 hint at the direction Harrison’s style would take in succeeding years.

For the central part of Act 3—the prayer text itself—Harrison composed a shamelessly triadic hymn-tune that is doubled by a solo violin

³⁸ For a discussion of the evolution of gamelan influences in Harrison’s music, see Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, “Lou Harrison and the American Gamelan,” *American Music* 17 (1999): 146–78.

and imitated canonically by the flute (Ex. 11b). Using the same row as in Act 1 (P_{11} , but now in retrograde), he highlighted triadic groupings that emerge when the triple drone is extracted (Ex. 11c).

The other row form used in Act 3 (P_4) exposes some of the same triadic relationships as P_{11} when the drones are removed (Ex. 12a). Furthermore, the original $F\sharp-C\sharp$ tonal nexus appears (as adjacent tones) near its end, a feature Harrison exploited by running the row in retrograde from the 10th note back to the first, then cycling back to the 12th and 11th (Ex. 12b). As Act 3's opening recitative took us from $C\sharp$ to $F\sharp$, so the concluding one ends with a movement from $F\sharp$ back to $C\sharp$ (Ex. 13).

The poetic parallelism of Morris's first and last scenes was not lost on Harrison. Nor was Morris's vision of unity haunted by the specter of separation. But subtle alterations heighten both the triumph and the tension of this climactic (partial) resolution. Melodically, the lines sung by Sebald and Guendolen mirror those in Act 1 (compare Exs. 14a and 14b with Ex. 10b above), but in most of this movement the prevailing fifth-relationship is ratcheted up to $G\sharp-D\sharp$. Similarly, the drone has now become $G-D$, played in frantic sixteenth-notes. The form of the movement also parallels that of Act 1: three vocal sections, each featuring independent speeches by the two protagonists, separated by increasingly ominous interjections by the witch (refer to Table 1, p. 95). The opera ends with the witch alone (Ex. 1), her phrase outlining the fifth-relation $A-D$, which stands in conflict with the prevailing tonal centers, but in consonance with the accompanying pentatonic drone ($C D E G A$) built from superimposed fifths.

Harmonic coincidences in Harrison's opera are primarily guided by contrapuntal concerns. Ruggles's music (a predominant influence on him at the time) encapsulated for Harrison not only an imaginative and flexible system of pitch relationships but also an exacting skill in counterpoint. "When I first encountered in the San Francisco Public Library Music Department, many years ago, the volume containing *Men and Mountains*," wrote Harrison in 1955, ". . . I was instantly aware that while this music was in the chromatic dissonant style and showed a certain resemblance to Berg and Schoenberg, . . . it also held something rare, something different from these others in its long, continuous, really vocal counterpoints."³⁹ The success of Ruggles's polyphony, Harrison wrote, lay in the "lack of negative spacing in the voices," each line a coherent and independent melody "bound into a community of singing lines." Harrison's works throughout the 1940s are marked by his explorations of contrapuntal relationships. (He even wrote a percussion fugue

39 Harrison, "Carl Ruggles," *The Score and I.M.A. Magazine* 12 (1955): 15.

EXAMPLE 12. *Rapunzel*, Act 3

- a. Removing the drone tones D, E, and G from P_4 exposes some of the same triadic relationships as in P_{11}



EXAMPLE 13. *Rapunzel*, end of Act 3

Yes, oft-en in that hap-py trance, Be-side the bless-ed count-en-ance Of gold-en Mich-ael, on the spire

Glow-ing all crim-son in the fire Of sun-set, I be-hold a face, Which some-time, If God give me

grace, May kiss me in this ver-y place. Curtain

p

rallentando

rallentando

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system includes lyrics for the vocal line and a piano part starting with a *p* dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system concludes the piece with the word 'Curtain' and features a *rallentando* marking. Fingerings and breath marks are indicated above the notes in the vocal line.

EXAMPLE 14. *Rapunzel*, Act 6

a. Mm. 20–28

20 King Sebald P_2 ff 8 9 10 (9) 10 8
I took my ar-mour off, Put

23 9 10 9 10 11 12 1
on king's robes of gold; O-ver the kir-tle

26 $\boxed{2-3}$ 4 (1 $\boxed{2-3}$ 4 1 $\boxed{2-3}$ 4) 5
green The gold fell _____ fold on fold. _____

THE JOURNAL OF MUSICOLOGY

EXAMPLE 14. (continued)

b. Mm. 51-59

51 $\overline{P_6}$ Guendolen ff 10 9 8 7 (9 8 7)

I am so glad, for ev-ery day He

54 6 5 (D) 4 (6 5) 4) 3 2 1 G

kiss-es me much the same way As in the tower.

57 12 11 (12 11 12 11 12 11)

un-der the sway Of all my gold-en hair.

EXAMPLE 15. *Rapunzel*, Act 5, Air (the eighth-note figuration is built from an interweaving of P_2 and P_3)

Air

Moderato maestoso, ($\text{♩} = 126\text{--}132$, $\text{♩} = 63\text{--}98$)

Twixt the sun - light and the shade Float up

mem - ories of

gva

After finishing *Rapunzel* and completing its orchestration in the spring of 1953,⁴¹ Harrison faced the challenge of securing a performance—no mean task for a contemporary opera, even one whose performance requirements are modest. Fortuitously, an opportunity to premiere an excerpt fell into his lap almost immediately, but it required a reworking of his newly completed orchestration. By the time he left North Carolina to return to northern California in 1953, Harrison had received word that he and Ben Weber had been selected as the two American contestants in a competition at the International Conference of Contemporary Music in Rome the following Spring. (A copy of the beginning of a

⁴¹ In a letter to his parents dated 14 April 1953, Harrison remarked that he was still working on the orchestration.

letter to his mother, in which he tells her about this honor, is reproduced as Figure 1b at the end of this article.) He labored feverishly to prepare Rapunzel's prayer scene for the event, transforming his unused orchestration into a chamber ensemble version.

On 27 March 1954 Harrison set off for Rome. All competition works were performed before a live audience without identification of the composer. His entry was sung by Leontyne Price, who had made her debut two years earlier in a revival of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* but was yet to sing with a major opera company. Michael Steinberg, reviewing the competition for the *New York Times*, praised the scene from *Rapunzel*, noting that it had "achieved what only one of its competitors . . . had come close to achieving. . . . Every turn of vocal melody, every rhythm or color in accompaniment was motivated by something in the text."⁴²

Rapunzel's *Air* won a Twentieth-Century Masterpiece Award for the best composition for voice and chamber ensemble. The prize (2,500 Swiss francs), which Harrison shared with Jean-Louis Martinet of France in what some reviewers considered a blatant political compromise, was conferred by Igor Stravinsky. An indignant Allen Hughes fumed in *Musical America*: "That anyone could have doubted the Harrison work to be infinitely superior to Martinet's is simply beyond the realm of imagination. It had seemed, in fact, to be the consensus of the majority of conference participants that the Harrison piece would be the one sure winner."⁴³

The complete opera was premiered in New York on 14 May 1959 (Harrison's 42nd birthday) in a double bill with Peggy Glanville-Hicks's *Glittering Gate*. His original vision was to place the three singers in the pit with the orchestra and portray the story on stage through dance.⁴⁴ The New York premiere did not adopt this idea, but a 1966 revival at the Cabrillo Music Festival in California attempted something similar: masked actors, mimes, and dance.

The opera was received, for the most part, with cautious praise. Howard Taubman (*New York Times*) commented that Harrison's "atonal-

⁴² Michael Steinberg, "Leontyne Price Soloist in Rome; Offers Setting of Prayer in Chamber Music Category—3 Fragments Heard," *New York Times*, 15 April 1954.

⁴³ Allen Hughes, "Rome Conference Selects Prize Scores," *Musical America* 74 (1954): 3.

⁴⁴ In a letter to Glanville-Hicks in 1956, Harrison suggested that the dancers include "three leads and perhaps two or three attendants for the Prince and Rapunzel. Also a witchling or so could be dashing in and out doing mysterious things during the prince's long soliloquies." Letter, Harrison to Glanville-Hicks, 28 November 1956 (New York Public Library, Composers Forum documents, Music-Am [Letters] 83-39, folder 377). Quoted by permission.

ism is not in the least forbidding. On the contrary, it is consistently lyrical, if never passionate.”⁴⁵ Francis Perkins (*Herald Tribune*) wrote that “there was no austerity, no setting off in brief segments, but a continuity which was lyric and, when desired, pungent, along with a pervasive and convincing sensitiveness.”⁴⁶

At the same time, however, Perkins missed “a sense of dramatic tension,” a criticism that has marked several later reviews. After the Cabrillo Music Festival’s 1966 performance, for instance, Robert Commanday (*San Francisco Chronicle*) wrote: “There was more drama in a few minutes of Mahler’s music than in the entire one hour score for ‘Rapunzel,’” and Alexander Fried (*San Francisco Examiner*) found the production “little more mobile than a dream tableau, in an effete pre-Raphaelite spirit.”⁴⁷ But there were also those who were willing to suspend the need for plot and revel in the “timelessness of the fairy-tale turned quasi-religious allegory.”⁴⁸ Raymond Ericson cited the opera’s “incantational qualities”; Richard Dee remarked on a “complete wedding of music and verse,” and Ron Reeves found the music “the expression of a man in love with music . . . handling it like a woman.”⁴⁹

In 1993 *Rapunzel* was revived for a performance in Bonn, where German reviewers, like others before them, noted the dream quality of the retold fairy tale, as well as the wedding of words and music. “Through the verse of William Morris, the [Rapunzel] tale is changed to a plea for peace and the harmony of love that even the witch cannot take away,” wrote the reviewer in the *Dortmund Ruhr-Nachrichten*. “For that, Harrison, the Schoenberg student, has found an individual musical language.”⁵⁰ Four years later *Rapunzel* was recorded in California for

⁴⁵ Howard Taubman, “Opera: Two Premieres: ‘Glittering Gate’ and ‘Rapunzel’ at ‘Y,’” *New York Times*, 15 May 1959.

⁴⁶ Francis D. Perkins, “Two U.S. Operas in Debut at Kaufmann Concert Hall,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 May 1959.

⁴⁷ Robert Commanday, “Aptos Cabrillo Festival: Heartiness, Vitality in Sound,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 August 1966, and Alexander Fried, “Cabrillo—Beauty and a Bad ‘Dream,’” *San Francisco Examiner*, 22 August 1966.

⁴⁸ Marta Morgan, “Festival Offers Seldom Heard Scores: Rich Music Feast in Aptos,” *San Jose Mercury*, 22 August 1966.

⁴⁹ Raymond Ericson, “Showcase Offers Music of the ‘50’s: Harrison and Weber Works Heard at the Modern Art [Museum],” *New York Times*, 2 March 1962; Richard Dee, “A Weekend of Music at Cabrillo,” *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 22 August 1966; and Ron Reeves, “Harrison Concert Draws Ovation from Audience,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 22 January 1962.

⁵⁰ “‘Rapunzel’—mit Musik,” *Ruhr-Nachrichten*, 22 June 1993. (Original: Überhaupt wandelt sich das Märchen (unter den Versen von William Morris) zu einem Plädoyer für Frieden und Harmonie der Liebe, der sich selbst die Hexe nicht entziehen kann. Dafür hat der Schönberg-Schüler Harrison durchaus eine eigene Tonsprache gefunden.)

New Albion Records⁵¹ and in 2001 the Cabrillo Music Festival presented it again (this time with shadow figures), garnering effusive praise from reviewers in San Francisco and Los Angeles.⁵²

Every successful opera composer probably harbors some degree of personal identification with his/her libretto. But for Harrison, this tale of a prince rebuffing challenges to his masculinity and then establishing a fragile partnership threatened by the specter of madness related quite directly to his own recent past. Moreover, the poem's illusory setting evoked Harrison's groundlessness during a period in which he often failed to distinguish fantasy from reality; the word "dream" or its derivatives occurs 14 times in Morris's text. During the recovery phase of his illness, Harrison sought stability through explorations of his cultural heritage. Burrowing into his own history on the advice of his doctors, he found himself attracted to the history of Western art in general and particularly to the visions of past ages. In addition to *Rapunzel*, he began (and then abandoned) an opera on Cupid and Psyche and a setting of an 11th-century goliard text on birds.⁵³ He wrote music for dance productions based on the story of Io and Prometheus and on the medieval verse of Nicolas Breton.⁵⁴ And the program notes for the premiere of his quartet *The Perilous Chapel* featured a quote from *Revelation*: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea."

While Harrison's personal history may have motivated his choice of libretto, aesthetic considerations governed *Rapunzel*'s expressive language. In the 1950s, he quite deliberately remade himself. He did not adopt a new name, but he did alter his handwriting so completely that his manuscripts and letters after 1949 bear no resemblance to those dating from before his hospitalization. Harrison's post-1950 script is akin to the resplendent melodicism he cultivated in the same period, each letter finely shaped and well-balanced within the line (Fig. 1). Just as he rejected his former holographic persona, he similarly cast out many features of his earlier harmonic language. He was so convinced of his new direction that he rescinded permission to perform many works from his early New York years.

⁵¹ *Lou Harrison: Rapunzel and other Works*, New Albion Records 093, 1997.

⁵² The production was reviewed by Allen Ulrich for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and by Mark Swed for the *Los Angeles Times*.

⁵³ The latter work, *Vestiunt Silve*, was completed in 1994. For a score and analysis of this piece, see Miller, *Lou Harrison: Selected Keyboard and Chamber Music, 1937–1994*.

⁵⁴ *Io and Prometheus*, composed for dancer and choreographer Jean Erdman, was originally named *Prometheus Bound*. The music for *Almanac of the Seasons*, a dance work by Bonnie Bird based on verse by Breton, is lost.

Except for his completion in the mid 1960s of the symphony he began in the hospital, *Rapunzel* is Harrison's last major serialist work, and in that sense as well it is a turning point in his career. Thereafter, 12-tonalism often represented for him the depersonalization of Western society. He would use it, along with specifications for equal temperament, in protest pieces such as the "Hatred of the Filthy Bomb" movement of *Pacifika Rondo* (1963), which ends with a terrifying scream by the conductor.⁵⁵

Rapunzel in many ways served as a bridge from Harrison's pre-breakdown works to his mature, more transparent style. Even in his earlier compositions, however, a lyric strain is perceptible. Responses to his short, Ruggles-inspired String Trio of 1946, for instance, prompted reviewers in New York and Los Angeles to praise the work's gentleness, "spontaneity of gesture," "expressivity," and "lyric impulse."⁵⁶ After 1950, Harrison permitted this lyricism to dominate, rooting out the elements that had obscured melodic clarity and diatonic directionality while at the same time maintaining a commitment to contrapuntal integrity. *Rapunzel* thus at once evoked Harrison's past and opened a window on his future.

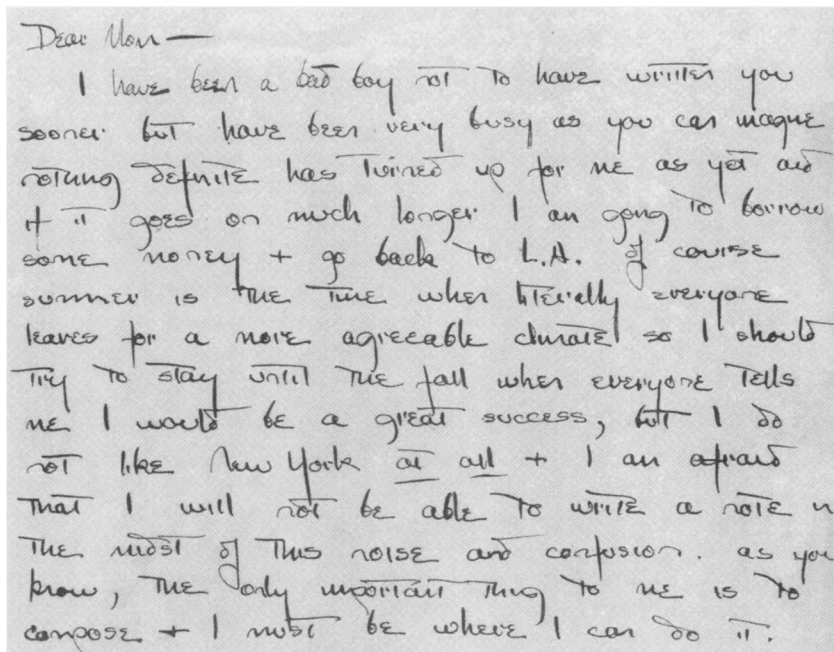
The opera is essentially lyric, the jagged lines of its recitatives balanced by evocations of folk tunes and hymns in the arias. The darkness of its expanded lower string section is similarly contrasted to the brightness of the gamelanish celesta, tack-piano, and harp combination. While the individual scenes could conceivably stand on their own (as Act 3 did in the Rome competition), *Rapunzel* is text-driven dramaturgy. Morris's poetry provided the opera's shape—not only its division into six acts, but also its parallelisms and contrasts in style and language. The music's fidelity to the text is both its strength and its difficulty. The lengthy narrations in recitative require a singer of uncommon insight to mold the rhythm with convincing flexibility (Sanford Sylvan's recent performance at the 2001 Cabrillo Music Festival was a brilliant success in this regard), and the lack of action in Morris's text requires inventive stage direction. Still unexplored is Harrison's original concept of placing the singers in the pit while the story is enacted in dance on the stage. A performance of this type, realized by a highly imaginative choreographer (Mark Morris, who has frequently collaborated with Harrison, comes immediately to mind) is overdue.

⁵⁵ Recorded on Desto DC-6478.

⁵⁶ From reviews by Virgil Thomson (*New York Herald Tribune*, 27 and 28 January 1947, p. 15), Mildred Norton (unidentified Los Angeles paper, April 1948), and T.M.S. (New York Times, 29 January 1965). Harrison claims that the trio was not influenced by Schoenberg's string trio of 1946.

FIGURE 1. Harrison's changed handwriting, in letters to his mother before and after 1950

- a. Lou Harrison to Calline Harrison, undated but postmarked July 9, 1943, shortly after he arrived in New York. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the city. Reproduced by permission of Lou Harrison.



Dear Mom—

I have been a bad boy not to have written you sooner but have been very busy as you can imagine nothing definite has turned up for me as yet and if it goes on much longer I am going to borrow some money + go back to L.A. of course summer is the time when literally everyone leaves for a more agreeable climate so I should try to stay until the fall when everyone tells me I would be a great success, but I do not like New York at all + I am afraid that I will not be able to write a note in the midst of this noise and confusion. as you know, the only important thing to me is to compose + I must be where I can do it.

As far as the compositional process is concerned, Harrison now asserts: "I could have created this music with any system—with serialism or modality or pentatonicism. It's like painting with red one day and blue the next."⁵⁷ Well, maybe. But the challenge of serving tonal ends through a system designed for the opposite effect required imagination, skill, experience, and sheer willpower. *Rapunzel* is a successful study in the balance of cohesion and contrast. Harrison describes its composition as "a fascinating adventure" in which he brought together his conflicting experiences and inclinations—serialism and tonality,

⁵⁷ Harrison, conversation with Leta Miller, 28 August 2001.

FIGURE 1. (continued)

- b. Lou Harrison to Calline Harrison, April 14, 1953, shortly before he returned to California after his two years in North Carolina. Harrison tells his mother about the forthcoming composition contest in Rome.

14 Mar-April, 1953

Dear Mother,

Here is the little composition, a suite which I composed four years ago. I hope you like it; & can read it. Unfortunately some of my nice thin stems didn't come through in the blueprint. Black notes from which the stems are missing are quarter-notes. I'll check it over before I send it. Now practice!

The honor is (today the official invitation arrived) that I am invited to compete in an international composers contest by invitation of the "Congrès pour la Liberté de la Culture" (Committee for Cultural Freedom) & to be their guest in Rome next spring. I will compose a work for voice & six instruments, the kind of composition in which I was invited, which will be published & recorded I believe, & I will be flown to Rome to attend the conference. Should my piece win in its category I should also receive an additional 5,000 Swiss francs.

I believe that I am one of three selected to represent our country, Ben Weber being, I know, one of the others.

ruggedness and lyricism, fear and hope, madness and method—to create a coherent work exploring the subtleties of human relationships. “On the question of clumpers vs. splitters,” he says, “I definitely place myself among the former.”⁵⁸

University of California, Santa Cruz

⁵⁸ Harrison, conversation with Leta Miller, 9 October 2001.

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the pivotal role of the opera *Rapunzel* (1952) in Lou Harrison's long and eclectic career. The libretto—a psychological reinterpretation of the Grimm fairy tale by the 19th-century polymath William Morris—explored themes closely related to Harrison's own psychological troubles in the late 1940s. Equally important, in this work he came to grips with 12-tone serialism, with which he had harbored an ambivalent relationship for the previous two decades. Inspired by Alban Berg's romantic yet serialist language, Harrison constructed his own opera using Schoenbergian principles while contrasting sections of tonal centrality with those of tonal diffusion. By overcoming the personal and professional obstacles that had constricted his musical growth in the previous decade, Harrison thus freed himself to pursue with confidence a new and very personal aesthetic path, turning from the dissonant contrapuntal style of his New York years to diatonicism, melodicism, and studies in just intonation.