Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra by Lou Harrison: A Study Guide

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CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND PERCUSSION ORCHESTRA  
BY LOU HARRISON: A STUDY GUIDE

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts  
in  
The College of Music and Dramatic Arts  

by  
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M.M., Louisiana State University, 2015  
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Im Memory of Maria Rozilda Bezerra Carneiro
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ABSTRACT

Lou Harrison is an American composer whose importance has been somehow overlooked. Amidst the modernist composers of the early 1940’s he was one of the most individualistic, which in turn, made him one of the most unique composers to come out of that era. Harrison’s name is mainly associated with percussion and the gamelan. However, he wrote for much more than just that. The purpose of this dissertation is to facilitate an understanding of Lou Harrison and his Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra, in the hopes of making his music accessible to the more conservative musician.

My research starts with a select biography covering the years pertinent to the composition of the concerto. Following is a detailed background on the violin concerto, including a short explanation about the percussion orchestra. In the next three chapters I provide a formal analysis with focus on melody, texture, and balance. The analysis is followed by a performance guide, where I offer tools and suggestions as to how to interpret Harrison’s music based upon my research of him and my own experience performing his piece with the LSU percussion ensemble.
CHAPTER ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Lou Harrison, a contemporary of well known American composers such as Henry Cowell, Charles Ives, and John Cage, did more for the modern American music than he is credited for. Before world-music was part of the gamut of inspiration for the serious composer, Harrison was already integrating those influences in his music, been it as an allusion or by using tangible world instruments. His music is also characterized by the emphasis on melody and rhythm, sometimes avoiding harmony all together.

![Lou Harrison](image)

Figure 1: Lou Harrison¹, Composer. Photo: Eva Soltes.

[Harrison] helped bring American music from generations of fearsome modernist iconoclasts to the generation of world music and minimalism. In the 1930s San Francisco, he helped to pioneer music for percussion ensemble as well as DIY mentality that extended to forming his own band and even making his own instruments long before classical composers did such things. His early explorations in noise, global musical cultures, early music, and unusual musical tuning also anticipated the larger world by decades, as did his contracultural convictions of pacifism and open homosexuality. An unrepentant eclectic in a

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time that celebrated singular artistic visions, he composed propulsive dance scores and unabashedly modal melodies alongside his experiments in atonality.

For the purpose of this document, a short biographical section, with focus on the years pertinent to the composition of the Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra, would be extremely helpful to the violinist who is undertaking this music with little experience outside the main stream violin repertoire.

Much of Harrison’s personal life resonates in the Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra. The love for the Eastern sounds, the choice of using the percussion ensemble as accompaniment, the dance-like character that permeates the piece and is more evident in the final movement, are all examples of how his early life contributed to the creation of this piece. Born May 14, 1917 in Portland, Oregon, Lou Silver Harrison was the eldest son of Calline Silver and Clarence Harrison. Harrison’s parents are responsible for providing him with the foundation to his lifelong passions: music and reading. A recurrent theme in most of Harrison’s music is the use of Eastern Asian sounds. The reason for this almost obsession with Asia can be traced all the way back to his first years of life. At the time he was born, many American homes were decorated with Asian themed objects. A description of Harrison’s first home at the Silver Court Apartments includes

[C]olorful paints from various Asian cultures mounted on walls covered by Japanese grass wallpaper. Chinese carved teak furniture perched on Persian rugs, colorful Japanese lanterns dangled from t In an era which produced remarkable American composers such as Henry Cowell and John Cage, one of its lessen known sons has escaped the main stream, not for lack of excellence, as his works are unique and even precedes its more famous counterpart, but maybe because of a combination of opportunity and practicality, the ceiling, cloisonné

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objects filled the mantel, and the rooms boasted other artifacts from Asia and Middle East.\textsuperscript{3}

This home where he lived the first eight years of his life would prove to be one of the happiest memories the composer would hold. Later in life, Harrison came to realize that in pursuing, studying, and ultimately creating original music deeply informed by the traditional sounds of Asia, he was trying to recapture the lost treasures of his youth. In an interview the composer says “I was surrounded by a household of very fine Asian art and as I grew up, I wanted to reproduce that. My problem has been, could I recover the lost treasures of childhood? Well, I discovered that if I couldn’t make enough money to buy them at least I could make some.”\textsuperscript{4} Being immersed in this environment sparked in Harrison an appreciation for the Eastern cultures which in turn led him to one of his greatest accomplishments as an American composer, the incorporation of world music in the concert halls.

A dedicated mother, Callene Harrison made sure to provide both Harrison and his younger brother with a rich educational background. The young Lou Harrison was exposed to ball room dance lessons, always had a piano teacher, even throughout the many times the family had to move cities due to financial reasons. His mother also allowed him to participate in the theater from the young age of 2, an experience that left a deep impression in the composer as it gave him a taste for performance, but also caused him to suffer from anxieties that would follow him for life. At the age of 13, Harrison had learned the basics of conducting, spent much time singing in the school choir, even getting solo parts as a boy soprano, and could acceptably play the French horn and the clarinet. In the words of Harrison, “I think that my attitude towards


\textsuperscript{4} Heidi Von Gunden, \textit{The music of Lou Harrison} (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1995), 3.
music, that it’s basically a song and a dance, comes from both things: first I was a singer, then I was a dancer.”

As Harrison grew older he came to realize that he was not the same as the other boys around him. Discovering himself as a gay man, Harrison took refuge on his studies in order to avoid dealing with the bullies he had to face in his life at the time. An avid reader and gifted with a curious mind, Harrison was always taking his many teacher’s assignments one step further. His father, the one who taught him the love for the books, would also encourage him to pursue other interests independently of his own comprehension of the subject. He took the now teenager Lou Harrison to learn about medieval music at the San Francisco’s historic Mission Dolores. There Harrison took Gregorian chant, learned about church modes and recitation tones. Harrison’s father also paid for lessons on music theory where Harrison received firm grounding in traditional counterpoint.

Sometimes is easy to dismiss the early years in a composer’s life as being less important to their career, but in Harrison’s case, much of his inspirations came from that part of his life either directly or indirectly. As a reaction to the constant moves, the young Harrison learned to keep it to himself and to rely on his own judgment, a skill that gave him the confidence to pursue his intellectual ideas without the worry of rejection of the Western compositional community. A skill that was important later on when his passion for melodic beauty over harmony won him the disdain of some of the main stream composers and music critics who dismissed him as a simple

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6 Ibid., 12.
Most, however, were delighted by his ability to prioritize melody over everything else even in his most percussive works.

Between 1934 and 1942 Harrison lived in San Francisco. During this time, he expanded his interest in Asian music and dance and was exposed to several other major factors that would mark his musical personality such as, percussion, early music, and tuning systems. He also met Henry Cowell, Arnold Schoenberg, Carl Ruggles, Charles Ives, and John Cage, all very important figures in Harrison’s life, both as mentors and as peers. Cowell’s course “Music of Peoples of the World” legitimizied Harrison’s inclination to favor the eclectic sounds that filled his youth. Even though most of Harrison learning happened outside the formal institutions, as he never earned a college diploma, his sheer curiosity and appetite for learning captivated important music personalities of the time, such as Cowell and Schoenberg. Upon his arrival to San Francisco, Harrison met Henry Cowell who would be first a teacher and later a long life friend. “Henry Cowell’s view of teaching composition was that it couldn’t be taught, but that an exchange of ideas with a more experienced colleague might be stimulant to someone who already knew where he was going.” Harrison was always an eager learner, but his association with Cowell was undoubtedly the most important denominator in his artistic career. “Henry was the central information booth for two or three generation of American composers.” Harrison said “You asked Henry a question, and if he didn’t know the answer, as he often did, he knew who did and had the phone number.”

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In 1936, Harrison’s interest in percussion was ignited upon coming in contact with Edgard Varese’s *Ionization*. Another major influence was Cowell’s music for the theater piece *Fanati*, which included a piano work and a series of partially improvised percussion pieces using an eclectic array of non-traditional instruments. At a time where modernist composers were discovering the percussion as a gateway to a wide variety of timbral possibilities, Harrison found himself attracted to the novel sonorities and the practicality offered by the percussion instruments, which often could be played by non-specialists as it could be fashioned from everyday objects. “Harrison’s openness to foraged or modified instruments would stay with him throughout his life.”

Also through Cowell, Harrison was inserted in the world of modern music. Cowell was a pioneer in using percussion music at dance studios and once he was unable to carry his work due to his imprisonment, Harrison was the one to act as a middle man between Cowell, and the dance studios. Cowell’s solution to this problem was to compose a “series of fragments: melodies, drones, percussion ostinatos and so on. He gave these to Harrison and entrusted him to combine them in ways that would fit the dance that he was unable to see.” Being exposed to this music and enjoying the confidence of his mentor, Harrison was able to sometimes complete Cowell’s music when it needed to be adjusted to fit the choreographies. This invaluable experience landed Harrison a job at Mills College as dance accompanist.

Another influence for the young Harrison was the contact with the music of Charles Ives. Harrison admired the expansiveness of Ives music. He said “I could sense the grand manner in

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12 Ibid, 37.
the sonatas, and that led to my being able in a sense to write symphonies.” Ives music also provided a model for Harrison’s eclecticism which would become a hallmark of his career: “I got the idea intellectually from Mr. Ives of inclusivity – that you don’t do exclusively one kind of thing.” Harrison’s devotion to Ives music would prove fruitful for both composers as less than 10 years later Harrison would edit and conduct Ives 3rd symphony, earning it a Nobel Prize.

After being deeply influenced by the grandiose approach of that Charles Ives had to its compositional works and absorbing all that Cowell had to offer, Harrison was now in need of some manner of order to his voracious creativity. “In addition to the expressive powers in Mr. Ives and the sense of freedom, there is the need for method,” he [Harrison] said. “The friction of the polarity between the free and the controlled… is very stimulating. You have to have both… And it was this sense of order that I needed from Schoenberg. I love system and methods.” Few people were able to read the studies into twelve tone technique around 1936. Cowell was one of those who could and he introduced Harrison to its intriguing possibilities. Harrison had already avidly studied Schoenberg scores from the San Francisco library. Under Cowell’s guidance he realized that this method was not so different from the exercises he had done before where he used small melodies or “melodicles” in every manner possible. Harrison studied directly with Schoenberg when he moved to Los Angeles in 1942.

By 1936 Harrison had established most of the techniques that would help him bring the *Concerto for Violin Percussion Orchestra* to life. With the Eastern Asian influence, first present in his childhood and later developed and matured during his time in San Francisco, Harrison had

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the underlying inspiration for the exotic characteristics of his melodies. The world-music introduced by Cowell, an unifying denominator in his music, and the consequent integration of percussion due to its role in world music were a key element in providing the uniqueness of the Violin Concerto. The influence of dance and the flexibility he learned from his job at Mills College are subtly present thorough the composition and finally the composing method to tie it all together.
CHAPTER TWO: THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

Attending a request by an old friend, Anahid Ajemian (1924-2016), Harrison wrote his Violin Concerto to be premiered at her upcoming concert at Carnegie Hall. Anahid was known for bringing new music to a wide listenership. She gave the United States or world premiere of many new works, a number of which were written for her. Harrison said in an interview in 1976, “She [Anahid Ajemian] wanted to commission a piece for solo violin with small ensemble. She had commissioned Ben Weber, Ernst Krenek, and several other composers, and she wanted a work from me. So I said well, I had something I had already begun, why don’t just pick it up and go with it.”16 The concerto was premiered on November 19, 1959 at Carnegie Hall in New York; Paul Price conducted the New York Percussion Ensemble and Anahid Ajemian was the soloist.

The Koncerto por la Violono kun Perkuta Orkestra, the original title in Esperanto for the Violin Concerto, has an interesting time frame regarding its composition. The first sketches, mainly related to the first and second movements, are dated from 1940, a time when Harrison was working closely with John Cage and Henry Cowell in San Francisco. The third movement however, was completed in 1959, creating an interesting parallel in Harrisons compositional output. Inspired by revisiting his early sketches, he brought back stylistic features of his “San Francisco” period, which includes borrowing from and combining the various influences of world-music, modern dance, and instrumental experimentation.

Harrison’s San Francisco period was greatly influenced by modern dance in which Harrison was directly involved as he worked as a teacher, composer, and accompanist for dance

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classes at Mills College. The dance element in Harrison’s music evolved from his experience inside dance studios. His mentor, Henry Cowell, described the effect that modern dance has had in percussion-based works as:

…Percussion instruments are essential aids in defining rhythmic change. All dance is of course dependent on a well-defined beat; when the beat shifts constantly, as in much of modern dancing, it is vitalizing to have the changes sharply indicated on percussion instruments. Having mastered the gamut of the instruments used in the studios, they [the composers] naturally proceed to compose for them works in larger forms, with enough tone qualities and rhythms to achieve independent musical compositions.¹⁷

In an effort to be liberated from the formalities and financial burdens of dealing with the classical music establishment, Harrison and a few other composers like John Cage and William Russell sought to find new sounds outside the realm of the symphonic hall. The result of this experimentation was the musical repurposing of materials found in a house hold or in a junk yard. In an interview with Virginia Rathburn Harrison explains:

As you can readily understand, it [the percussion ensemble] has built-in abstractions, especially if you are not using symphonic percussion. When we were doing lots of percussion concerts on the West coast, way back in the 30s, we did not use classic symphony percussion because that got you involved with the symphony orchestra and traditional players and the union and everything else. Whereas, what we were creating, actually was a way of making music outside the traditional music world, and we did. It was, in fact, the same impulse that carries a lot of the young people into electronics instead of learning symphonic practices and getting acquainted with conductors and musicians and so on…We did the other thing; We went outside the establishment in every sense. We picked up brake drums and flower pots and such instruments as we could find in Chinatown. We gave our own concerts, we had our own friends to play it, we hired the hall…it was the establishment of a whole realm, a whole literature, and it did, it turns out, put the percussion ensemble on the map in western music, which it was not before.¹⁸

¹⁷ Henry cowell, “Drums Along the Pacific,” Modern Music 18, no 1 (Nov./Dec., 1940), 48-49
¹⁸ Virginia M. Rathburn, Lou Harrison and his music, (Unpublished M. A. Theses, San Jose University, 1976). 119
When studying a concerto from the standard violin repertoire, one will probably be already familiar with the mechanisms of a symphonic orchestra. As part of the process of learning a new solo piece, the musician will also learn how the solo part fits with the accompaniment, how they complement each other, what the dynamic marks mean in relationship with the background music, and how flexible can the tempo markings be interpreted. All of those questions still need to be asked when the accompaniment is not the traditional symphony but a percussion orchestra. For the first time in his compositions Harrison provides in his Violin Concerto a clear and detailed table of instructions regarding the nomenclature and specific details regarding individual selection, sound properties, and construction of the homemade instruments for the performer. (See figure 2). Due to the unconventional nature of most of the percussion instruments, it is interesting for the soloist to familiarize oneself with the shapes and sounds of the instruments that will be complementing one’s musical ideas. It will not be possible to anticipate the exact sounds that will happen before the first rehearsal, but through the notes provided with the score it is possible to have a good understanding of what to expect from the accompaniment.

A major element for successfully playing the Violin Concerto actually falls on the percussion ensemble. Today some of the “junkyard” instruments are used frequently enough that most percussion groups and percussion studios already have them in their arsenal, i.e. brake drums or washtubs. But still those instruments were “found” at some point, they are not for sale in any music store. Other instruments are more specific for this composition and may need to be handmade or acquired for the specific performance such as the pipes and the flower pots which have specific recommendation as for their sizes. Harrison is very specific about the sound he
wants from the percussion orchestra; to such degree that he gives alternative suggestions in case
the sound obtained from the specific object is not the desired one. In his notes he says

If no pre-communist Chinese gongs are available, then use modern
Indonesian ones, for most of the gongs now coming out of Hong Kong are simply
no good, I think. If the suspended brake-drums are not of the sweetest (& long
lasting), then use instead a set of large Belgian or English “hand-bells” (but
mounted of course) – in any pitches desired.¹⁹

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**Figure 2: Table of Instruments**²⁰. Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra.

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²⁰ Ibid.
Even though there is a total of twenty instruments being played in the percussion orchestra, only five players are necessary to play those parts. The instruments can be separated in two distinct categories: dry sound and sustained (or rolled) sound. (See figure 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>No. of Instruments</th>
<th>Sustained</th>
<th>Dry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Player I</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player II</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player III</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player IV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player V</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Distribution of instruments and classification according to its timbre.

As one can see in the table above, the distribution of dry and sustained instruments is mostly divided between the players, with exception of the fifth player who maintains a dry sound throughout the piece. The timbre quality of the instruments in the orchestra is a key element in understanding how Lou Harrison made an odd combination, such as a single lyrical instrument against a group of loud rhythmic instruments work in terms of sound balance.

Soon after its premier, the concerto was performed in Los Angeles under the direction of William Kraft, a percussionist and composer who was very much influenced by Harrison’s works. Kraft says “I found Lou’s percussion writing more fascinating than Cowell’s or Cage’s. I think he was the most musical, and the most in tune with sound. The solo part for the violin is a virtuoso part, extremely well written. And all the sounds, whether produced by maracas or flower pots, are so well integrated that you forget that they are exotic.”21 The admiration was mutual and upon working with Kraft for the second performance of the concerto in 1974,

Harrison revised his score to clarify matters of tempi, instrumentation and general formal expression. The revised edition is the only one available for purchase and performance today. Harrison would often take into account the suggestions from performers and conductors during rehearsals of his pieces\(^2\). He also would let many questions of interpretation open to the performer.

On a primary level, Harrison’s Violin Concerto finds its solid groundwork and foundation in world-music. Harrison says

> [the violin concerto] is among many of my compositions which follow the pattern of having a single melodic part accompanied (or enhanced) by rhythmic percussion, whether with or without an additional drone. The model is, of course, world-wide. This is the standard usage in India, in Islam, in seniti folk (if not in the cultivated) music, in Africa – and where not else? The use of a modern European instrument as a soloist, the mixture of “junk” instruments with standard ones in the percussion section, and the employment of romantic concerto form constitute the only novelties, from the world point of view.\(^3\)

Even today, a percussion orchestra is not common practice in the Western music; it is, however, not an uncommon occurrence in music around the world. Harrison is quick in recognize that the true innovation in his concerto is not the instrumentation chosen, but the combination of the European instruments and form, and the world-music style.

The violin concerto is presented in a classical three-movement scheme that follows the traditional fast – slow – fast format. While the foundation of musical form in the European tradition is grounded in harmonic movement, the organization of the thematic material can also be associated with form. Harrison’s violin concerto lacks harmony but its thematic material can be clearly connected to the traditional form in a romantic concerto. The following table identifies...

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the form of each movement in the European tradition. Figure 3 demonstrates the organization of the movements and its respective form. Each movement will be discussed in depth regarding its formal structure in the following chapters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement I</th>
<th>Allegro Maestoso</th>
<th>Sonata Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement II</td>
<td>Largo, Cantabile</td>
<td>ABCABC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement III</td>
<td>Allegro, Vigoroso poco presto</td>
<td>Rondo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Form structure of each movement.

The melody line for Harrison’s Violin Concerto and Percussion Orchestra came to him after he heard the inaugural recording of Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto around 1940. Harrison called Berg’s work “among the highest musical achievement of the century.” Berg’s mastery in using consistent chromaticism within a tonal context agreed with Harrison’s inclination to favor melody and lyricism. Inspired by the long and lyrical melody in Berg’s Violin line, Harrison composed a “fair amount” or “most of [the violin concerto]” around that time. Most of the accompaniment was added later. Years later, Harrison would be personally congratulated for his violin concerto by none other than Louis Krasner, the violinist whose premiere recording of Berg’s concerto had enticed Harrison.

To achieve the level of chromaticism desired but avoid being tied down by the strict restrictions of Schoenberg’s 12 tone serialism, Harrison came up with a variation that would give him the freedom to choose but still keep a binding structure to his music. He called this technique “interval control.” The Saraband and Prelude for Grandpiano were the first pieces to

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come from this experimentation with interval control. Both pieces were composed in 1937 and receive mixed review upon its publication. Harrison’s interval control could be used in a more strict sense, where no inversions would be allowed, or it could expand the composer’s choices by allowing the inversions and octaves displacement of the chosen intervals.

The *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra* is the most recognizable work resultant from the use of interval control. Harrison restricted his intervals to the minor second, major third, and major sixth. He called this combination of the minor second and major third “very affecting and useful,” and it would become a signature combination in works half a century later.\(^{27}\) For his violin concerto, he went as far as to preserve the intervallic relationship from the last note of one movement to the first note of the other. He also allowed the use of inversions and octaves transpositions resulting in a greater degree of flexibility while keeping a strict integrity as for its compositional method. At a quick glance, one might get the impression that Harrison may have allowed himself to escape his method. But in reality he sometimes uses enharmonic version of the pre determined intervals. (See figure 5). In essence, from any tone, then, the compositional choice was one out of the six possible ones, either up a minor 2\(^{nd}\), a Major 3\(^{rd}\), a Major 6\(^{th}\), or down the same intervals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enharmonic Intervals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor 2nd</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major 3rd</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major 6th</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Enharmonic equivalents of the allowed intervals.

Harrison wrote his score and had it published in his own typeface calligraphy. He organized the score into systems of six lines where the solo violin goes on the top and each of the following five lines is for each one of the percussionists respectively. He did not use one staff for each instrument in the percussion orchestra; instead, the instrumentation is indicated right before it is needed.
CHAPTER THREE: MOVEMENT I – ALLEGRO, MAESTOSO

Out of the three movements of this concerto, the first one is the longest and more complex in terms of orchestration and balance. Due to the innovative nature of this piece, the lack of tonality and harmonic movement makes it challenging to attempt a formal analysis in the classical European tradition. There are however, two clear elements that can be considered: the melody and the texture. With that in mind, the whole movement can be organized into two larger sections. I will call them section I and section II. Those two sections are comprised of melodic subsections that are almost a literal repetition of each other, except for the very last subsection of each section. (See figure 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Measure No.</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I – B</td>
<td>32 – 81</td>
<td>Fast, homogeneous texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I – C</td>
<td>82 – 102</td>
<td>Slow, cadence like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I – D</td>
<td>103 – 165</td>
<td>Metrically slow in the violin, canonic theme in the orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – A’</td>
<td>166 – 188</td>
<td>Recapitulation, double stops in the violin for added intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – B’</td>
<td>189 – 221</td>
<td>Shortened B theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – C’</td>
<td>222 – 237</td>
<td>Repetition of C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadenza</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>Slower and more forceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – E</td>
<td>239 – 263</td>
<td>Fast, active in both parts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Form diagram of first movement Allegro Maestoso

One of the first problems to be considered is the sound balance between the solo violin and the percussion orchestra. By the nature of those instrument classes, one single pitched
instrument against a battery of percussion instruments is bound to cause artistic problems for the
performer. Harrison however, does a brilliant job in orchestrating the percussion in order to
avoid overpowering the violin. The score has dynamic marks given by the composer, however, I
avoid mentioning it as a device for balancing orchestra and solo since the interpretation of a
dynamic mark can be subjective and overall ineffective in representing what the final result
should be. As I discuss each of the subsections, I will highlight how the composer minimized
balance issues.

This chapter will first discuss the overall structure of the movement based on its melodic
and textural organization, followed by a detailed performance guide where I will suggest
technical and interpretative ideas based on my research of Harrison’s style and overall ideology
but also considering matters of effectiveness and practical applicability. As much of the technical
and interpretative challenges of this movement are going to repeat itself, I will discuss them side
by side rather than in order of appearance.

**Textural Organization and Overall Structure**

One of Harrison’s inherent talents was the ability to integrate a well established technique
and an experimental idea. In his percussion orchestra he did just that. In the slow sections,
(subsections A, C, A’, and C’) he used a very standard and well established composing technique,
a question and answer approach, thus creating suitable instrument balance by incorporating a
variety of accompaniment textures to highlight the soloist. The percussion orchestra is organized
in five layers were the first two voices are higher in pitch and dry in resonance. They are
responsible for most of the soloistic movements within the orchestra. The last three voices, in
particular the lower two, are comprised of lower pitched and resonant sounds. They provide
mostly a pedal point either for the violin or for the top two percussion lines.
The movement is introduced by the low crescendo rumble in the bass drum. From the very beginning of the piece, Harrison present us with the textures he will be dealing with throughout the piece: the low resonant percussion, the dry higher pitched percussion and the singing melody line on the violin. Those three elements work together like a dialog where there is a give and take approach. The low sustained sound provides the foundation for the solo line whereas when the violin has a long, sustained sound, the dry percussion takes the lead. By clearly separating the musical lines, Harrison creates a proper instrumental balance without the need for the violin to extrapolate its sound. (See Figure 7).

![Figure 7: mm. 11 to 25 exemplifies the use of question and answer between the percussion and violin.](image)

In the faster sections, (subsections B and B’) Harrison introduces a more homogeneous texture between the violin and the percussion orchestra. The percussion switches to dry pitch.

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instruments and they hardly play at the same time. Each percussionist has an ostinato rhythm that complements each other like threads in a fabric, thus allowing the solo line to come through without any major difficulties. (See figure 8). The crisp staccato sound in the percussion delineates the rhythm in both voices, while the violin stands out with an exciting melody.

![Figure 8: mm. 33 to 40 exemplifies the use of texture to create transparence in the orchestra](image)

As a contrast, subsection D presents a new textural hierarchy: 1) the violin melody, 2) a cannon in the top two percussion lines, and 3) the eight-note accompaniment in the lower lines. For the first time the violin plays a complete different rhythm from the orchestra. Following the already established pattern of question and answer, the violin could be understood as the accompaniment to the more interesting conversation happening in the percussion orchestra; however, Harrison gives clear directions in the score for the violin to chant, while the orchestra shimmers. Again, by voicing three clear textural levels, the lines complement each other without undermining the solo voice.

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Figure 9: mm. 102 to 111 exemplifies the three textural levels.\footnote{30}

The subsection E presents a culmination of all the voices Harrison has been working with so far. The texture gets dense as all the melodic themes and rhythmic patterns are somewhat represented. The textural devices the composer used previously to avoid balance problems are put aside. As the percussion orchestra gets louder and busier so does the violin. The final result is a vibrant climax were the solo line functions as an integral part of the whole, instead of being above it. The last few measures however, balance is restored as the percussion drops out except for the fifth player who finishes the movement together with the violin.

In a typical romantic concerto, the first movement would most likely be in sonata form. The sonata form is fundamentally a more complex binary form and it is characterized mainly by its harmonic movement: Main key (Tonic) $\rightarrow$ Secondary Key (Dominant or relative minor) $\rightarrow$ Back to main key. The inherent problem with applying a formal analysis to this piece comes from its complete lack of harmony. The thematic material is secondary in importance and essentially characterized by its harmony, nevertheless it holds some order of appearance that we can associate melodically to the subsections in Harrison’s music.

Subsection A and A’

The first subsection is titled *Allegro Maestoso* and in the overall shape of the movement, it works as the primary theme in a sonata form. The melodic structure is not only slower than the body of the movement in the tempo marking but it is also metrically slower, with the percussion orchestra playing quarter notes as its fastest rhythm. The violin line uses as few eight-notes, but they function as an embellishment to the long line instead of being of motivic importance; thus, not affecting the slow pace of this introduction. (See Figure 11).

The challenge in this opening is to establish a *Maestoso* feeling without sacrificing much of the tempo marking (quarter note circa 160). In order to obtain a full and continuous sound it is important to “fill in” every note. The closer one gets to the tip of the bow, the harder it is to keep an intense sound. By leaning the weight of one’s right hand towards the first finger as the bow moves from the middle to the tip, the player will be able to compensate for the lack of natural weight and keep a steady pressure in the bow for the full value of the note. Another fundament to consider is the contact point. By moving the bow closer to the bridge as one increase the pressure it is possible to avoid strangling the sound.

After stablishing the intensity of sound desired for this opening I realized that at the approximated speed asked by the composer, the phrases ended up sounding very “choppy”. To solve this problem, I experimented with different bowings and articulations. My conclusion is
that by slurring the notes by measure, except when there is a clear articulation written by the composer, the performer can better achieve a continuous line and phrase the notes as notated by the composer. Using this articulation allows the performer to play long bows giving more fluidity and intensity to the line, avoiding the constant change of bow direction, which in turn keeps the tempo up without sounding rushed. There are a few slurs and accents written by the composer, but more importantly are the expression lines and the tenuto markings which, in the absence of harmonic movement, are the only indication as how to direct the phrasing. (See Figure 11).

Harrison is very economic with his articulation markings which in turn makes the few that are written in the music so much more significant. Under the long expression lines Harrison uses tenuto markings to stress the inflection within the measure, independent of its metric expectations. He also sporadically uses accent markings which raised the question of how to differentiate it from the tenuto markings. My solution was to think of the accents, at least for this subsection, as a pick-up movement into the next note. I suggest using a short bow stroke, still in the contact point closer to the bridge, to achieve a contrast inside the long phrase and to differentiate it from the stress in the tenuto notes. One final marking to consider is the few commas written by the composer. It is common to interpret a comma as a breath mark, but this is not the case in this music. The violinist should interpret this comma as a cut off of the sound. It is more a warning to not hold the long note too long, which is a common problem with bowed instruments. (See figure 11).

In the initial dialog between the percussion and the violin, the long note held by the violin in measures 7 through 10, and again from measures 15 through 20, can seem unimportant, nevertheless, it needs to be treated with care. There is not any dynamic indication in the violin
part but by following the percussion line the violin should direct the sound towards the end of the
measure and change bows as necessaire to give the sound direction and intensity. (See figure 11).

![Figure 11: Subsection A on the left and subsection A’ on the right.](image)

The highly chromatic nature of the piece and the lack of chordal harmonies can be challenging for accurate intonation. In preparation for practicing this piece, I suggest sitting at the piano and carefully listening to the set of intervals the composer used, the minor 2\(^{\text{nd}}\), major 3\(^{\text{rd}}\), and major 6\(^{\text{th}}\), and its respective inversions. Once the performer has those intervals set in the ear, it is easier to approach the piece with more freedom. The left hand is mainly set for this subsection except for a few long shifts. In cases such as this, there are always two options, 1) gradually shift up and stay in position, or 2) use a long shift and avoid awkward string crossings. In the specific case of this opening, it is important to maintain timbral cohesion and sustained sound. For this purpose, it is appropriate to shift up with the third finger in measure 25 and again in measure 27 in order to stay in the same string and to get a full vibrato as those measures show the highest point in the overall theme presented in the opening. With this in mind my suggestion for fingering is as shown in figure 12:

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The reprise of this subsection presents an increase in texture and articulation. Now, the melodic line is enhanced by the addition of octaves double stops where before it was a single stop melody. The articulation is also different as the composer gives tenuto marks to almost every beat indicating a clear articulation contrast to subsection A. Now it is appropriate to bow separately each of the notes stressed by the tenuto mark, while keeping the non-tenuto notes slurred like the first time. (See Figure 11).

**Subsection B and B’**

Subsection B brings the most recognizable theme in this movement. The character changes from Maestoso to Vivace and the tempo speeds up to quarter note equal 200. This change in tempo is set up by the percussion alone while the violin holds a long note. The shift in character signalizes the arrival of a different thematic material that could be understood as the secondary theme in a sonata form. This subsection once more asks for careful consideration regarding the articulation. The notation is not clear as how to articulate the notes, it is clear however as how to group them. Again, Harrison uses the tenuto marks to stress the notes that should come out of the texture. These notes are further emphasized by the underlying rhythm in the percussion accompaniment.

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To bring out the tenuto marks I decided to have those specific notes falling in a down bow whenever possible. For that purpose, I slurred the eighth-notes in groups of two or three and kept the remaining notes as it was originally. (See Figure 13). Slurring some of the rhythms in the violin also helps to highlight the contrast between the defined pitched melody in the solo against the non-defined pitch in the percussion accompaniment. There is however a down side to slurring the eight notes. The rhythmic precision is of extreme importance, in this subsection specially, since both orchestra and solo share most of the same rhythmic patterns. There is no place for rubato or taking time for a long shift for example. In this sense, it would be easier to keep the notes short and the bow compact. Adding slurs may cause the performer to unconsciously rush. But again, as I have already stablished, the contrasting articulation plays an important role in the sound balance and the shaping of the phrase.

![Figure 13: Bowing suggestion](image)

In my personal practice, the groups of three eight notes were the most problematic. Upon investigating the source of the problem, I realized that due to the constant metric change, I was unconsciously transforming the groups of three eighth-notes into triplets. This is a mistake quite common when playing a fast paced, irregular rhythm. It is important to play each eight-note exactly, independent of the grouping. To avoid rushing through the eight-notes it is imperative to practice with a metronome beating at the subdivision of the beat. This way, the performer is able to practice through the many changes in meter without losing track of the beat.

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In the hopes to achieve a perfect rhythmic precision, one may fall prey to the mechanization of the notes. Once again is important to remember that Harrison was an advocate to melody. Thus, his music should never sound mechanic or lacking of a singing quality. Harrison provides expression lines throughout the movement. Most of those lines are over more than four measures at a time. This indication shows his desire to create long phrases even in the more rhythmically driven passages. Following the contour within those expression lines, one can achieve an interesting shaping of the melodic material in the absence of more direct indications.

The highly chromatic nature of this piece and, in this subsection, the fast pace of the rhythmical figures asks for careful planning for the left hand. More than just finding a convenient fingering, it is important to be aware of the placement of the left hand and elbow. In order to preserve intonation, I avoided sliding the finger for most of the minor 2\textsuperscript{nd} intervals. I find that using different fingers for each note preserves the clarity of rhythm and sound. The shifts need to be carefully measured and guided by the last finger used on the string. In this subsection, there is no instance where the player will need to “jump” to a higher or lower position. All the shifts can be carefully prepared and studied. Additionally, the left elbow needs to move either to the right, when in need to reach the lower strings, or to the left, when moving toward the higher strings. I find that due to the fast character it is necessary to be aware of this movement in the left arm to keep the left hand moving organically and avoiding unconsciously stressing notes due to resultant stiffness in the left hand.
Subsection C and C’

Subsection C accomplishes two melodic goals as it functions as a closing material to the second theme presented in subsection B, and also as a transition into the development at subsection D. It brings to a halt the excitement that was built with the fast and rhythmically driven melody by alleviating the textural intensity as well as using more resonant instruments in the percussion orchestra. (See figure 14).

Figure 15: Textural change between subsections B and C.

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At measure 81 the tempo changes immediately. The *Meno Mosso* indication can be misleading as it suggests a subtle relaxation in tempo. In my performance however, I found that exaggerating this tempo changing is very effective when combined with the textural changes provided by Harrison. The tempestuous character brought by the crescendo thundering rumbling of the bass drum at measure 83, which culminates with the lightening sharp sonority of the metal pipes and brake drums in the following measure, is brought up more effectively in a slower tempo. In order to successfully make this tempo transition, the violinist needs to clearly set the tempo with the quarter note at measure 81, and again, with the eight-note octaves at measure 83. (See Figure 15).

As one moves from the faster and higher pitched character that dominates subsection B and the beginning of subsection C, and gradually sets down into slower rhythms and lower pitch notes towards the end of subsection C, it is important to bring the left elbow out to reach the lower strings with more ease and to use a wider vibrato in order to keep the *molto forte* dynamic resonant. Visually the soloist may be mislead to believe that the character achieved at the end of subsection C will continue into subsection D, since the note values gradually get bigger going from quarter notes to half notes and finally to whole notes at subsection D. This is not the case however. Again, the transition between subsections is marked by a sudden tempo change. This time the conductor will set the tempo change and is important for the soloist to pay close attention in order to cut off the long note at the appropriate time and also be prepared accurately follow the new tempo. (See Figure 16).
Subsection D

The developmental material presented in subsection D is mainly delineated by the unmistakable recapitulation that follows. For the first time Harrison asks for a piano dynamic in the violin, a strong indication of the contrasting nature of this passage. While the percussion orchestra provides an interesting material, with the two lower lines holding an eight-note rhythm ostinato and the two upper voices resonating as a canon, the violin holds whole notes almost throughout the whole passage. At a first glance, one may think that the accompanying voice would be the violin, since the percussion orchestra theme seems more interesting. However, Harrison directs: “Here the orchestra should finely shimmer & glitter while the violin chants.”

Due to the nature of the instruments, it will be challenging for the violin to be heard over the percussion orchestra, especially at a soft dynamic in a lower register.

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37 Ibid
To solve this problem I thought of the *piano* marking more as sound quality than as a volume level. Carl Flesch in his method *Problem of Tone Production in Violin Playing* says:

> If the string is touched with the inner flashy part of the finger tip, a much softer tone color will be produced than when the setting takes place with the tip in the neighborhood of the nail. Therefore the excessive “drawing in” of the left arm (towards the right) brings with it not only the danger of the finger slipping away from the E string, but of the tone color itself becoming hard and inflexible. 38

As I played this passage I placed my left hand fingers slightly flatter and used a wider vibrato. Also, I used a faster bow speed and a contact point away from them bridge. With each entrance of the violin line the dynamic level increases. As the melody gets louder I recommend gradually go back to use the tip of the fingers and a narrower vibrato.

**Cadenza**

The cadenza is built on the melodic theme from subsection B. It is free from time signature, but Harrison still applies the same devices he used throughout the concerto to indicate the grouping of eight notes, thus highlighting the metric organization of the melody. The main challenge in this passage falls on the groups of running notes over a sustained note. In order to play the double stops it is necessary to shift fingers in the sustained note. This maneuver is not ideal and, following the tradition already established in standard repertoire, such as Bach’s unaccompanied *Sonatas and Partitas* for solo violin, one may drop the sustained note a little earlier to avoid the change of position.

**Subsection E**

Subsection E functions as a coda where all the basic themes from the previous subsections are somewhat represented. (See figure 17).

The coda brings some balance problems for the soloist as the texture gets thicker and the dynamic louder in the orchestra. It is very difficult to avoid having the violin obliterated by the percussion orchestra and keep the energy and enthusiasm of this ending. During my rehearsals with the LSU percussion ensemble (Hamiruge), I realized there was two ways to make sure the solo line was still heard. 1) Play as close to the bridge as possible and use full bow whenever possible and 2) take advantage of the spots when the texture lightens up to stand out and keep the melody line in the audience’s ear.

This section is also technically more demanding for the left hand. The fast tempo makes it harder to play the double stop octaves accurately since there is no easy fingering for those passages. In my practice I tried avoiding string crossing by playing the passage up the G and D strings. At the speed asked, that was not effective. There was no time for a long shift. The other option was to avoid the long shift and end up with some awkward string crossings. Even though this later option may disrupt the slurring of the passage, I decided that it was the best option for me. It is extremely important to avoid tension in the left hand. Trying to play as loud a one can,

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even with the correct bow placement and technique may bring some unwanted tension, especially if there is a lack of independence between the right and left hands. To avoid that, one has to focus on relaxing the left hand when shifting and moving the left elbow either inward or outward, depending of which string needs to be reached.
CHAPTER FOUR: MOMEMNT II – LARGO, CANTABILE

Following the Western music tradition, the second movement is slow contrasting with the first movement. Again, the lack of harmonic movement makes difficult to analyze in a traditional European tradition. Instead I will consider the melody and the texture in order to cohesively organize the shape of this movement. Yet again, the whole movement can be divided into two larger sections, each of which is formed by three smaller subsections. (See Figure 18). In this second movement, the influence of Eastern music is very strong in the song-like melody with sparse accompaniment and eventually no accompaniment at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Measure No.</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I – A</td>
<td>1 – 12</td>
<td>Sparse, heterogeneous texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I – B</td>
<td>13 – 45</td>
<td>Combination of three cells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I – C</td>
<td>46 – 67</td>
<td>Sparse resonant texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – A</td>
<td>68 – 87</td>
<td>Dense texture, intense melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – B</td>
<td>88 – 97</td>
<td>Five voices canon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II – C</td>
<td>98 – 126</td>
<td>Sparse dry texture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18: Form diagram of movement II, Cantabile.

In this chapter I will first discuss the textural organization in the orchestra as a device to provide balance and clarity. The thematic material in the solo line is parallel but contrasting between sections I and II, in order to highlight this contrast in the performance I will discuss them side by side instead of chronological order.
Textural Organization and Overall Structure

Harrison is much more economic in the use of the percussion orchestra for the second movement. The texture starts very thin with the violin dominating mostly of subsection A. The chanting melody against the dry ostinato suggests an example of the Asian influence in Harrison’s music. As the movement progresses the texture gradually shifts to a fuller array of timbres eventually including a full five-voice canon at the reprise of A. Differently from the first movement where the violin and the percussion often played the same rhythmic figure complementing each other as part of a whole, the texture now is more heterogenic, as the violin and percussion orchestra never play the same rhythm together. This predominately contrapuntal mechanism ensures that sound balance is controlled, and the violin can enjoy a greater pallet of sound colors and variety in dynamics with more comfort and freedom. (See Figure 19).

Figure 19: Beginning of 2nd movement, sparse texture and bigger dynamic range.\(^{40}\)

By using fewer instruments at a time, Harrison creates an atmosphere proper for chamber music, which is one characteristic of this movement. Harrison focuses on exploring the tone colors in the percussion ensemble and focuses less in the complex rhythmic patterns. By using fewer instruments in the accompaniment, he highlights the specific color of each individual

instrument and integrates this new-found color as part of the solo line. Measures 8 to 13 exemplify the contrapuntal nature of this movement between the percussion and the violin. (See Figure 20). Another important relationship is the use of three distinct rhythmic groups in the orchestra. Those groups are mainly distinguished by its sound frequency contour, I resist calling it melodic, since the instruments used have no defined pitch. The shaping of these groups are: 1) ascending third-second notes, 2) down and up motion, and 3) downward motion. (See Figure 21).

Figure 20: Measures 8 through 13 exemplifies the counterpoint between violin and orchestra.  

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The second half of the movement brings a thicker layer of sounds in the percussion and a higher melodic register for the violin. In correlation to the first movement, Harrison again organizes the ensemble into five layers, the upper two against the lower three. But now he inverted the use of timbral texture. The top two lines are now responsible for the resonant texture while the lower three punctuates the already established atmosphere with sharp staccato sounds. It contrasts with the first section by going parallel in the opposite direction. The A section melody, which is singing and soft, becomes intense and *molto forte*, with tenuto marks over each note and the use of the full percussion orchestra. Section C which had a resonant accompaniment the first time, has the accompaniment in dry sounds, with staccato marks over each note, in its reprise. The most contrasting section however is the B section. The cellular rhythm gives way to a five voice canon also intensifying the texture in relationship with section I. Figure 22, 23, and 24 exemplify the contrast in the three subsections.

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Figure 22: Comparative diagrams of sections I and II.\footnote{Lou Harrison, \textit{Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra} (New York: C. F. Peters Corporation, 1961).}
Figure 23: Comparative diagrams of sections I and II.\textsuperscript{44}

Figure 24: Comparative diagrams of sections I and II.\footnote{Lou Harrison, \textit{Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra} (New York: C. F. Peters Corporation, 1961).}
Theme A

The A theme is one of the most beautiful melodies in this second movement. Harrison has a specific sound in mind for the violin and he tries to convey it in his writing through a very specific set of indications in the music. My first impulse as I read this opening was to play it very lyrical, with a full sound and a wide vibrato since the violin is playing almost by itself. A very romantic impulse I should add. However, that is not at all what is asked in the music. At the same time Harrison indicates *ben cantando*, which means singing, he also indicates *quasi senza vibrare*, which means almost no vibrato. Those indications seemed contradictory at first, but in reality, it demands a natural sound that can be achieved by exploring the different contact points between the bow and the strings, and also, a variety of bow speed.

The opening theme in the second movement is one of the most difficult sections of the concerto. The slow tempo and long rhythm makes it difficult to play expressively without the use of vibrato. The best way to achieve a singing sound without vibrating the left hand is to play with a fast bow speed, away from the bridge, and use very little pressure in the bow. Upon experimenting with different contact points and bow speeds, my solution was to start at the tip of the bow, with very little pressure and a slow bow speed. The goal was to economize the bow at the beginning of the note by aiming for a *quasi niente* sound thus having enough bow left to increase its speed and achieve a resonating singing sound for the main body of the note. (See Figure 25).
The repetitive monodic accompaniment and the natural sound in the melody bring a meditative character to this opening. This character is enhanced by the sight like motive at mm. 6 indicated by the decrescendo marks on the top over a structural decrescendo. (See Figure 21). Again, it is important to carefully use the bow speed to achieve the desired sonority.

The reprise of A brings a complete different atmosphere. The molto forte and sul G indicates Harrison’s desire to contrast the two sections. This time the theme is also expanded by a small sequence that leads into the arrival of B. In order to show the different character in this section I decided to use separate bows for the notes with the tenuto mark. Also, to highlight the fortissimo arrival of the B theme, I added a diminuendo at mm. 75 and gradually increased the sound and intensity with each repetition of the sequence.

**Theme B**

Theme B brings a romantic character to the music with a virtuosic lyrical melody. The main challenge for this section is the back and forth changes of the eight-note to the sixteenth-note as the measure unity. Practicing with the metronome beating the sixteenth note is recommended in order to keep an accurate rhythmic relationship. It is important to remember

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most of the percussion instruments have a clear attack sound which does not allow for any
rhythmic imprecision. (See Figure 26). This section is one of the most enjoyable to play because
it is relatively simple for the advanced player, yet it is interesting and powerful in a more familiar
sense. Still, one must be careful not to let oneself be carried away and loose the rhythmic
precision which is so important here.

Figure 26: Example of changing time signature

The first statement of the B theme is longer and includes a small cadenza like passage
dividing it in two sections. Both sections as well as the reprise of B have the same character and
can be thought of the same way. I recommend playing with a full sound, using wide vibrato and
establishing a set position for the left hand avoiding long shifts. Intersecting the first statement of
the B section, Harrison gives the violin a couple of unaccompanied measures. Knowing of
Harrison’s inclination to improvisatory themes in his music, I decided to take this opportunity to
play those four measures with more freedom. I recommend starting with a full bodied sound, still
piano though, and gradually diminuendo into an airy sound. As for the tempo, I suggest starting
slower and speeding up, especially at the last two measures, taking a longer pause in between the
group of two measures. (See figure 27).

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Theme C

The final theme in the second movement brings back the meditative quality of theme A. The violin melody is built over a chain of eight notes that remain uninterrupted to the very end of the section. The repetitive cycle of eight-notes could easily become monotonous. It will be the soloist’s task to keep that from happening. Harrison makes sure to mark this section as *espressivo* and *liberament*, which means expressive and free. He also indicates *Poco Piu Mosso* both times theme C is presented, but he is even more specific in the score where he adds, “or more by a trifle” at the reprise of theme C. Those are the only indication as to how to shape this section. The devices Harrison had used previously, the tenuto marks and the expression lines over the phrases are not employed this time. It falls over the performer’s shoulder the shaping of this section.

As I pondered how to approach this theme, I realized that I had two guides, the melodic contour of the line and the percussion orchestra accompaniment. By following the melodic contour I directed the phrasing towards the highest pitch in the line then relaxed the sound when moving to the lower pitches. The result was pleasant but after a few measures it became too predictable. The next step was to observe where the accompaniment joined the solo line.

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percussion punctuates the beginning of almost every measure and eventually stops, leaving the solo line unaccompanied until the end of the section. With the percussion line in mind, I decided to join them by slightly stressing the first eight note of each measure where the percussion played. Most of the times, the stress in the beginning of the measure coincided with the melodic contour, however in a few occasions it did not. The combination of these two methods provided an interesting phrasing creating variation within the overall arch of the melodic contour alone.

In the second statement of theme C, there is an added challenge as Harrison asks for the whole section to be played an octave higher. The chromatic intervals at the higher octave proved to be more demanding than in the lower octave. In cases such as this the final goal should be to keep the integrity of the phrasing that was decided upon. After experimenting with a few different options, I decided for the fingering as demonstrated in figure 28:

![Figure 28: Fingering suggestion for theme C](image)

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CHAPTER FIVE: MOVEMENT III – ALLEGRO, VIGOROSO, POCO PRESTO

The final movement of the *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra* is set in Rondo form. Once more, due to the lack of harmony, the sections are delineated by the melodic material and textural organization. (See Figure 29).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measure No.</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1-35</td>
<td>Alternating metric motive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>36 – 63</td>
<td>Light texture, sixteenth note embellishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>64 – 104</td>
<td>Higher octave, sixteenth note embellishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>105 – 135</td>
<td>Polyrhythm, heterogeneous texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>136 – 160</td>
<td>Literal repetition in higher octave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>161 - 182</td>
<td>Dense texture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 29: Form diagram of movement III, Allegro.

This movement has an animated dancing flavor. “The entire movement, thought not written for dance, shows a strong kinetic influence; the listener’s body tends to respond involuntarily to the muscular rhythm.”\(^{50}\) This movement was written 19 years after the first two, yet, it holds little discrepancy in style. The dance quality as opposed to the singing quality of the first two movements and the use of a more complex rhythmic metric are the few characteristics that shows Harrison’s maturity at the time he wrote this final movement.

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\(^{50}\) Leta E. Miller and Frederic Lieberman, Lou Harrison (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 45.
Textural Organization and Overall Structure

The theme of the rondo is introduced in a lively manner by the alternating binary and ternary metric rhythm in the percussion. This short introduction sets a lively tone for the movement with its dry staccato sounds. Differently from both the first movement, where the melodic line is shared between percussion and orchestra, and second movement, where the individual timbre of the instruments are highlighted, the third movement presents the motivic material independently in the violin as well as in the percussion orchestra. (See Figure 30).

Figure 30: Ternary and binary motivic figure.\(^{51}\)

After a unified statement of the motivic figure, the ternary/binary combination, Harrison lightens the texture by distributing the motive equally across the five lines of the percussion orchestra. By distributing the theme, Harrison kept the timbral variety of the different percussion instruments but avoided overpowering the solo line. (See Figure 31).

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The second half of the theme presents a contrasting articulation in the solo line. The crisp accented character gives way to a legato expression. To highlight this change, Harrison uses a sparse accompaniment leading into section B.

Section B is marked by a lighter texture, where the percussion is once again subordinated to the solo line. The dry accompaniment helps to punctuate the highly irregular metrical rhythm of this section. The grouping of three eight note against two becomes less prominent as Harrison adds double stops and disguise the main rhythm by adding melodic semitones to the violin line. Alternating between denser and lighter texture in the accompaniment is a particular feature of this movement. Each alternating episode brings a contrasting use of the texture and timbres. Section C adds variety by introducing the use of rolled percussion instruments and section D brings a thick texture with the whole orchestra plays in unison gradually increasing in sound from *pianissimo* to a *fortissimo* culminating at the coda where the percussion drops out, leaving

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the violin almost alone, mainly accompanied by the fifth player, a parallel with the ending of the first movement.

**Performance Guide**

The main feature of this movement is the alternation of the ternary meter and the binary meter. As in the first movement, the danger in grouping the eight notes in three is that it is easy to rush through them. I recommend practicing with the metronome beating the eight notes instead of relying on one’s inner pulse only, especially in this movement which is so exciting. (See Figure 32).

![Figure 32: Alternating metric motive](image)

The first decision I had to make was how to bow the first three accented quarter notes at measure 5. It seemed natural to play them all down bow to emphasize the accents and also to give a powerful start to the movement. There was a problem however; the last quarter note is slurred into the next bar, which in turn has its eight notes grouped as a 6/8 measure. At the fast tempo asked by Harrison, the slur, together with the change of bow, was causing me to unconsciously elongate the last quarter note. Another disadvantage with this bowing was that there was no time to retake the bow and keep the three quarter notes motive always executed

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with three down bows. One solution would be to simply start the first quarter note up bow and proceed with the rest of them down bow as originally planned. The other solution, which was the one I ultimately chose, was to play the figure in the second measure also down bow. This solution was ideal in two ways: 1) it kept the three accented down bows motive consistent and 2) it prevented a late change of bow by keeping the bow going in the same direction. Moreover, the first articulated note in the second measure is mostly in the next string, this way avoiding any imprecision in the articulation. (See Figure 33).

![Figure 33: Bow suggestion for theme A](image)

This articulation deserves careful consideration, not only because is the first statement of the main motive, but also because it will create a bigger contrast with the legato articulation Harrison asks for the same rhythmic pattern but transposed to G. In order to create the distinction, I suggest playing the contrasting motive with a long and fast bow stroke, starting downwards but then, moving as it comes. I recommend keeping the next articulated note in the following measure in a down bow as the first time. This way the bow direction will fall in place without creating any problems. (See Figure 34).

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While theme B continues expanding with the motive presented in A, the addition of the neighboring sixteenth note embellishment creates a few difficulties for the violinist. Those difficulties increase with the addition of the double stop octaves. Due to the fast pace of the movement, the sixteenth notes in separate bows will have to happen very fast and accurately. It is an added challenge that those sixteenth notes are followed by octaves. To keep an accurate tempo I considered slurring the sixteenth notes, however, upon experimenting with both, slurred and separate bowings, it was clear to me that the crispness resultant of the separate bowing was a better match to the character of the passage. To avoid any rhythmic imprecision, I suggest avoiding string crossings and playing with a very compact bowing. As for the fingering, I recommend setting the hand in position for the octaves in advance. Shifting after a longer rhythm is ideal, with that in mind, my bowing and fingering suggestion is as follow in figure 35:

![Figure 34: Bow suggestion for contrasting articulation](image)

While theme B continues expanding with the motive presented in A, the addition of the neighboring sixteenth note embellishment creates a few difficulties for the violinist. Those difficulties increase with the addition of the double stop octaves. Due to the fast pace of the movement, the sixteenth notes in separate bows will have to happen very fast and accurately. It is an added challenge that those sixteenth notes are followed by octaves. To keep an accurate tempo I considered slurring the sixteenth notes, however, upon experimenting with both, slurred and separate bowings, it was clear to me that the crispness resultant of the separate bowing was a better match to the character of the passage. To avoid any rhythmic imprecision, I suggest avoiding string crossings and playing with a very compact bowing. As for the fingering, I recommend setting the hand in position for the octaves in advance. Shifting after a longer rhythm is ideal, with that in mind, my bowing and fingering suggestion is as follow in figure 35:

![Figure 35: Fingering and bowing suggestion](image)

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In the reprise of A, Harrison brings the melody one octave higher and adds the sixteenth note embellishment of the B theme. In the few transitory measures preceding theme C, he gives the violin a fermata on the first beat of measure 104. I took this fermata as a device to wind down the excitement of theme A, in preparation for theme C. As Harrison did in the development section of his first movement, he gives long note values to the violin, while the percussion orchestra stays busy with a fast ostinato rhythm.

Section C was one of the most difficult sections to play together with the orchestra. The long notes need to be carefully played, and more importantly, the bow change after the long notes needs to be very precise. There is an added challenge in section C, as the percussion orchestra in playing a polyrhythmic motive. (See Figure 36).

![Figure 36: Polyrhythm in the percussion orchestra.](image)

Towards the end of C, the texture becomes more and denser until it culminates with a tempestuous character brought by resonant crashes in the percussion orchestra, while the violin

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holds a high trill for the next ten measures. Even though the texture in the orchestra becomes denser, it does not become heavier. The melodic line in the violin goes up in register and dynamic, thus, ensuring it stays above the accompaniment. In theory, it makes perfect sense that the melody line will come through without any major difficulties, in reality though, the violinist needs to carefully consider what the best way to achieve the desired resonance is.

Excessive strong finger pressure, which may manifest itself either through rigid inelastic pressure or though elastic, though exaggerated darting of the finger […] causes glassy, brittle tone quality, and diminishes freedom of the vibrato; furthermore it will injure the tonal volume by diverting a part of the right arm’s power of expression.⁵⁷

It is important to not let the need to play loud overpower the control over left and right hand. More than pressure, the placement of the left hand and the contact point of the bow will help the violinist to achieve the desired sound.

The cadenza that follows theme C is short but extremely virtuosic. The disjointed nature of the melody makes it difficult to play intuitively. Upon trying different fingerings, I realized that in order to achieve precise intonation and play organically, the best option would be to gradually shift up end stay in position for the highest note. I also recommend taking time between the quarter notes and speed up towards the end of the eight notes group. Measure 135 needs to be back at the original tempo of the movement. (See figure 37).

⁵⁷ Carl Flesch, Problems of Tone Production in Violin Playing (New York: Carl Fischer Inc. 1934), 11
After the cadenza, the reprise of theme A is presented again in a higher octave, but this time the repetition is more literal. The embellishment from theme B is not present. The final theme brings an increase in texture and rhythmic changes. Like the first movement, the culmination of the motivic materials comes to a halt at the *Meno mosso*. It is a difficult transition to achieve and there is no indication of *ralentando*. However, Harrison may not have intended to have a subto change of tempo. The measure before the *Meno mosso* is played by the violin alone giving one total freedom to choose how to get there. I chose to use this measure to slow down and set the tempo for the percussion orchestra.

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CONCLUSION

Lou Silver Harrison is the product of an era that saw great American composers such as Henry Cowell, Charles Ives, and John Cage. While his works present a level of creativity and innovation that many times preceded the works of more well known composers like Cage, he is still largely underperformed. Due to a combination of missed opportunities and, in a sense, a focus on the self instead of pursuing the approval of the main stream intellectuals of the time, Harrison’s music missed the chance to shine together with his contemporaries.

Harrison wrote works for many different instruments, both traditional and non-traditional, including: symphonies, chamber music for strings, strings and winds, strings and percussion, solo pieces for piano and much more. With such a varied compositional output and considering the pioneering aspects of his music, it is a problem that his music is mostly known among the percussionist only.

The *Concerto for Violin and Percussion Orchestra* is an interesting piece which combines the avant-garde techniques of his time with the long-established Western music tradition. This piece is ideal for the musician who is looking to go out of the standard violin repertoire, but is still not ready to part with tonality and melody. Harrison’s concerto poses many difficulties, starting with, but not only, balance between a battery of percussion and one violin, sound projection, articulation, phrasing and specific fingerings. Those difficulties however, can be overcome with a good understanding of the composer and of the piece, as well as careful consideration of the violin techniques, specific the ones related to sound production.
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March 23, 2018

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Deborah Ribeiro holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Nicholls State University, a Master degree in Music Performance from Louisiana State University, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts at Louisiana State University under the guidance of Professor Espen Lilleslatten. Native of Brazil, Ms. Ribeiro came to the United States to further her education in music. Her passion for music started at the very young age of 5 years old and after just one year of learning she was already performing small solos with the local junior orchestra. While in Brazil, Ribeiro has toured through many states as part of the Joao Pessoa Youth Orchestra and later as Part of Paraiba Symphony Orchestra. She was invited to be a founding member of the Joao Pessoa Chamber Orchestra in which she had the chance to perform as soloist and concert master. In 2008 after a master class with violinist James Alexander, Ribeiro was offered a full scholarship to pursuit her Bachelor degree at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. There she had the chance to work closely with great musicians from United States and Europe. Ribeiro was featured as a soloist with the Chichester Chamber Orchestra (UK) under the baton of conductor Crispin Ward, when they visited Nicholls State in 2010. During her four years of undergrad she was featured many times at the Nicholls Camerata. After coming to Louisiana State University, Ribeiro has been actively performing with Baton Rouge Symphony, Acadiana Symphony and the Louisiana Sinfonietta, with which she was recently featured as a soloist. Another passion of Ribeiro is teaching. She has been a teaching artist with the Kid’s Orchestra project since 2013 and is currently the violin and viola teacher at the Music Tree prep school in Zachary, LA.