

for jim, ben and lou

Three pieces for harp, guitar and percussion

I. Preamble

II. רועפלאץ (Rue Plats) (Resting Place)

III. The World's Longest Melody (Trio)
"The Ever-Widening Halfstep"

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Written originally as a commission from the West Coast guitarist John Schneider, *for jim, ben and lou* was premiered and recorded in Belgium over 10 years later by Toon Callier, Jutta Troch, and Jeroen Stevens. They have since played it widely in Europe, and, a few months ago, the piece was finally premiered in the United States (in Boston and New York City).

Each of the three pieces is dedicated to a composer who has been a close friend and mentor of mine from an older generation: James Tenney, Ben Johnston, and Lou Harrison. Each uses a different approach to harmony and extended intonation as a formal and orchestral basis for the work.

"Preamble," for James Tenney, is a version of my "psaltery" idea, which I have used since the late 1970s. The piece modulates through three related harmonic series (C-E-G-C), gradually replacing pitches of one with "close" pitches of the next. The harp and guitar are both retuned, and the percussionist retunes the guitar in real-time throughout the piece while the guitarist plays. The three pieces of this set also follow that harmonic scheme (the second piece in E, the third in G).

רועפלאץ for Ben Johnston, is a setting of a well-known Yiddish resistance song by the early twentieth century poet Morris Rosenfeld. I imagined it as the song played by street musicians from some unknown culture. The harp is retuned completely from the first movement. The percussionist is asked to play on milk cans, in gentle reference to the poetry of the Warsaw ghetto, but Jeroen often uses beer cans, an idea I like very much.

"The World's Longest Melody" for Lou Harrison is a computer-written work which incorporates a few different ideas: my "world's longest melody" algorithm (a simple probabilistic definition of melody which only specifies directionality); an expanded notion of what Lou often called "epimores" (or superparticular ratios); and the use of the harp and guitar as one instrument, and their resultant just intonation possibilities, given their tunings (and the guitar only playing open strings, harmonics, and notes on the 5th, 7th and 12th frets). The computer "knows" the gamut of the harp and guitar, and uses harmonic and melodic algorithms to orchestrate the piece. Each of the five sections consists of discrete phrases of varying lengths (in an homage to a fourth composer, Ruth

Crawford Seeger, who I, of course, never met), and has an evolving idea of the harmonic and melodic terrain.