

Michael Harrison Biography

Michael Harrison, composer and pianist, has been called “an American Maverick” by Philip Glass. Through his expertise in “just intonation” tunings, Indian ragas and rhythmic cycles, he has created “a new harmonic world...of vibrant sound” (*The New York Times*). With a uniquely personal style that transcends the ages, his music is both forward looking and deeply rooted in different forms of traditional music. This unique perspective alongside a simple and elegant gift for melody, makes him a composer that can reach audiences of many kinds.

Just completed, a new recording of Michael's music features cellist Maya Beiser performing *Just Ancient Loops* (a 25 minute work for multi-track cello), *Hijaz* (commissioned and conducted by 2011 MacArthur 'Genius' Award recipient Francisco Nunez, and composed for Maya and the Young People's Chorus of New York City, with piano and tabla), and other original works. Complementing Harrison's compositions is music by two composers he reveres: Arvo Part and J.S. Bach. In addition, Michael collaborated with visionary French artist Loris Greaud to create *The Bragdon Pavilion*, an installation on exhibit at the Centre Pompidou in Paris from May-September 2011. Michael and Loris are now collaborating with French architect Dominique Perrault on a new installation, the *Pandit Pran Nath Pavilion*.

Michael has performed his music and received premieres at the 92nd Street Y in New York with the Young People's Chorus of New York City and with cellist Maya Beiser, The Newman Center for the Performing Arts in Denver (solo and with composer/clarinetist Evan Ziporyn), Music in the Morning in Vancouver (with author Stuart Isacoff), the Spoleto Festival, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, numerous Bang On A Can Marathons at the World Financial Center, Klavier Festival Ruhr in Germany, the United Nations, the Wordless Music Series, Symphony Space, Merkin Concert Hall, the Other Minds Festival in San Francisco, the American Academy in Rome, and alongside a host of greats with Kronos Quartet at Carnegie Hall performing with his mentor Terry Riley on *In C*.

Revelation, Michael's first recording for the Cantaloupe Music label (a multi-year project), was chosen by *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* and *Time Out New York* as one of the Best Classical Recordings of the year, and received awards from the Classical Recording Foundation and IBLA Foundation. Music critic and scholar Tim Page wrote, “Say it plainly — Michael Harrison's ‘Revelation: Music in Pure Intonation’ is probably the most brilliant and original extended composition for solo piano since the early works of Frederic Rzewski three decades ago (and no, I am not forgetting Elliott Carter). What could have been a mere glossary of unfamiliar sonorities made possible by Harrison's unconventional tuning of a grand piano turned instead into a virtuosic tour-de-force that would have done credit to the hypothetical team of Franz Liszt and Claude Debussy working overtime.”

During his time at the University of Oregon, Michael traveled to New York City where he worked closely with La Monte Young preparing all of the specialized tunings and scores for Young's 6½-hour work, *The Well-Tuned Piano*. In 1987, Michael became the only other person besides the composer to perform this extended work. In 1986, Michael designed and created the “harmonic piano,” an extensively modified grand piano with the ability to play 24 notes per octave. Kyle Gann from *The Village Voice* hailed the harmonic piano as “an indisputable landmark in the history of Western tuning,” and the instrument is described in detail in the second edition of the *Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*. Michael is the president of the American Academy of Indian Classical Music. He is a disciple of the late Pandit Pran Nath, with whom he studied since 1979, and has performed solo and with Terry Riley as a vocalist, pianist, and on tamboura in numerous concerts and trips to India. Since 1999, he has continued his studies and performances with master Indian vocalist Ustad Mashkoor Ali Khan. He has taught graduate seminars at the Manhattan School of Music and was on the faculty of the Bang on a Can Summer Institute at MASSMoCA. Chapters are devoted to Michael's work in the books *Grand Obsession* (Scribner, by Perry Knize), and *Temperament* (A. Knopf, by Stuart Isacoff). His recordings have been released on Cantaloupe Music, New Albion Records, Important Records, and Fortuna Records.