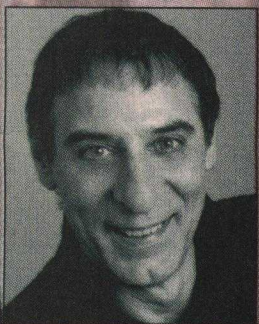
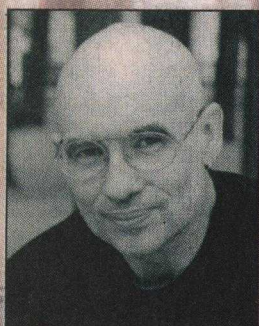


# A LITTLE LOU A LOTTA POP

## The Cabrillo Music Festival honors Harrison and embraces pop culture

By **WALLACE BAINE** *Sentinel staff writer*



*Cabrillo Music Festival*

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Clockwise from bottom left: Joseph Ribeiro, Dennis Russell Davies, Christopher O'Riley and Hila Plitmann. Far left: Musical director Marin Alsop.

✓ If there's a line to be drawn between popular culture and high art, the Cabrillo Music Festival is destined to walk all over it this summer.

The celebrated two-weekend festival — considered one of the finest contemporary music festivals in the country — is conjuring up some rather familiar names this season: Radiohead, Harry Potter, Dracula, Frankenstein and last year's Oscar-winning "The Pianist."

Lest you think that the CMF has completely lost its way and has replaced musical director Marin Alsop with Jennifer "J.Lo" Lopez, the festival is also making news this summer by harkening back to its past with an evening concert dedicated to the late Lou Harrison and featuring an appearance by Harrison's longtime friend and collaborator and Alsop's predecessor as head of the festival, Dennis Russell Davies.

The pop-culture touchstones are only part of the festival's season. As in past years, the festival is focusing on the work of living composers including Richard Danielpour, Augusta Read Thomas, Thomas Adès and John Adams (who interestingly ran the festival in the one-year interval between Davies's departure and Alsop's arrival).

But it's those same pop-culture elements that will create audience curiosity (known in the biz as "buzz").

"New music has always been influenced by popular culture," said Alsop by phone from London. "It's really hard to draw a firm line between popular culture and classical music, especially in America which is far more influenced by, say, rock music than European culture is."

One of the more noteworthy embodiments of that melding effect is pianist Christopher O'Riley, the CMF's premiere guest soloist who will star in the festival's second weekend.

O'Riley is one of classical music's most accomplished young pianists who's also gained another level of popularity for his work as host of the public-radio program "From the Top," which highlights the life and work of young talent in classical music.

But he's also a huge fan of the enormously popular British gloom-rock group Radiohead.

O'Riley has, in fact, created a body of work titled "True Love



## SANTA CRUZ STYLE

# CabMuFest

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Waits" which transforms Radiohead's music to the idiom of classical piano. O'Riley will perform the Radiohead material on Aug. 8 as part of this year's festival.

"I know there are a lot of people out there saying, 'Who is this Mr. Head?'" said O'Riley. "But it's really astoundingly beautiful music. As far as genres of music is concerned, it was Duke Ellington who said, 'There's only two kinds of music, good music and bad music.' I feel likewise."

O'Riley hears elements in Radiohead that hint at complexities absent in most other popular music.

"It's not my desire or intention to wrench Radiohead out of the rock context. I feel I'm playing the music as it was intended."

As a lifelong innovator and maverick, the late Lou Harrison may have approved heartily.

Harrison, who died last February, was one of the founding artistic minds behind the original Cabrillo Music Festival and remained for years its spirit

emeritus.

On Sunday, Aug. 3, the CMF devotes an evening to its muse called "The Festival & Lou." Davies, who oversaw the CMF for 17 years before becoming a central figure in German contemporary music, returns for the first time to the festival to honor Harrison, a longtime friend. Davies and CMF concertmaster Yumi Hwang-Williams will play Harrison's "Grand Duo" for piano and violin. Harrison wrote the piece as a gift to Davies.

The Harrison tribute show will also feature baritone Sanford Sylvan who starred in the festival's 2001 production of Harrison's opera "Rapunzel" and composer/conductor Philip Collins, a longtime student and friend of Harrison's.

"In the U.S.," said Alsop, "Lou was always considered a revered national treasure. Whenever we programmed Lou's work, people just couldn't get enough."

Alsop will also bring in the work of Polish pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman, the subject of Roman Polanski's film "The Pianist," which brought a Best Actor Oscar to star Adrien Brody who played Szpilman.

A survivor of the Holocaust, which wiped out his entire family, Szpilman's story is now well-known. But his music is less so.

"You'd be surprised at how light and upbeat it is," said Alsop. "It's not what you would expect considering what he went through. But I hear elements of Gershwin, even Strauss in it."

The Szpilman piece will be presented Saturday, Aug. 2 in a show that also features Michael Daugherty's "Rosa Parks Boulevard," a tribute to the Civil Rights icon, Michael Hersch's "Symphony No. 2" and, certainly a crowd-pleaser, H.K. Gruber's "Frankenstein," a cult-classic take-off on the famous monster story starring the popular Joseph Ribeiro, the South African actor/singer known by local audiences for his over-the-top performances in Shakespeare Santa Cruz's holiday pantomimes.

Where there's a "Frankenstein," can there be a "Dracula" far behind?

The night before the "Monsters in the Park" concert featuring the Gruber piece, the CMF opens the new season with "Blood, Sweat & Tears," the first part of that title represented by David Del Tredici's

treatment of the Dracula story.

Soprano Hila Plitmann plays the central role in the piece in which she is seduced by the vampire and becomes one herself.

"They're very different pieces," said Alsop of "Frankenstein" and "Dracula," "but they're similar in their style of presentation. Both composers portray the twisted elements of their story very well, though 'Dracula' is more a sung piece and 'Frankenstein' more theatrical in that way."

Opening night will also feature the world premiere of Emily Wong's "Structure III" and Michael

Daugherty's "Fire and Blood" featuring a solo from violinist Yumi Hwang-Williams.

Oh, and did we mention Harry Potter? The most famous fictional character since Superman comes into the festival when the CMF Orchestra presents the music from "Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone" at the annual Free Family Concert on Sunday, Aug. 3. It might be the only thing associated with Harry Potter you'll ever get for free.

After his Radiohead concert, pianist O'Riley returns for a concert called "The A Team" in reference to Alsop and composers

John Adams and Thomas Adès. And the festival bows with its annual trip to the Mission San Juan Bautista featuring selections from Richard Danielpour, Augusta Read Thomas and Kevin Puts with O'Riley again playing piano in the Danielpour piece.

"He seems to really have a good sense of our esthetic and artistic values," Alsop said of O'Riley. "Breaking boundaries, enthusiasm, innovations. He's the whole package."

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