

Legendary composer, Aptos resident dies at 85

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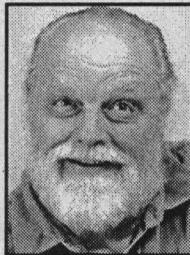
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REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

Aptos lost a classical music legend Sunday with the death of long-time Santa Cruz County resident Lou Harrison. A contemporary legend in his own time, Harrison died of a heart attack near Lafayette, Ind. He was 85.

Harrison was en route to Columbus, Ohio, where he was being recognized for a lifetime of musical achievement at the Contemporary Music Festival 2003 at Ohio State University. Harrison collapsed and died at a restaurant in Lafayette, a stopover on his trip to the festival, which was supposed to run Thursday through Sunday. The festival was dedicated almost entirely to the works of Harrison.

"This is a big loss, not only to the community, but to the whole world," said Santa Cruz Symphony Music Director Larry Granger, who has performed several of Harrison's pieces with his orchestra. "He's left a wonderful thing behind: his music. It was like light itself — it's rhythm and fluidity, it breathed in such a natural way."

Described as an avant-garde virtuoso, Harrison was a crucial element of the West Coast contemporary classical music genre, often bridging the gap between Eastern and Western musical influences. Harrison also made a name for himself as a Gamelan enthusiast and lover of Eastern drums.



Harrison

"From very early on Harrison was blending music from all over the globe; he was truly a world musician," said Granger. "He had this incredible international view, bringing together multiple musical fields before it was popular to do so."

To many, Harrison was a renaissance man of artistic styles, often fusing poetry, painting, calligraphy, charismatic writing, instrument and dance into his repertoire of ability. A staunch political activist, Harrison also worked hard to fight for gay rights, coming out of the closet during the early 1940s as a pioneer icon for homosexuals.

Harrison moved to Aptos in 1953 and lived with partner Bill Covig, who died in 2000. His cur-

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rent partner, Todd Burlingame, was traveling with Harrison when he died.

In recent days, Harrison had just finished and mailed off a book of his poetry, sketches and thoughts on music to publishers. He was also an avid gardener and was very interested in sustainable energy, recently converting a used Mercedes to run on bio-diesel fuel.

Funeral services and memorial plans have yet to be announced.