

## Robert Hughes

[Robert Grove Hughes](#) (September 16, 1933 Buffalo NY – August 11, 2022 Emeryville CA), American composer, conductor, publisher, and trailblazing advocate for contemporary music. He was composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Symphony and resident composer for the Disney film *Never Cry Wolf*. His unfinished life-work *Silenus's Antiphonary* is a hand-drawn score in which poetry and visual art figure prominently. He specialized in interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary music.

He thrived on the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s, offering an eclectic and often zany approach to art and life in his own music and in the programming and interpretation of music for the many groups he spawned.

Among these were the Cabrillo Music Festival, founded with Lou Harrison in 1963 and the Arch Ensemble for Experimental Music founded with Thomas Buckner in 1978. It was as Founder and Music Director of the Youth Chamber Orchestra, he discovered the greatest freedom to shift the paradigm for what contemporary and world music could mean to American culture. The YCO toured “The Black Composer in America” to Texas and Louisiana in 1970. It was a landmark achievement. A contract for a commercial recording of the program on the Desto label followed, another first for a youth orchestra.

### Composition

Drawing on his interest in literature, Hughes wrote ultramodern works with strength in both melodic and rhythmic lines, a voice apart from twelve-tone music, East Coast modernism, and aleatoric methods. He singled out the flute and bass clef instruments, and wrote for electronics as well as for the virtuoso abilities of his orchestral colleagues in the many performing groups he conducted or performed with on bassoon and contrabassoon.

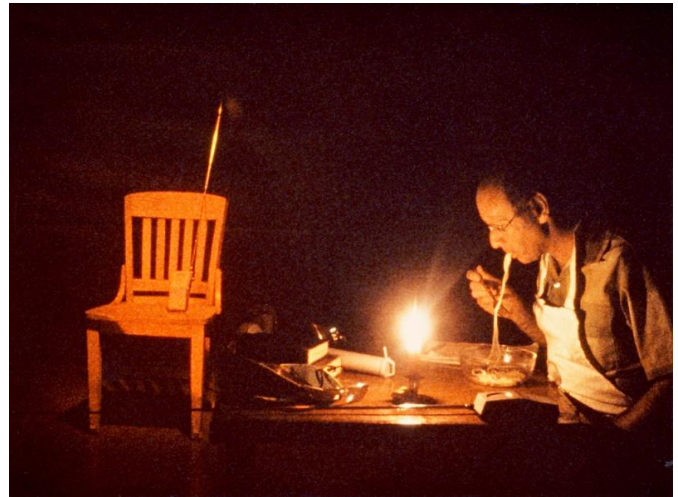


[photo Sam Vestel, Watsonville Register-Pajaronian]

His compositions for chamber ensemble, electronics, film and media, and experimental performance works are scored for Western, Asian, Native American, ethnic, folk, and ancient instruments; electronics, and low tech gadgets such as walkie-talkies and pencils crushed by a go-kart.

*Gli Insetti*, for MAFISHCO, 1978

[photo: Marion Gray]



From 1980-1982 he composed music for Carroll Ballard's Disney Production, *Never Cry Wolf*. When the film did not reach a final cut after two years, he left for Italy on a postponed Fulbright grant to compose song settings of Italian proverbs in dialect. From 1983 to 1989 as Artistic Director for MAFISHCO, a performance and media group, he toured his electronic music across the United States, to Europe and Japan.

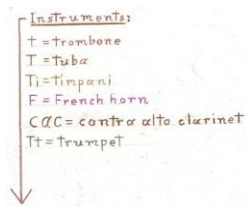
In 2004 he was inducted into the Buffalo Music Hall of Fame.

### Silenus's Antiphony

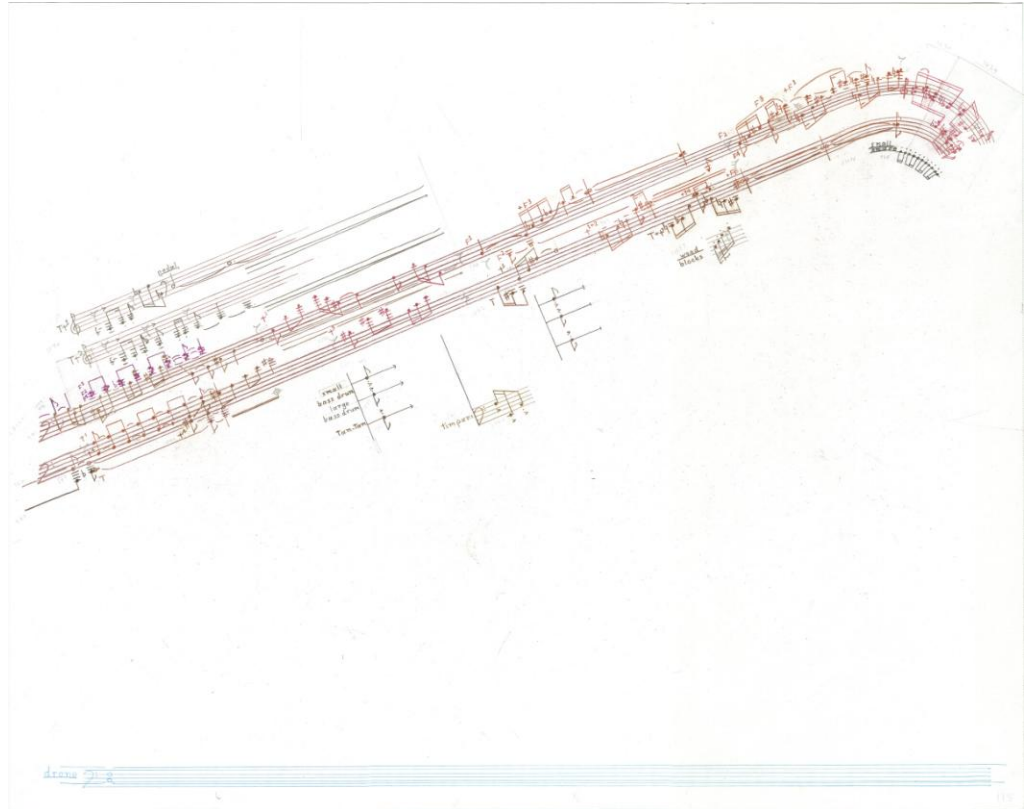
Hughes devoted the 2000s to finding a suitable form for a music score and project that could express his lifelong pursuit of music, literature, and art. The work, titled *Silenus's Antiphony*, proceeds on the premise that "true innocence occurs after experience, never before," a saying Hughes attributed to Silenus, mythological companion and mentor to the Greek god Dionysus. His notes make clear that he is not Silenus, but an interpreter of Silenus.

The *Antiphony* borrows one of its main themes from Alfonso X's thirteenth-century *Cantiga* 125 (di Gioia). The work is structured on the four seasons, with a transformative water interlude between each. Voices populating the work derive from antiquity, the Western literary canon, the Beats, and Silenus himself. The voice of Hestor Storm, an unjustly neglected Beat who performed frequently with her cohort at the [Old Spaghetti Factory](#) in North Beach, anchors the *Antiphony's* final section "Autumn" with the line "My fading sight."

Intended to be a constellation of many lodestars, the work is unfinished at about 145 pages. Its philosophical reach is mirrored in the gamut of performing forces, from kithara to electronic drone, small ensemble to oversized orchestra.



[p. 115 of the score, MM = c. 40, all brass open, *mf*]



The music, hand-drawn with a Prismacolor set of 130 pencils, includes favorite texts, some set to music and others integrated into the visual layout of the page. Images are also hand-drawn or superimposed as film transparencies through which one can view the music. The music staves may bend, disappear and reappear. On page 133 they succumb to the all encompassing eye of God, a hand-drawn rendering of Ezra Pound's line from *Drafts and Fragments*, "God's Eye art 'ou . . ."

### Early life and education

Hughes grew up in Eggertsville, a suburb of Buffalo NY, son of Henry Hughes, an active Teamster, and Carolyn Grove, a bookkeeper and truant officer. At age 15 he conducted his music composition "Dreams of Heaven and Hell" with the Buffalo Civic Orchestra (later Buffalo Philharmonic). When not conducting, he played bassoon as a union member of the orchestra through his college years. His "Three Cowboy Songs" for whistler and wind quintet (1953) proved a big hit in Buffalo and throughout his career.

While a Teaching Fellow at the Music Department at the University of Buffalo, he programmed and conducted the series Contemporary Music Concerts 1956-1959. His task was to prepare the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in advance of appearances by Aaron Copland, the Department's Snee Professor of Music. A similar situation transpired with Carlos Chavez of Mexico City, the next Snee Professor of Music.

In this role, he planned a series of Lou Harrison concerts with the composer present. Harrison wrote, "I am 'done in' tonight from a day of strenuous clipping & bathing of dogs at the Animal Hospital where I have my job. You must, therefore, forgive a shaky hand. &, too, understand that (much as I'd like to risk it) I've not the grace of a 'sabbatical' now & then, & would not want to distress my employers, nor lose the job . . . a possible consequence were I to accept your alluring offer to visit the University of Buffalo!" [letter, Harrison to Hughes, 2 April 1959]

Hughes raised the funds needed for a ticket and lodging and pressed Harrison to reconsider. Six weeks later Harrison informed Hughes that he would come to Buffalo after all, "For recognition at the airport I will wear the green star of Esperanto in my lapel" [Letter, Harrison to Hughes, 16 May 1959].

When Jerry Mulligan visited Buffalo, Hughes followed his concerts in the clubs and found an opportunity to ask if he would be interested in improvising to something classical. Mulligan replied, "I'd give my eye tooth to improvise to the 6th Brandenburg Concerto." Hughes assembled a group of musicians from the Philharmonic to improvise, gratis, with Mulligan to the 6th Brandenburg.

In 1958 at the age of 25, Hughes went to St. Elizabeths\* Hospital in Washington D.C. with Forrest Read and others in his recorder group to play a concert of chamber music for the incarcerated American poet Ezra Pound. The visit was a thrilling cap to his literature studies at UB, and the beginning of a lifelong pursuit to understand how and why the distinguished poet of *The Cantos* set the words of other poets to music (Dante, Cavalcanti, Sordello, Sappho, Catullus, and Villon). At the time, Pound was unable to tell Hughes the whereabouts of the score for his first opera based on, and titled after François Villon's *Le Testament*. The Villon opera was the first of many "lost" scores Hughes would locate and bring to audiences over the course of his career. [\*no apostrophe]

When Hughes sailed to Italy later that year on a Baird Foundation Fellowship to study with composer Luigi Dallapiccola in Florence and to study conducting at Darmstadt and Salzburg,

he was already a fully formed musician and intellectual with emphases in English literature and art history.

With the remainder of his fellowship award, Hughes traveled to Aptos, California in 1960 to study with Lou Harrison, whose music tapped the traditions and tunings of the Pacific Rim.

#### Lou Harrison and the Cabrillo Music Festival

From this point Hughes' own music became more melodic and inclusive of ethnic instruments. Hughes would become proficient on the piri or Korean oboe, the Mexican clay flute, the contrabassoon, the percussion instruments of different cultures, and later, the Moog and Prophet 10 synthesizers.

The association between Hughes and Harrison led to a lifelong friendship as well as works co-composed, such as *Ritmicas* (1964); arranged, such as *Schoenbergiana* (1962) and *Exquisite Corpses* or *Party Pieces* (games by Harrison, Cage, Thomson, Cowell, and Wigglesworth, 1964), and *Suites for Cello* (1997).

One of the first projects jointly undertaken by Harrison and Hughes was to start a concert series at the Sticky Wicket restaurant in Aptos, CA, with Hughes as Music Director. The series developed in 1963 into the Cabrillo Music Festival under the baton of Gerhard Samuel at the newly built Cabrillo College. The Festival commissioned Hughes to augment the orchestra with electronics and to be composer-in-residence. Now relocated to Santa Cruz, CA, the [Festival](#) has an international reputation for its promotion and commissioning program of contemporary music.

In 1974, the Festival commissioned Beth Anderson, a graduate of Mills College, to compose a new music opera *Joan* on texts from the trial of Joan of Arc. The heroine saint—Margaret Fisher—was to dance above the orchestra on a scaffold. Maestro Dennis Russell Davies, short on time to prepare the aleatoric opera, passed the score to Hughes. The orchestra resisted the composer's experimental music notation and indications of randomness within the work. They staged mock new music ensembles outside of the theater prior to the premiere, and two performers famously streaked down the aisles of the concert hall, taking their seats on stage just as the music began. The chaotic scene brings to mind the riotous Futurist provocations in Italy.

Fisher later invited Hughes to collaborate on her performance works. From 1978, they toured the festival circuit for new music and dance, performance art and experimental theater, and



performed in Venice at the invitation of the Venice Biennale. Fisher and Hughes married in 1996.

### Conductor

Hughes' conducting career in the 1960s and 1970s included the roles of Assistant or Guest Conductor to Gerhard Samuel, Carlos Chavez and Dennis Russell Davies throughout their tenures at Cabrillo. He was assistant to Samuel and to Harold Farberman of the Oakland Symphony; and he guest conducted SF Western Opera Theatre, SF Ballet, and Berkeley Symphony, among other groups.

In 1972, he conducted the world premiere of Ezra Pound's opera *Le Testament* (more on that below). In 1975 he conducted and recorded the film score for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. His final appearance was as Guest Conductor for the Lyon Opera Ballet. Kent Nagano invited him to conduct Frank Zappa's *Perfect Stranger* (choreographer Ralph Lemon) and *Bogus Pomp* (choreographer Lucinda Childs) in 1990 for the [Lyon Biennale de la Danse](#). Though long put to rest in California, the familiar antagonism between orchestral musicians and new music, as still practiced in Lyon brought Hughes to the decision to devote his full energy to composition.

### Counterculture

A rebel as well as reveler in the culture of the 1960s and 1970s, Hughes was "non-conformist to the core" (Paul Hertelendy, *Oakland Tribune* Sun., April 22, 1973, p.31-EN). For example, the 1964 work *Anagnorisis* was a commission to feature San Francisco Ballet's principal dancer Thatcher Clarke. It was scored for a trombonist (Stuart Dempster) who doubles on garden hose. To get the desired pitches in the hose, Hughes stretched it out along California Street to notch it correctly. The work, a tour de force for trombone, has since been performed by Toyoji Tomita (for choreographer Shela Xoregos) and by Andy Strain, among others. A photo of the original production can be seen on the cover of Hughes' compilation CD of collected short works, also titled *Anagnorisis*.

While *Anagnorisis* teased out the erotic impulse with the visual aspect of the instrumentation, the 1966 *Kama Sutra Ballet* for western and Asian instruments celebrated it with memorable solos for flute and for the contrabassoon. James Broughton's erotic film *The Golden Positions* provided opportunity for another score on erotic themes. Before long the whole music making endeavor was ripe for erotic mischief. To celebrate the return of Spring, Hughes joined with Martha Nastich, a movement and body awareness therapist, to sponsor a "Dionysiad." The event included an Aphrodisiac Supper Feast, music ensembles improvising on Greek and Indian song, "Musical Massage, and "Maenad Joy."

Hughes also did not hesitate to enter the political discourse of his times. “Angry Arts Week West” and “Music and Words of War” in 1967 featured his “Elegy for Vietnam followed by a Protest.” He challenged the color barrier in the South with the Youth Chamber Orchestra’s tour of Black American composers in 1970, and in 1977 he spoke publicly against the newly passed California Proposition 13, with its tax relief for property owners and deep funding cuts to the arts as a result. His second season with the S.F. Symphony as composer-in-residence fell victim to Prop 13.

With the large 1976 work *Cadences*, a two-orchestra (Oakland Symphony and the Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra), two-conductor spatial work with electronics performed in the historic Paramount Theater and recorded on the Arch label, Hughes tackled the social conundrum of his time, the erosion of stability and tradition within our culture. He asked for the young musicians to record their views on sex and society. The pre-recorded, edited tapes were incorporated into *Cadences*, to the consternation of some of the parents and members of the public.

Six thousand miles away, seven years later, *Cadences* had a different reception.

Choreographer Bruno Jacquin at Tanz Forum of the State Opera of Cologne wrote Hughes he wanted to set a new dance to *Cadences*, “The theme of my piece is a group of people, finding themselves in an anarchic and chaotic situation, searching for a leader, a hero, an ideology, or a faith. I was inspired by the book *The Era of the Crowd* (an historical treatise on mass psychology). This subject matter seemed to me to adapt itself very well to the concept of your work” (letter, Jacquin to Hughes, 14 April 1983). He used the Arch recording of the work.

### Lecturer

A frequent lecturer (Arts and Music Conferences in the Western United States, San Francisco Symphony, Mills College, Cabrillo College, UC Extension, Cal State Long Beach, Cal Arts Valencia, Cal State Hayward, Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka Alaska), Hughes could hold audiences spellbound with his characteristic broad scope paired to a rapid-fire delivery of details drawn from the music and from the social and the economic history of his subject.

His talk for the “Speaking of Music” series at the S. F. Exploratorium with electronics pioneer Don Buchla, cellist Amy Radner and flutist Patrice Hambleton proceeded in the presence of the “Dreamstage” exhibition with its public display of a sleeping 24-year old psychology student Tina hooked up to testing instruments. While her brain wave patterns were realized visually and aurally in pictures and music, Hughes’s quartet traced the development of stringed instruments from pre-history to the present, including a recording of Ilhan

Mimaroglu's *Prelude No. 4* for Rubber Band, the medieval melody *The Lament of Tristan* played on one string of the cello, followed by Bach's *Third Suite* for solo cello, and Mozart's work for cello and bassoon. All the while, the sleeper slept. The *S.F. Examiner* described Hughes' abilities on the bassoon as upstaging the program's theme (Fri. March 31, 1978, p. 27). It's easy to forget that while he pursued a career as a composer and conductor, Hughes performed as a professional bassoonist with all of the Bay Area orchestras. The Exploratorium "talk" ended with an improvisation by Hughes, Radner and Buchla.

### Alaska

Invited to Alaska by his former University of Buffalo music theater colleague James Bravar, Hughes turned his attention to Alaskan native instruments. "[The indigenous peoples] have very few instruments, since most of their northern tundra has nothing to make sound with. I mean you get ice there, and that's about it. Their major instrument is a drum made from a piece of pliable wood shaped into a big hoop, and then they stretch seal bladder over it. It's rather delicate. . . . Plus, they make a whirring instrument out of the baleen whales' teeth – these whales don't actually have teeth but a whole kind of filter system. If you take a piece of that it will make a curious sort of rhythm by whirring. And then I utilized a number of Eskimo melodies and composed them for an instrumental ensemble of about 12 musicians, largely Oakland Symphony people." (Margo Hackett, ed., *Front Row Center*, 'A Conversation with: Robert Hughes,' Vol. 1 No. 1, September/October 1974, pp 1, 3). The music pieces were commissioned by the U.S. Department of Interior for their documentary *Magnificence in Trust*, a tour-de-force cinematic essay on Alaska.

### Japan

A 9-month residence from 1983-84 in Tokyo to join Fisher, recipient of the Japan-U.S. Artist Exchange Fellowship, gave Hughes a forum to present his short works and to lecture on "Contemporary Trends in Music, Art and Poetry," as well as on "Ezra Pound and Music" in Tokyo and Osaka. He met the Japanese composers active in the 1980s: Satoh Somei, Shiomi Mieko, Joji Yuasa, Toshi Ichianagi, Matsudaira Yoritsune, Hinoharu Matsumoto, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Mamoru Fujieida.

Returning to the U.S. with their tapes and recordings, he promoted concert programs of Japanese contemporary music at Mills College, Langton Arts Center and on KPFA-FM radio; his efforts led to future commissions, record distribution, the establishment of a library of contemporary Japanese scores in Berkeley, and the exchange of repertoire between new music ensembles in Tokyo and Berkeley.



## Young Caesar

In 1988 Hughes realized two Harrison works of note. *Young Caesar*, a puppet opera from 1971 was [described by John Rockwell](#) as perhaps “the first overtly male gay opera in history, complete with a love affair between the teenage Julius Caesar, as an emissary from Rome, and Nicomedes, the king of distant Bithynia, on the south shore of the Black Sea. It even had a gay orgy, depicted with puppets.” Newly revised for live performers, *Young Caesar* received its stage premiere by the Portland Gay Men’s Chorus under Hughes’ baton.

## Recordings and Films

Also in 1988, Hughes conducted Harrison’s *Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra* for New World Records, with Keith Jarrett and Lucy Stoltzman as soloists.

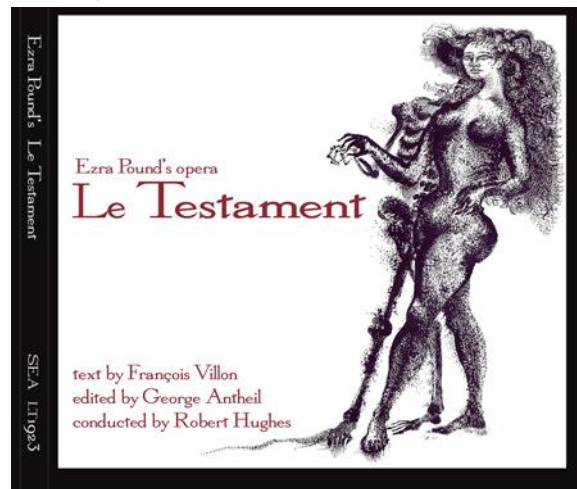
In addition to *Never Cry Wolf*, Hughes produced scores for the ongoing series of delightful film scores for Houghton Mifflin’s Amazing Life Games. These were virtuoso small ensemble pieces for friends in the orchestra on clarinet, tuba, French Horn, toy instruments, Dixieland Band, you name it, recorded by Hughes’ good friend Richard Beggs, future recipient of the Academy Award for Sound Design, for Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Alaska again became the theme for films for PBS (*Alaska, Time, and Technology*) and Disney (*Never Cry Wolf*)

## Lost music found

While searching for material for the YCO that was relevant to the cultural diversity of their Northern California audiences, Hughes found he had a knack for locating music thought to be lost or unfinished or unrealized. This included music by Camille Saint-Saëns (*Hail! California!* composed for the 1915 Pacific Exposition in San Francisco), and music by poet-composers Robert Louis Stevenson and Ezra Pound.

The project of historical import was the world premiere and recording of Ezra Pound’s first opera *Le Testament* with San Francisco Western Opera. The presentation of Pound’s complete score, as rhythmically arranged in 1923 into modern asymmetrical meters by George Antheil, was the culmination of Hughes’ efforts dating to the late 1950s when he visited Pound in D.C. Ongoing negotiations with Pound’s wife Dorothy Pound, Pound’s publisher James Laughlin, the BBC music library and the Ford Foundation eventually resulted in the opera’s premiere on November 13, 1971 at the newly opened Zellerbach Auditorium on the UC Berkeley campus. A recording on the Fantasy Record label was issued the following year, now a collector’s item.

He later formed Second Evening Art with Fisher to publish works that warrant a second, or third or fourth hearing. Their first project was a five-volume set of Pound's complete musical oeuvre. They re-leased the Fantasy LP on CD on the Second Evening Art label.



### The Youth Chamber Orchestra in more detail

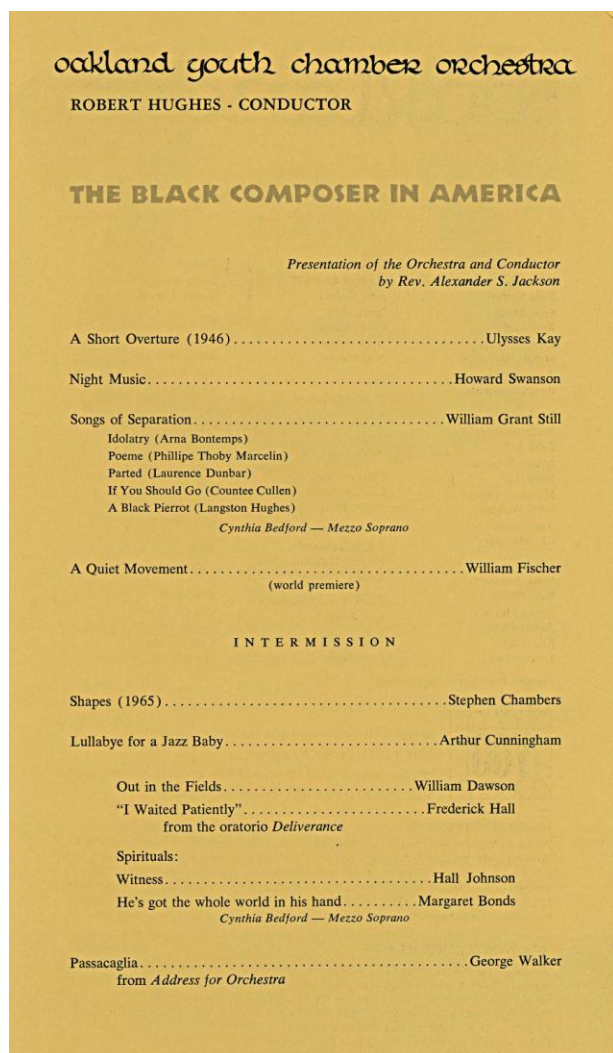
Arguably, the organization that most successfully accomplished Hughes' ambitions for contemporary music programming was the Youth Chamber Orchestra (YCO) that he founded in 1964 for Gerhard Samuel and the Oakland Symphony. Drawing from a pool of talented high-school age musicians well before the San Francisco Youth Orchestra was constituted, and sustained by its devoted and unstoppable manager Ethel London, the YCO "commissioned, premiered and recorded more new scores, altogether, than either the Oakland or San Francisco Symphony" during these years (Charles Shere, "Youth Orchestra takes on Stravinsky challenge," *Oakland Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1980, p. G-33).

Intent on exposing the musicians to world cultures in addition to that of Europe, Hughes programmed Carlos Chavez's *Xochipilli-Macuilxochitl*, a reconstruction of Aztec Music, Blas Galindo's *Sones de Mariachi*, and Silvestre Revueltas' *Homenaje a Federico Garcia Lorca*, all composed in the first third of the twentieth century. Music from the Japanese, Korean and Chinese classical repertoire followed, performed on western and ethnic instruments. Also on this program was Lou Harrison's 1963 *Pacifika Rondo*, with the composer on piri, a Korean oboe, Bill Colvig on sheng and Richard Dee on cheng. A search for the lost transcription of the 8<sup>th</sup> century gagaku court orchestra classic *Etenraku* as prepared for Leopold Stokowski by Hidemaro Konoye led to a dusty library in Vienna. These works plus *Song of Badarshan*, anonymous Afghanistan music transcribed by Lou Harrison, were meant to show the strong influence of foreign ethnic groups on California.

The program's lighter touch emerged in the portion of the program titled "A Panorama of California Music." Hughes located music sketches by Robert Louis Stevenson dating from c. 1879 at the eponymous museum in Monterey. Arranged for orchestra and flageolet as "Four Pieces," they accompanied the 'lost' work by Saint-Saens. Also in this section was "Music from the Gold Rush Era," five examples of music performed in the California opera houses. These were arranged by Hughes for the orchestra and sung by soprano Corinne Swall.

The program's grand finale was a YCO commissioned musical theater piece *Jewel-Encrusted Butterfly Wing Explosions* by Robert Moran of San Francisco. It called for television ensemble, baroque consort, string quartet with variable tuners, horn quartet, string orchestra, soloists, tempo regulator, environmental light projector, pre-recorded tape score, and film. Three thousand music teachers at the Music Educators National Conference in Seattle who saw the work on tour gave it a hearty "BOOOOOOOOOO!" which the orchestra duly exploited for future publicity. KQED scheduled a special performance for their 16mm documentary film of the YCO. It can be viewed on the [Internet Archive](#). At about 10 minutes 5 seconds one sees one of the violinists wrapped as a mummy carried to the podium on the shoulder of the conductor.

YCO's groundbreaking program, "The Black Composer in America," toured featured mezzo soprano Cynthia Bedford. Composers represented on the program were Margaret Bonds, Stephen Chambers, Arthur Cunningham, William Dawson, William Fischer, Frederick Hall, Hall Johnson, Ulysses Kay, John E. Price, William Grant Still, Hale Smith, Howard Swanson, and George Walker. Seven of the works were included in "The Black Composer in America" released on the Desto label.



The orchestra commissioned multimedia spectacles from Robert Moran and Laurie Anderson, and performed music of world cultures on an equal footing with the western canon.

They revealed in a very short time the untapped potential of orchestral endeavors in the United States. They were spontaneous, playful, technically superb, with pedal to the metal, whereas the boards of directors, educational, publicity and development directors, and the professional musicians of music institutions across the country were, and still are segregating their program offerings to appear politically correct, and, in general, playing catch-up to the YCO's vision of why a community and a young person might find something of value in the institution of a symphonic or chamber orchestra.

Though non-conformist in demeanor, Hughes was a serious composer, conductor, and researcher. He was ambivalent about his success with the youth orchestra, aware that he might be expected to fulfill, or might in retrospect be typecast into the role of educator who shapes the tastes rather than sharpens the minds of young musicians. The opposite was true.

In fact, by 1970, the Board of Directors had their doubts that Hughes was a healthy influence on the high-school age students, despite a robust discography with the Black Composers album, Henry Brant's *Kingdom Come*, Ned Rorem's *Water Music*, and Lou Harrison's *Pacifika Rondo*. "He shocked a good many people with his boldness. Not the kids. They loved it. The irreverent, good-natured repartee going back and forth between them on tour buses was something for your diary" (Paul Hertelendy, *Oakland Tribune* April 22, 1973, p.31-EN).

Nevertheless, Hughes had his supporters, returning as guest conductor at the invitation of conductor Calvin Simmons in 1980, but with a bargaining chip in hand. He would direct the group for a year if they would perform three new commissions and tour Italy with an expanded orchestra to accommodate Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. On May 17, 1980 the expanded and renamed Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra premiered the commissioned

work *Born, Never Asked* by Laurie Anderson. The score was the basis for Anderson's first popular hit, *O Superman*.

The orchestra was perhaps the first of its age group to tackle the difficult metrics of *Rite of Spring*. They toured it to Hans Werner Henze's Cantiere Internazionale d'Arte Festival in Montepulciano, the Church of the Frari in Venice (where the electrical panel caught fire and the priests hiked up their cassocks to be able to race to quench the flames), Opera Barga in the Garfagnana, and to Mahler's summer home at Dobbiaco in the Dolomites.

Filling out the program was *Reflections*, a commissioned work by Olly Wilson; *East Meets West*, a commissioned work by Bill Bell; Mahler's Symphony N. 10; Haydn's Symphony N. 71; and Hughes' own *Eclogarii* or *Selected Works* that included *Estampie*, whose dance-like movement belies the influence of Lou Harrison, *HCE*, a commission from the S.F. Symphony that takes James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* for inspiration, and *Kalanit*, a work commissioned by choreographer Shela Xoregos to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the State of Israel. Hughes received the ASCAP Award for Adventuresome Programming of Contemporary Music for his work with the Youth Orchestra.

### Commissions

While the Youth Orchestra seemed like a straight trajectory to the moon. Hughes' composing and conducting careers were like volcanic explosions, taking off in every direction. The 1970s saw commissions as well as composer-in-residence offers from the S.F. Symphony (*HCE*, and *Commentary on Daphnis and Chloe*), Cabrillo (*Auras*, *Radiances*, *Quadroquartet*), Cal State University at Hayward (*Amo Ergo Sum*, a large choral setting of Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, with electronics), Oakland Ballet (*Cones*), Alaska Arts Council (*Edge*), St. Paul Chamber Orchestra (*Where are we going*).

### The Arch Ensemble

From 1978-1983, Hughes was co-music director and conductor of the Arch Ensemble for Experimental Music, a 16- to 23-member, one-each-instrument ensemble (including electronics) co-founded with baritone Thomas Buckner on the model of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble in New York founded by Arthur Weisberg, a bassoonist. The Arch Ensemble was the third component of Buckner's visionary monument to new music, preceded by 1750 Arch Street, a former Spanish-style home in North Berkeley converted into a 49-seat highly successful concert venue, and Arch Records, overseen by audio engineer Bob Shumaker whose tenure saw the release of landmark recordings weighted toward Pacific Coast composers.



With three active careers Hughes was constantly in motion. An example of a typical three-service Saturday work load: he would conduct Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Wilson's *Reflections* in the morning with the Youth Orchestra, Peter Lopez's fiercely difficult *Ship of Death* in the afternoon with the Arch Ensemble, and then perform as featured soloist for the Oakland Symphony's premiere of Henry Brant's *Antiphonal Responses, Triple Concerto for Three Bassoons*, all while hosting the brilliantly wacky, audacious Brant in his home during the Oakland Symphony rehearsals and performance.

### Lost Music Found, again

The 1980s were no less volcanic. An invitation to perform with Fisher in February at the Biennale's newly re-instated Carnevale program in Venice, Italy led to a game-changing meeting with Olga Rudge in that city. She had a career as a highly regarded violinist and new music specialist in Paris where she met Ezra Pound. She preferred to be known as his secretary, though the relationship was no secret. Pound lived with her in Venice his last years. Hughes picked up the phone. On hearing his name, Rudge inquired, "THE Robert Hughes?" The friendship flowered, thanks to Hughes' aversion to academia. As if sensing this was a man who could do justice to 'lost' manuscripts, Rudge drew from the closet the 'missing' scores to Pound's second opera *Cavalcanti*, the scores that were thought to have been left unfinished. She relinquished them at last. She had held onto the scores for decades. Perhaps she thought she herself would combine the opera's scattered manuscripts into a master score. Or was she worried for Pound's safety? The third act requires a young page to the thirteenth-century poet Guido Cavalcanti to memorize a cipher encoded in the music he is to sing to the border guards to be able to re-enter Florence.

Pound had been indicted for 'treasonous' broadcasts during the war. He was declared insane by the U.S. courts and sent to prison for his talks on culture, politics, and economics. His carefully curated classical and modern music programs were of no consequence, of course. Arguably, the third act of the Cavalcanti opera could support a different slant.

Hughes introduced Rudge to Charles Amirkhanian, composer and executor of the George Antheil estate, who happened to be in Venice at the same time. Rudge obligingly brought forward Antheil's violin solo, "Printemps, for Olga," yet another lost work now found.

In 1983 Hughes helped the Beinecke Library identify and catalogue the Pound music they had recently received from the Pound family. He returned to the Bay Area to collate and prepare the opera scores for a concert version of the work to be performed a few months later by the Arch Ensemble, with Rudge in attendance. The program included a 1926 version of *Le Testament* that Rudge herself had played at the Salle Pleyel in Paris.

When Hughes returned from Japan in 1984 via Italy he reunited with his son the poet Stephen Ezra Hughes. While in Rome, Hughes lectured on Pound's music at the Libreria Rispoli. In Venice, Olga Rudge produced another surprise – a batch of tangled cassette tapes she recorded of Pound during his last years in Venice.

In 1985 he invited Rudge to California for the Pound centennial events planned in the Bay Area. Rudge brought the cassette tapes for Hughes to transfer to more reliable (back then) reel-to-reel tapes at his music studio, located in the home of Ethel London. Content ranged from Pound reading his and others' poetry, to the passing of the hours, marked by church bells, to intimate conversation. Excerpts edited by Richard Sieburth can be heard [here](#).

As Distinguished Composer-in-Residence in 1989 at the Rockefeller Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy, Hughes had time to assemble the long-delayed definitive version of *Cavalcanti*. In 2003 he published, with Fisher, the complete music works with engraved and facsimile scores in five volumes: *Cavalcanti: A Perspective on the Music of Ezra Pound*; *Complete Violin Works 1923-1933*; *Collis O Heliconii, The Recovery of Ezra Pound's Third Opera, Settings of Catullus and Sappho*; *Le Testament, 1926 and 1933 performance editions*, and *Le Testament, an opera by Ezra Pound* in facsimile edition of the 1923 George Antheil holograph score. The volume also includes essays on the prosody, music analysis, and annotations on the holograph score.

Charles Amirkhanian produced a compact disc of excerpts drawn from Pound's complete oeuvre. The compilation, conducted by Hughes and titled *Ego Scriptor Cantilenae, The Music of Ezra Pound*, is on the Other Minds label. The work on Pound's music was almost done.

Hughes returned with Fisher to the Beinecke Library on a Donald C. Gallup Fellowship to create a definitive catalogue to all of the music, informed by four and a half decades of research and performance. They gave talks explaining and demonstrating the difficulty and originality of the music at the Beinecke, University of Buffalo Poetry Center, University of California at Berkeley, and the Ezra Pound International Conference in Rome. For their scholarship the Ezra Pound Society awarded Hughes and Fisher a [Lifetime Achievement Award](#).

### The 2000s

Hughes retired from the Symphony orchestras in 2001 and sold his bassoons. He turned to his composing desk to *Silenus's Antiphonary*, where he could comb through the myriad of influences throughout his lifetime, and the experiences that both obeyed and disobeyed those influences. It was time to make it new, as Pound had said.

A day before his death he called out, "I have come a long time to innocence, without innocence," paraphrasing and perhaps embracing Silenus's line as his own (score page 134). He repeated the statement time after time, eventually settling on the concise and prescient line, "I have come to innocence, without innocence."



Lasciate ogni speranza,  
voi ch'intrate.  
Dante Alighieri (c.1265-1321)  
La Divina Commedia (1308-1320)  
C. III, v.33, ln. 9.



You never know what is enough unless  
You know what is more than enough.

← Marriage of Heaven and Hell →  
William Blake  
(1757-1827)

The Palace of Wisdom is led to  
by The Road of Excess (sic)

...and others merry making:  
E'en his face begetteth laughter,  
And he speaks Truth...  
... wit waits upon the fool.

Ben Jonson - Volpone  
(1572-1637) (c.1606)  
Act 1, scene 2, lines 56-57,  
68-69, 74-75, 79

fools create their own paradise.

Charles Bukowski - The Last Night of the Earth Poems  
(1920-1994) (1992)  
days like razors, nights full of rats (p.35)

... 'tis your soul wherewith I am so taken,  
The only one creature, that I can call blessed:  
Song  
Free from care, or sorrow-taking,

base / tre / hold as long as possible

flute / /

alto / tre / hold as long as possible

clarinet / /

drone 2

[p116 of Silenus's Antiphony + posthumous superimposition of photo of the composer]

Hughes died on 11 August at age 88 from complications of pneumonia. He is survived by his wife, a son from a first marriage Stephen Ezra Hughes of Madrid, a brother Donald Hughes of Walnut Creek CA and a sister Karen Saona of Buffalo NY.