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Composer John Harbison Publishes First Book
What Do We Make of Bach?

The 2018-2019 concert season marks composer John Harbison's 80th birthday with celebrations throughout the country and around the world, including three major premieres, several new CD releases and the publication of his first book.

Harbison's absorption in the music of J.S. Bach has been a lifelong touchstone in all of his work: as conductor, performer, composer, teacher, and scholar. His new book, *What Do We Make of Bach?* comprises a series of short pieces: Portraits—encounters with individuals revolving around Bach's work; Essays—experiences with institutions in which Bach was at the core, together with some thoughts about where Bach's music could take us, now; and Program Notes—from many written over the last sixty years, a few chosen to light upon the aesthetic and social issues Harbison feels are most important today.

The book is being released coincident with the premiere of Harbison's new organ symphony of the same title, *What Do We Make of Bach?*, a co-commission of the Seattle Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and Northrup at the University of Minnesota.

"This piece began with its title," writes Harbison, "and with the assumption that along with the music I would write a short book with the same title. I started them both simultaneously, and they remain closely linked in my mind, each half of the project explaining the other." Although both the book and the new symphony are free-standing independent works, "each plays a role in summarizing a lifetime preoccupation. . . I do not consider either to be in any way a Tribute or Homage. For me Bach has always been too fundamental, too elemental for that—instead it is something to use, to make something of, to add to the stream."

Among America's most distinguished artistic figures, Harbison is recipient of numerous awards and honors, among them a MacArthur and a Pulitzer. His work encompasses all genres, from chamber music to opera, sacred to secular. He has composed for most of America's premiere musical institutions, including the Metropolitan Opera, the symphony orchestras of Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, Seattle, and New York, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Institute Professor at MIT, Harbison divides his time between Cambridge, Massachusetts and Token Creek, Wisconsin.

The book is available direct from the publisher (\$23 includes shipping): www.arsnovallc.com.

SIDEBAR: Acclaim for the book

"A superb small book ... intense and moving ... lucid and instructive." - Michael Fried

"Fascinating collection of biographical sketches, essays, and program notes ... a memoir of [Harbison's] evolution as a composer and performer." - Richard Griscom

"The autobiography we couldn't possibly have predicted ... fragments from a life devoted to music, and especially to Bach." - Lloyd Schwartz

"Valuable, eloquent insights into the journey of an essential American composer." - James Primosch

"Wonderfully person, poetic, illuminating sketches and essays ... we begin to understand Bach's work as a living, breathing model for our musical and artistic selves." - Robert Kirzinger