



# Harp

## A Tribute to Lucile Lawrence in the form of a memoir by Saul Davis

*This tribute was composed for a celebration in honor of Lucile Lawrence at Boston University, October 10, 2000, celebrating her life and work as a performer, pedagogue, and editor.*

It is hard to put into just a few words everything that Lucile Lawrence represents. She stands on the horizon like a resolute beacon, her Olympian ideals illuminating the world through music. She is admirably free of pretension. Just the other day, when we were discussing this upcoming celebration, she told me, "I just go in to teach and try to do the best job that I can."

From the moment that I opened the *Method for the Harp* by Lucile Lawrence and Carlos Salzedo, I knew that it was something real. I felt that I'd found a testament, a path. I remember reading it avidly, from cover to cover.

When I was finishing high school, I thought of applying to Boston University to study with Miss Lawrence, but I was scared by my awe of her, and of moving so far from home, of not measuring up, of not being able to afford it. So I went to the college near home, but by my senior year (1980), I realized I just hadn't learned enough about how to play the harp. When I found out that Miss Lawrence had a summer program at Tanglewood, I applied on my own, not knowing that another of my teacher's students had gone there the year before.

I was accepted, but my excitement really began in earnest when, realizing that I didn't know what music to bring with me to study, I called Miss Lawrence and she told me to bring the Fauré *Impromptu*, the Caplet *Divertissements*, the Hindemith, Pescetti and C.P.E. Bach *Sonatas*. I swelled to think she thought I was ready for such masterworks, not even dreaming of what I would have to accomplish.

When I'd had my first lesson, I knew I'd found what I was seeking. I managed not to cry in that first lesson, barely, and felt I'd won her respect. The next task

was learning to practice for five hours a day. I felt like my head was breaking apart, doing slow scales and the *Conditioning Exercises* for up to an hour. Around the sixth week, Grace Wong and Elizabeth Richter came to visit and Miss Lawrence asked me to play for them and the rest of the harp class. I'll never forget her comment, "Well, his work is holding up." Those eight weeks were the most intense and wonderful of my life, an immersion into a secret garden of classical music.

After Tanglewood, I went back home to practice my new repertoire and to prepare my audition for a conservatory master's program. I hadn't felt really comfortable with the Boston-Society atmosphere at Tanglewood, so I applied to Manhattan School of Music, where I was sure I could feel more at home. It was hard preparing without a teacher who could keep me on the same path, but I squeaked by and got accepted for a three-year program. When I arrive in New York, I couldn't wait to get sophisticated, so the very next day I went down to Greenwich Village to get my ear pierced. When I arrived for my first lesson with two fake emerald studs in my ear, well, you can imagine Miss Lawrence's chagrin. She made me swear never to wear them to orchestra or concerts, and after reluctantly agreeing that she was right, I never did. Of course, less than five years later she had another male student who wore his earrings all the time, and by 1986 even conductors were wearing them!

The most important aspect of Miss Lawrence's teaching is her ability to show her students the highest standards of classical music *and* how to achieve them. She teaches how to play with superb technique and more importantly, how to listen to the harp,

to hear its tonal resources and shape them according to the subtle interplay of overlapping overtone structures. She talks about sculpting columns of sound, adding a little here, taking away a little there, like a sculptor chiseling a block of marble. She explains the impact of fingerings on phrasing and articulation, and how to achieve dynamic contrasts. She says solving technical deficiencies will often resolve musical deficiencies. — And always work on your hand position!

The sense of lineage is part of the honor of being part of her studio, along with an implicit sense of ethics, and of musical and social responsibility. We are sent out into the world to save the harp from obscurity, bad repertoire and any perception of it as a mediocre instrument. Indeed, she sees it as an artistic medium, capable of the finest and highest esthetic experiences.

Among her magical powers is a wonderful ability, when told the name of a piece, to sort of reach up somewhere and pull down its gestalt, tempo, quality, and usefulness with astonishing accuracy. With her playing, she has been known to make it rain, and I'll never forget the spell she cast over me when once she played Debussy's *Dance Sacrée* in a lesson.

She is generous of spirit, and has been very supportive of my performing, research into repertoire, and my composing and writing. One word of her praise is worth volumes from others. For so many of us, and there must be hundreds, she is teacher, role model, parent, goddess, all rolled up in one magnificence of mind and spirit.

*Saul Davis is a concert harpist/composer/writer living in Philadelphia. He studied harp at MacPhail Center;*

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*Jersey Symphony). He has taught at Roosa School, Hebrew Arts Center, Brooklyn Conservatory, and privately. Mr. Davis is a member of Local 802, ASCAP, Dramatists Guild and other organizations. He is founding Harp-*

*ists Associated for Repertoire Promulgation (H.A.R.P) to develop and promote composers and repertoire for the harp's benefit. †*