

# Meet Roy Harris, Musician



## *The rhythm of a free land . . .*

**O**N HIS FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY, Leroy Ellsworth Harris, distinguished composer of impressionistic music in the United States, received this citation:

"As a composer, you have given our schools, churches, and concert halls American music which characterizes our people and our time; as a teacher, you have spoken to students of the worth and dignity of American culture, and you have by your example given encouragement to them to create and play the vital, new music of this free and democratic land."

The praise came from the Governor of the State of Colorado, but it reiterated the feelings of people all over the country who had benefited from the musician's genius.

Roy Harris, who is proud to remind everyone that he was

born in an Oklahoma log cabin on Abraham Lincoln's birthday in 1898, began to compose music rather late in life. He was almost 30 years old when he wrote his first concerto, yet he has succeeded in creating a staggering quantity of music of all descriptions, distinctly American in subject matter.

In 1933, Harris met the late Serge Koussevitsky, the ardent champion of so many American composers. He asked the struggling composer to write a work for him—a "big symphony of the West." When completed, Harris called it "Symphony: 1933." The reaction of the critics was mixed, but there was no mistaking the impression that it made on young American musicians. It was the first real modern American symphony. There was no jazz rhythm nor folksong quality in it, but

there was a melodic sweep, a harmonic freedom and perhaps a certain awkwardness in handling the materials that suggested an original utterance, authentically native.

The brilliant composer reached a peak of symphonic popularity with his "Third Symphony" brought out by Koussevitsky in the spring of 1939. It was called an "extraordinary" work.

**H**IS CHILDHOOD and adolescence, spent among simple people, made Harris a gregarious person, capable of easy communication with all types of people. He had spent a frugal early life, became a soldier in World War I, and for four years after the war, he drove a delivery truck. When he began to study music seriously, Harris was 20 years old. In the

years that followed, his enthusiasm and originality brought him the patronage of some of the United States' and Europe's outstanding musician-teachers. Harris received a private stipend to study in Europe under Nadia Boulanger, the musical nurse of a whole generation of American composers. For his first lesson, she asked Roy to write 20 melodies. He brought her 107.

Roy Harris thoroughly enjoys people, and loves to teach. He has had numerous positions in schools throughout the country. But he is never content to be just a professor. Invariably, his program has expanded; he has organized festivals, invited famous musicians to be guest teachers, and in numerous ways has encouraged young American musicians to record the rhythm of a free and democratic land. — *Free World.*

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### Timely

*A well-known but improvident author was toiling over a new novel when there came a ring on his doorbell. His caller proved to be a comely young woman who announced, "I represent the Federated Community Charity Fund."*

*"You've arrived in the nick of time," enthused the author. "I'm starving."*

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