

Joan Rivers is not coming to town, but we talked to her anyway. See Page 4B

THE Friday EDITION

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In Flight



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omposer-pianist Michael Harrison knows music.

Synthesizing the Eastern and Western musical traditions, he intimately understands the physics of sound, the mathematics of musical systems and a variety of compositional styles in an array of musical genres.

"In Flight," recorded for Windham Hill Records last week in San Francisco, is the title of a six-minute piece selected for production in the company's first Piano Sampler. In relation to his compositions of past, Harrison considers his latest work, including "In Flight," a move toward simplifying his music.

"As musicians we are always trying to play faster,

impress people more and more because we feel we have to substantiate ourselves. We never feel we are good enough," he notes. "With the version that will be on the sampler, I took out

all the extra notes, all the fast runs, the huge dynamic range and made it so that every note would really count. As well, the piece is in the traditional tuning."

While any change in style is a progressive move forward, Harrison thinks of his most recent music as "almost a step back."

"I don't want to write music just for other musicians, the intellectuals. I want to write music that will touch even your grandmother's heart," he says.

And until recently, much of Harrison's lifetime interest and passion for music has included intellectual pursuit into the fine intricacies of tunings and sound theory. His father, a mathematics professor at the University, gave him his first theory lesson at age 12.

It wasn't long before Harrison's ear detected a dispar-

ity in the Western system of music theory. He also became interested in the music of Indian vocalist Pandit Pran Nath. This led to his study of Eastern music theory and tuning in just intonation.

'Twentieth-century musicians are looking for new ways of making music...but most of them are stuck in the 12-note system.'

— Michael Harrison

The main difference in the Eastern structure of the musical intervals is that all the notes in the ragas, the equivalent to scales in the Western system, are derived from the overtones. Each of these notes is a basic fundamental interval in nature with a corresponding mathematical ratio. A musical tone has a certain measurable vibration.

And with an interval, two musical vibrations, there is a relationship between their frequencies. Intervals in Indian music form perfect integer ratios based on simple whole numbers; intervals in the Western equal-tempered system only approximate these combinations of perfectly tuned frequencies as irrational fractions.

"When you work with these intervals, you'll find



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