

# AJ Harbison Biography

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(under 500 words)

AJ Harbison (born 1985) is a composer and singer/songwriter living with his lovely wife and young daughter in Kansas City, Missouri. His music lives at the intersection of concert music and vernacular music, each bringing unique vitality to the other in a language both adventurous and accessible. Often integrating harmonies and rhythms from pop music with theory, instrumentation, and performance techniques from concert music, while drawing forms and structure from both, his work searches for beauty in brokenness in the space between the already and the not yet. He seeks to create music that is beautiful (displaying a mastery of the craft of composition), true (portraying the world as it really is), and good (enriching the performer and the listener).

AJ has composed for a wide variety of genres and contexts, including concert music, musical theatre, film, and guitar/vocal pop songs for his CD *Songs From My Shelf*, which he also recorded and produced. He was commissioned by Michael Robert Patch in 2014 to compose *Voices Rising United* for the Kansas City Women's Chorus, with text by Kansas author and poet Debra Seely, a work inspired by the life and words of Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai. Kansas City pianist Lamar Sims premiered AJ's *Five Scenes* for solo piano in May 2014 along with choreography created for the piece by Stephanie Whittler, and the piece will be performed by James Gibson on World Oceans' tour throughout Europe early in 2017. His piece *A Magic Like Thee* was chosen by The Singers, a Minneapolis-based choral ensemble, out of nearly 400 submissions to be one of four pieces to receive its premiere in May 2014 as well. In the summer of 2015, LifeHouse Theater in Redlands, California, performed *Paul: The Road to Damascus*, a full-length musical theatre production for which AJ composed, orchestrated, and recorded the songs and underscore. He also received a commission in 2015 from FuseBox New Music and an Inspiration Grant from the ArtsKC Regional Arts Council to compose a work for the string orchestra of Harmony Project KC, an intensive music education program for underprivileged children in Northeast Kansas City. The composition, titled *Fanfare for the Common Kid*, was premiered by the students of the Harmony Project in December 2015. Among his other recent concert music works are *Cantata* for saxophone quartet, which employs a form inspired by the cantatas of J.S. Bach but uses modern materials and techniques to explore the variety of tone colors and instrumental combinations available in the ensemble; and *The Footsteps Die Out For Ever* for narrator, drum set and orchestra, based on the last chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens.

AJ has studied with Leonard Rhodes, Pamela Madsen, Lloyd Rodgers, Ken Walicki, Chen Yi, Paul Rudy, and James Mobberley, and holds degrees in composition from California State University, Fullerton (BM), where he received scholarships for piano performance and composition, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City (MM).