

# AJ Harbison Biography

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AJ Harbison (born 1985) is a composer and singer/songwriter living with his wife and two children in Kansas City. 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).

Harbison's compositions include solo, chamber and orchestral works, and vocal music from songs to works for mixed chorus. His music has been performed by ensembles including the Kansas City Symphony, The Singers (Saint Paul, MN), The Hutchins Consort, the Kansas City Women's Chorus, Luna Nova, newEar Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, and the students of Harmony Project KC, and has won awards including several Pikes Peak Young Composers Competition awards and first prize in the 2018 Belvedere Chamber Music Festival Composition Contest. *Magic Like Thee* was one of four pieces selected for performance by The Singers from nearly 400 entries to their 2013 call for choral scores. Harbison has collaborated with artists including poet Debra Seely, choreographers Stephanie Whittler and John Swapshire, instrumentalists Perry Mears, Michael Gordon, Sascha Groschang, Lamar Sims, Natalie Brooke Higgins and Eman Chalshotori, and his brother Mark Harbison, who has written texts for several of his choral works, including *panicpanicpanic* and *Adventus*. Their musical *Paul: The Road To Damascus*, with script by Mark and songs and underscore by AJ, was produced by LifeHouse Theater in Redlands, CA in 2015. In 2017-18 Harbison participated in a cross-country collaboration with New York City singer/songwriter Melanie Penn and West Covina (CA) High School's choirs, conducted by Tyler R. Wigglesworth, titled *A Journey of Becoming*. Following the world premiere in California, the first movement was performed in Carnegie Hall in April 2018 as part of Choirs of America's Harmonic Convergence concert. In 2021 Harbison composed *A Long Weight of Silence*, a meditation on the coronavirus pandemic through the lens of the six stages of grief, for Kansas City Symphony Principal Flute Michael Gordon. The Kansas City Symphony premiered his orchestral work *Chameleons* on a family series concert in March 2023, and October 2024 will see the premiere of *The Haunted Pavilion* by the Lee's Summit Symphony.

Harbison is a member of ASCAP, the American Composers Forum, the National Association of Composers/USA, and the Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society. He 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, where he received scholarships for piano performance and composition, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

*Current through December 2024*