the casual thirst of many summers

wet in heat and taken by the sea.

Some places are forever afternoon.

Across the road and a short field

there is the river, split and yellow

and this far down affected by the tide.

(11 Places for Richard Hugo)

Wayne Horvitz

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Eric Eagle

Peggy Lee

Keith Lowe

Ron Miles

Sara Schoenbeck

Tim Young

C & P 2015 Songlines Recordings

SGL 1612-2

SONGLINES

1. Money or a story	(The Milltown Union Bar)	3:34
2. those who remain are the worst	(Three Stops to Ten Sleep)	4:22
3. you drink until you are mayor	(Dixon)	4:44
4. Nothing dies as slowly as a scene	(Death of the Kapowsin Tavern)	3:42
5. all weather is yours no matter how vulgar?	(Fairfield)	5:06
6. the beautiful wives	(Missoula Softball Tournament)	5:55
7. for Jim and Lois Welch	(Cataldo Mission)	2:18
8. in some other home	(The Only Bar in Dixon)	5:17
9. The car that brought you here still runs	(Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg)	10:27
10. last place there	(for Richard Hugo)	3:28
11. You must have stayed hours	(Driving Montana)	4:14
12. Some places are forever afternoon	(West Marginal Way)	4:13
		58:13

Wayne Horvitz
Some Places Are Forever Afternoon

I heard of The Richard Hugo House long before I knew anything about Richard Hugo. The Hugo House presents a variety of literary events in Seattle, and in 2004 I was invited to take a small part in a tribute to the late James Welch. I was very taken by Welch's work, and was inspired to create a song cycle based on his novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*. When it was performed I met a whole circle of people connected to writers of the West, and Montana in particular. Welch was very close to Dick Hugo, as was his widow Lois. Both Lois and the poet Frances McCue have become good friends and invaluable resources. So when a friend casually mentioned doing a project inspired by Richard Hugo's poems, I was intrigued enough to finally read them. After that it didn't take much convincing. They are inherently "musical", and I loved the language, the era, the places.

Hugo is less known today than he was 30 years ago, and he wasn't a household name then. But since this began I continually meet new people who loved his work, who loved him, who had him for a teacher, who can recite their favorite Hugo poem and so on. It's very Western, inspiring, and quite touching. I have only once been reprimanded by a Hugo fan. I knew Hugo fished, and loved to fish in Montana, and I made the erroneous assumption, a la *A River Runs Through It*, that Hugo was a fly fisherman. My new acquaintance firmly corrected me, "Hugo was a bait fisherman!" It's a bygone era of drinking and fishing and writing, and I am old enough to have caught a small glimpse of it, but too young to have really been there.

I knew from the start I would not put the text to music. A relief at first, I soon realized the task was more difficult, not less. When I finally began composing I felt despondent, I was less and less sure the music had anything at all to do with the poems. It was Hugo himself that saved me, his own notion of "triggering", how a town or a river or a friend might start a poem. He carefully admonishes the poet to let go, to not be beholden to what one thinks the poem is, but to let the words lead the way. And so it should be with music, and the music herein is simply something that happened. In a few instances I even wrote the music first and then found the poem that fit it.

I recently drove by myself for two days from Seattle to Wyoming, and I listened again to these recordings. Speeding past the landscape Hugo loved so much, I was puzzled by what I had wrought. In many ways it sounded familiar, like my music. Yet in other ways, ways I couldn't put my finger on, it sounded like nothing I had ever imagined. But of course it's obvious, this would not exist without the poems. I couldn't have done it without him.

I hope you enjoy the music.

Wayne Horvitz
Seattle 2015

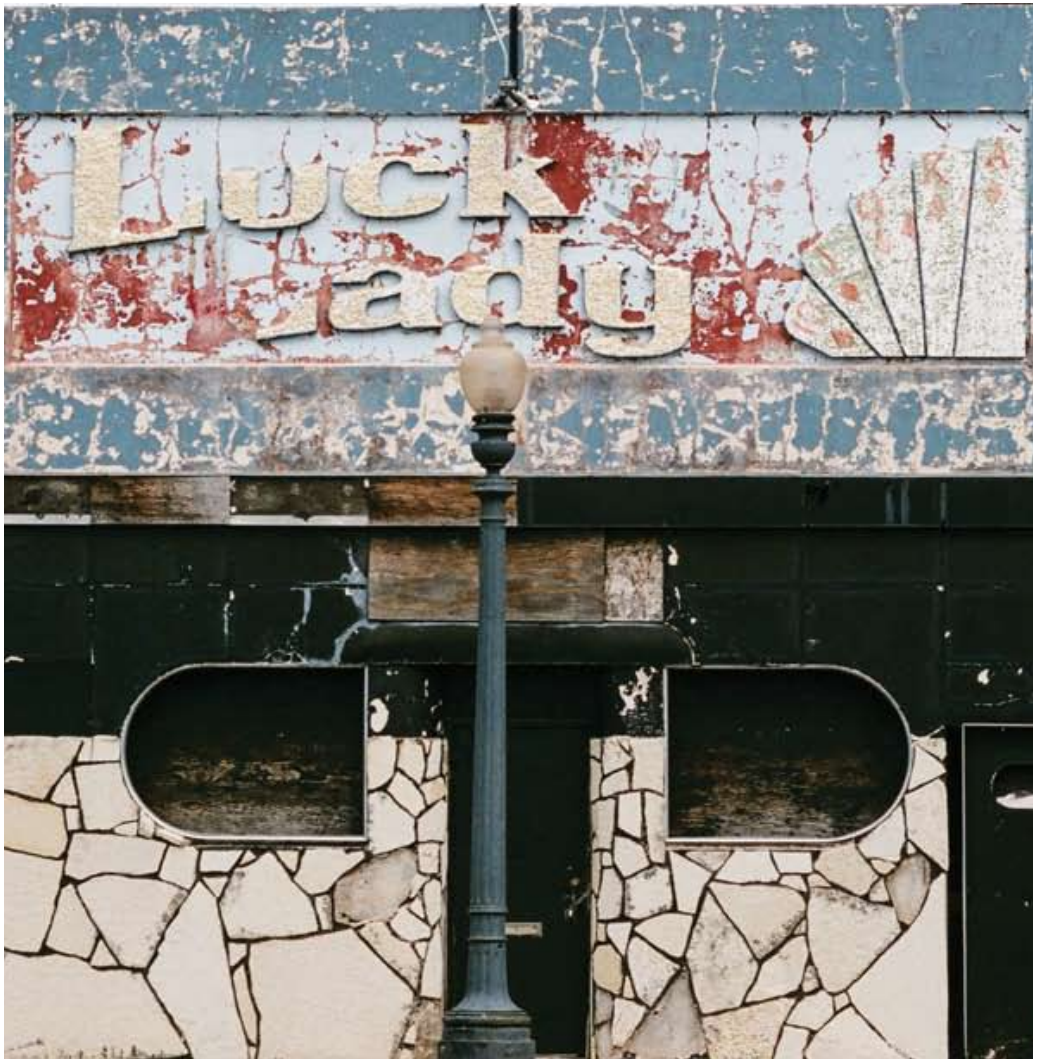
The Milltown Union Bar

for Harold Herndon

(Laundromat & Cafe)
You could love here, not the lovely goat
in plexiglass nor the elk shot
in the middle of a joke, but honest drunks,
crossed swords above the bar, three men hung
in the bad painting, others riding off
on the phony green horizon. The owner,
fresh from orphan wars, loves too
but bad as you. He keeps improving things
but can't cut the bodies down.

You need never leave. Money or a story
brings you booze. The elk is grinning
and the goat says go so tenderly
you hear him through the glass. If you weep
deer heads weep. Sing and the orphanage
announces plans for your release. A train
goes by and ditches jump. You were nothing
going in and now you kiss your hand.

When mills shut down, when the worst drunk
says finally I'm stone, three men still hang
painted badly from a leafless tree, you
one of them, brains tied behind your back,
swinging for your sin. Or you swing
with goats and elk. Doors of orphanages
finally swing out and here you open in.



Three Stops to Ten Sleep

Ho. The horses can water. We are miles
ahead of schedule thanks to cool weather
and a strong wind at our backs. Ahead
are the mountains where we plan to build
our city. Our bank will be solvent. Our church
will serve all faiths. We will pass tough laws
against fragmentation. Anyone threatening
unity will be sent to the plains to wander
forever. The plains have snakes and wolves
and much of the water is poison. Have the women
make dinner. We camp here. Tomorrow
we should be close to the forest, and the next day
we will find our place to live as destined.

Stop. It is farther than it seemed. No doubt
an illusion created by light off high snow.
Then, the wind changed and discouraged
the horses. They don't like wind full in their eyes
all day. I urge you to stop this bickering.
Remember, our city will be founded
on mutual respect. I urge you to accept
this necessary rationing of food.
Above all, remember, every time you frown
the children see it. Several already
have been crying and saying there will be no city.

Wait. The mountains are never closer. What
is this land? We lost too many last night
in the storm and those who remain
are the worst, the ones we hesitated to take
when we started back at the river. You
remember? That town where we first formed?
Those saloons and loose women? Let them grumble.
We are going on. Indians know
the right roots to eat and there's water in cactus.
Even if we fail, wasn't it worth the trip,
leaving that corrupting music behind
and that sin?

Dixon

Light crawls timid over fields
from some vague source behind the hills,
too gray to be the sun. Any morning
brings the same, a test of stamina,
your capacity to live the long day out
paced by the hesitant river. No chance
you might discover someone dead.
Always you curse the limited goods
in the store and your limited money.
You learn to ignore the wind leak
in your shack. On bad days in the bar
you drink until you are mayor.

On neutral days you hope the school
is adequate though you're no father
and your wife left decades back
when the train still ran. You look
hours down the track. Perhaps a freight.
Only the arrogant wind. You think
the browns are running, hitting bait.
You have waited and waited for mail,
a wedding invitation, a postcard
from New York. You reread the book
about red lovers one more time,
pages torn and the cover gone.

On good days festive cars streak by.
You laugh and wave. Sun on blacktop
whirrs like ancient arrows in the sky.
Cattails flash alive the way they did
when lightning told them, die.
You catch the river in its flowing
never flowing frozen glide.
The small clear river jitters on
to join the giant green one lumbering
a definite west, a lake released.
Your heroes go home green. Bison
on the range are reproducing bears.

Death of the Kapowsin Tavern

I can't ridge it back again from char.
Not one board left. Only ash a cat explores
and shattered glass smoked black and strung
about from the explosion I believe
in the reports. The white school up for sale
for years, most homes abandoned to the rocks
of passing boys – the fire, helped by wind
that blew the neon out six years before,
simply ended lots of ending.

A damn shame. Now, when the night chill
of the lake gets in a troller's bones
where can the troller go for bad wine
washed down frantically with beer?
And when wise men are in style again
will one recount the two-mile glide of cranes
from dead pines or the nameless yellow
flowers thriving in the useless logs,
or dots of light all night about the far end
of the lake, the dawn arrival of the idiot
with catfish – most of all, above the lake
the temple and our sanctuary there?

Nothing dies as slowly as a scene.
The dusty jukebox cracking through
the cackle of the beered-up crone –
wagered wine – sudden need to dance –
these remain in the black debris.
Although I know in time the lake will send
wind black enough to blow it all away.

Fairfield

"A guy I used to know – he taught me all about the sky."
Humphrey Bogart in *High Sierra*

I wanted it depressed, one dusty road
and two cafés both with 'help wanted' signs.
Where I ate, the waitress was too in love
with the cook for things I wanted to say.
The canal passed through town ripe green
and grain, I had to admit, grew assured.
A dog slept fat on warm gravel. No trouble foreseen
raising funds to build the new gym.

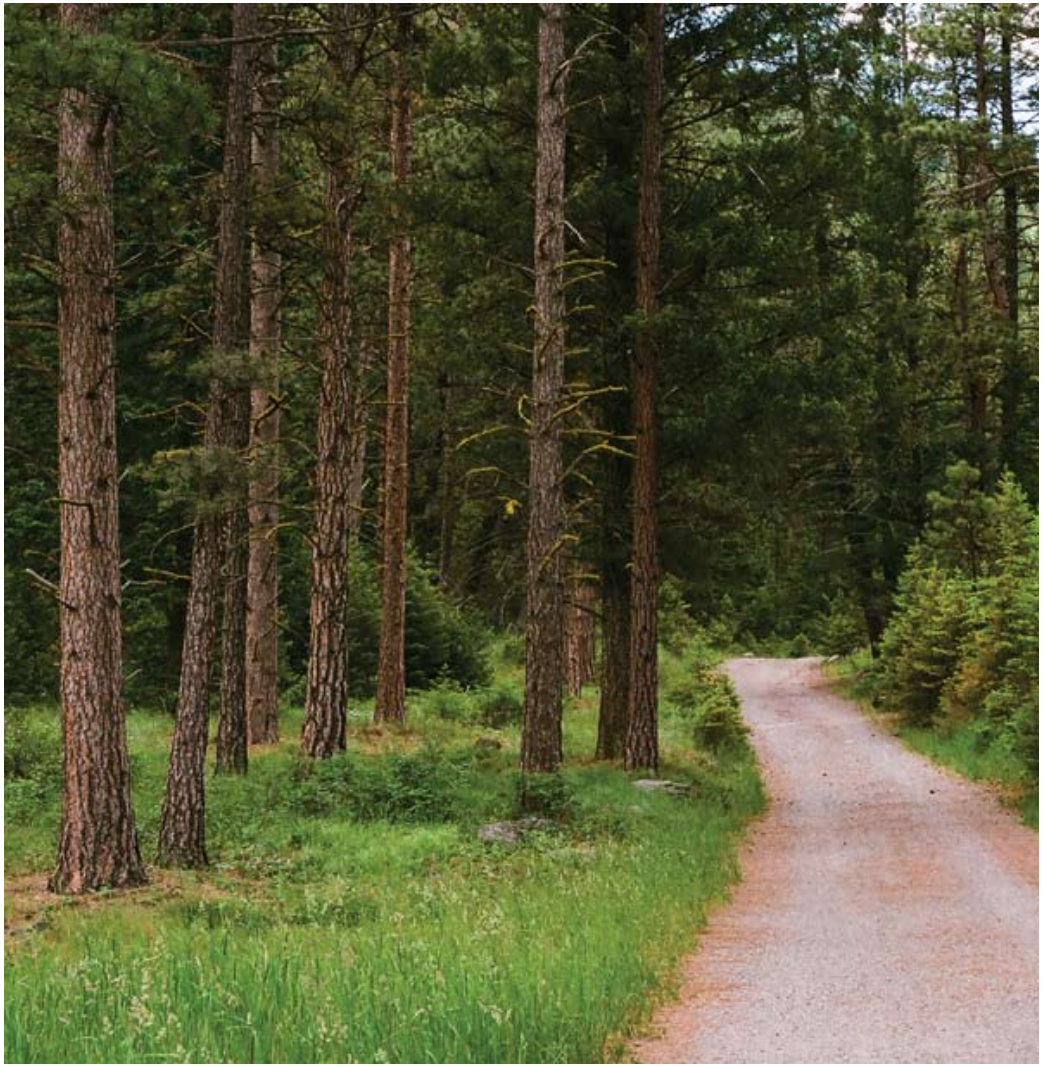
I'd expected hurt, the small town kind everyone
knows and ignores, a boy who tried and tried
to leave home, sobbing his failure alone
at the mirror back of the bar, still wearing
his '39 letter sweater, still claiming
the girl who moved to Great Falls will return.
I wanted to honor him in this poem,
to have the sky turn dark as I drove off
the town in my rear view mirror
huddled with fear white in black air.

The drunk I saw seemed happy. I drove empty away.
What if Fairfield sent signals to Mars
and signals came back saying all weather is yours
no matter how vulgar? I imagined cruel sky
left every bird orphan. When I passed
Freeze Out Lake I saw herons accepted that refuge
as home, and I knew the water was green with sky,
not poisoned green with resolve.

Missoula Softball Tournament

This summer, most friends out of town
and no wind playing flash and dazzle
in the cottonwoods, music of the Clark Fork stale,
I've gone back to the old ways of defeat,
the softball field, familiar dust and thud,
pitcher winging drops and rises, and wives,
the beautiful wives in the stands, basic, used,
screeching runners home, infants unattended
in the dirt. A long triple sails into right center.
Two men on. Shouts from dugout: go, Ron, go.
Life is better run from. Distance to the fence,
both foul lines and dead center, is displayed.

I try to steal the tricky manager's signs.
Is hit-and-run the pulling of the ear?
The ump gives pitchers too much low inside.
Injustice? Fraud? Ancient problems focus
in the heat. Bad hop on routine grounder.
Close play missed by the team you want to win.
Players from the first game, high on beer,
ride players in the field. Their laughter
falls short of the wall. Under lights, the moths
are momentary stars, and wives, the beautiful wives
in the stands now take the interest they once feigned,
oh, long ago, their marriage just begun, years
of helping husbands feel important just begun,
the scrimping, the anger brought home evenings
from degrading jobs. This poem goes out to them.
Is steal-of-home the touching of the heart?
Last pitch. A soft fly. A can of corn
the players say. Routine, like mornings,
like the week. They shake hands on the mound.
Nice grab on that shoot to left. Good game. Good game.
Dust rotates in their headlight beams.
The wives, the beautiful wives are with their men.



INFORMATION CENTER

Cataldo Mission
for Jim and Lois Welch

We come here tourist on a bad sky day,
warm milk at 15,000 and the swamp across
the freeway blinding white. No theory
to explain the lake of saint, torn tapestry.
Pews seem built for pygmies, and a drunk
once damned mosquitoes from the pulpit,
raging red with Bible and imagined plague.
Their spirits buoyed, pioneers left running
for the nothing certain nowhere west.
Somewhere, say where Ritzville is, they would
remember these crass pillars lovely
and a moving sermon they had never heard.

More's bad here than just the sky. The valley
we came in on: Mullan. Wallace. Jokes
about the whores. Kellogg and, without salvation,
Smelterville. A stream so slate with crap
the name pollutes the world. Man will die again
to do this to his soul. And over the next hill
he never crosses, promises: love, grass,
a white cathedral, glandular revival
and a new trout, three tall dorsal fins.

We exit from the mission, blind. The haze
still hangs amplifying glare until
two centuries of immigrants in tears
seem natural as rain. The hex is on.
The freeway covers arrows, and the swamp
a spear with feathers meaning stop.
This dry pale day, cars below crawl thirsty,
500 miles to go before the nation quits.

The Only Bar in Dixon

Home. Home. I know entering.
Green cheap plaster and the stores
across the street toward the river
failed. One Indian depressed
on Thunderbird. Another buying
Thunderbird to go. This air
is fat with gangsters I imagine
on the run. If they ran here
they would be running from
imaginary cars. No one cares
about the wanted posters
in the brand new concrete block P.O.

This is home because some people
go to Perma and come back
from Perma saying Perma
is no fun. To revive, you take 382
to Hot Springs, your life savings
ready for a choice of bars, your hotel
glamorous with neon up the hill.
Is home because the Jocko
dies into the Flathead. Home because
the Flathead goes home north northwest.

I want home full of grim permission.
You can go as out of business here
as rivers or the railroad station.
I knew it entering.
Five bourbons
and I'm in some other home.

Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg

You might come here Sunday on a whim.
Say your life broke down. The last good kiss
you had was years ago. You walk these streets
laid out by the insane, past hotels
that didn't last, bars that did, the tortured try
of local drivers to accelerate their lives.
Only churches are kept up. The jail
turned 70 this year. The only prisoner
is always in, not knowing what he's done.

The principal supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte. One good
restaurant and bars can't wipe the boredom out.
The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
a dance floor built on springs –
all memory resolves itself in gaze,
in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
or two stack high above the town,
two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
for fifty years that won't fall finally down.

Isn't this your life? That ancient kiss
still burning out your eyes? Isn't this defeat
so accurate, the church bell simply seems
a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?
Don't empty houses ring? Are magnesium
and scorn sufficient to support a town,
not just Philipsburg, but towns
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the town you came from dies inside?

Say no to yourself. The old man, twenty
when the jail was built, still laughs
although his lips collapse. Someday soon,
he says, I'll go to sleep and not wake up.
You tell him no. You're talking to yourself.
The car that brought you here still runs.
The money you buy lunch with,
no matter where it's mined, is silver
and the girl who serves your food
is slender and her red hair lights the wall.

Driving Montana

The day is a woman who loves you. Open.
Deer drink close to the road and magpies
spray from your car. Miles from any town
your radio comes in strong, unlikely
Mozart from Belgrade, rock and roll
from Butte. Whatever the next number,
you want to hear it. Never has your Buick
found this forward a gear. Even
the tuna salad in Reedpoint is good.

Towns arrive ahead of imagined schedule.
Absorakee at one. Or arrive so late –
Silesia at nine – you recreate the day.
Where did you stop along the road
and have fun? Was there a runaway horse?
Did you park at that house, the one
alone in a void of grain, white with green
trim and red fence, where you know you lived
once? You remembered the ringing creek,
the soft brown forms of far off bison.
You must have stayed hours, then drove on.
In the motel you know you'd never seen it before.

Tomorrow will open again, the sky wide
as the mouth of a wild girl, friable
clouds you lose yourself to. You are lost
in miles of land without people, without
one fear of being found, in the dash
of rabbits, soar of antelope, swirl
merge and clatter of streams.

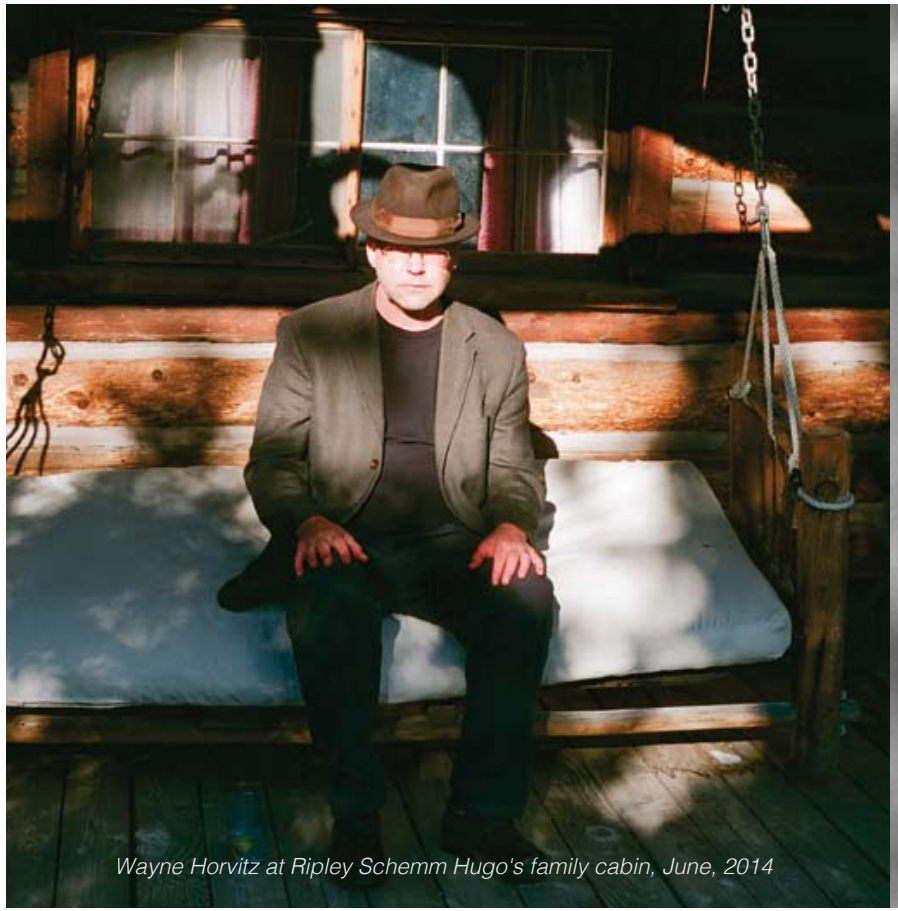
West Marginal Way

One tug pounds to haul an afternoon
of logs up river. The shade
of Pigeon Hill across the bulges
in the concrete crawls on reeds
in a short field, cools a pier
and the violence of young men
after cod. The crackpot chapel,
with a sign erased by rain, returned
before to calm and a mossed roof.

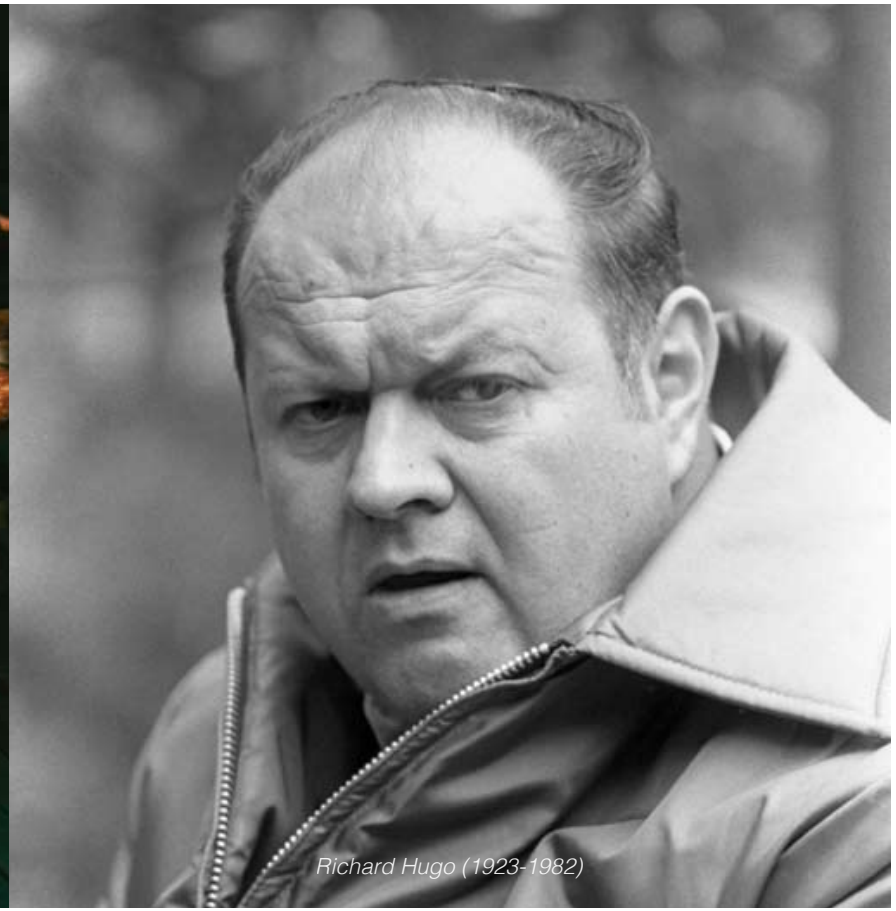
A dim wind blows the roses
growing where they please. Lawns
are wild and lots are undefined
as if the payment made in cash
were counted then and there.

These names on boxes will return
with salmon money in the fall,
come drunk down the cinder arrow
of a trail, past the store of Popich,
sawdust piles and the saw mill
bombing air with optimistic sparks,
blinding gravel pits and the brickyard
baking, to wives who taught themselves
the casual thirst of many summers
wet in heat and taken by the sea.

Some places are forever afternoon.
Across the road and a short field
there is the river, split and yellow
and this far down affected by the tide.



Wayne Horvitz at Ripley Schemm Hugo's family cabin, June, 2014



Richard Hugo (1923-1982)

Some Places Are Forever Afternoon

Wayne Horvitz, piano, Hammond B-3, electronics
Ron Miles, cornet
Sara Schoenbeck, bassoon
Peggy Lee, cello
Tim Young, guitar
Keith Lowe, bass
Eric Eagle, drums

Produced by Wayne Horvitz / Executive Producer: Tony Reif

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