

**PARTCH**

*Plectra & Percussion Dances: An Evening of Dance Theatre*

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May 30 – 31, 2008

8:30 p.m.

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS



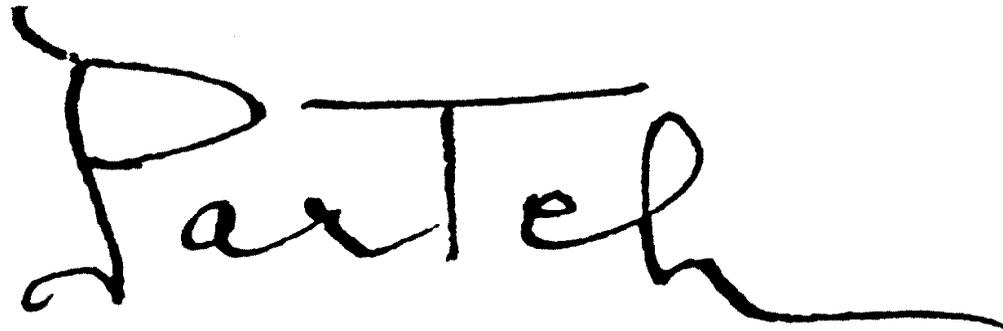
## PARTCH

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#### ***Plectra & Percussion Dances*** (1952)

##### An Evening of Dance Theatre

###### I. *castor & pollux*

~ *A Dance for the Twin Rhythms of Gemini* ~

Castor: *Insemination • Conception • Incubation • Delivery*

Pollux: *Insemination • Conception • Incubation • Delivery*

###### II. *Ring Around the Moon*

~ *A Dance Fantasm for Here and Now* ~

First Phase – “*Ring around the moon...*”

Second Phase – “*One, two, three, four...*”

Third Phase – “*Shake hands now boys...*”

Fourth Phase – “*Mumbo jumbo, hocus pocus...*”

Their CD *Just West Coast* was *CD Reviews* “CD of the Year” in 1994, and was inducted into *Fanfare’s* “Classical Hall of Fame” (2003). Sasha Matson’s *The 5th Lake* was released by New Albion Records; music of Harrison, Partch and others on *Just Guitars* (2003) on Bridge Records, while their latest release, *por Gitaro* (music for guitar and percussion of Lou Harrison) was released on Mode Records in March. Their 2006 performance of *Castor & Pollux*, choreographed by Liz Hoefner, was released on the DVD *Enclosure 8: Harry Partch* (Innova Records). Partch is the resident ensemble of MicroFest, Los Angeles’ yearly festival of microtonal music.

**Rachel Arnold** (Kithara & viola), **Erin Barnes** (Diamond Marimba, Eroica & cymbal), **Paul Berkolds** (voice), **David Johnson** (Cloud Chamber Bowls & Chromelodeon), **Vicki Ray** (Canon & Kithara), **Mike Kudirka** (Canons), **Tom Peters** (Surrogate Sub-bass), **Rebekah Raff** (Canons), **John Schneider** (guitars & Canons), **Nick Terry** (Bowls, Bass Marimba, Eroica & fight bell), **T.J. Troy** (Bass Marimba & voice)

Supertitles: Bill Alves

*As always, our gratitude to the artisans who have helped recreate Partch’s instruments: Skip Abelson (Diamond & Bass Marimbas, Cloud Chamber Bowls), Kent Arnold (Chromelodeon), Greg Brandt (Adapted Guitars), Scott Hackleman (Kithara, Harmonic Canons), Robert Portillo (Adapted Viola & Chromelodeon)*

#### UPCOMING COMING EVENTS

**June 6 -7:** Dance Camera West

**June 14 - 15:** Toy Theater Festival (For Adults)

**July 17 - August 2:** New Original Works Festival 2008

For more information visit: [www.redcat.org](http://www.redcat.org)



is a unique ensemble that specializes in the music & instruments of the iconoclastic American Maverick composer Harry Partch who, between 1930 and 1972, created one of the most amazing bodies of sensually alluring and emotionally powerful music of the 20th century. Partch wrote music drama, dance theater, multi-media extravaganzas, vocal music and chamber music—all to be performed on the extraordinary orchestra of instruments that he designed and built himself.

Since their formation as Just Strings in 1991 to perform the music of Lou Harrison and Harry Partch, the group has gone on to commission and premiere works by Larry Polansky, Mamoru Fujieda, John Luther Adams, Mari Takano, Sasha Bogdonawitsch and others. In 1995 they toured Japan under the auspices of the American Embassy's prestigious Interlink Festival, giving three weeks of concerts and lectures on new music. In 2005, with the completion of their twelfth Partch instrument, the group began performing under the name Partch. They have performed for Chamber Music in Historic Sites, the LA County Museum of Art, UCLA's Partch Centennial Celebration, Sacramento's Festival of New American Music, Minnesota Public Radio's *American Mavericks*, the *Songlines* series at Mills College, and the Gordon Getty Concerts at the Getty Center. In 2004, they made their Disney Hall REDCAT debut premiering Harry Partch's *Bitter Music*, and have returned every year since.

In 2007, Partch performed in Albuquerque (36th Annual Composer's Symposium), Santa Cruz (April in Santa Cruz Festival of New Music), Oakland (Mills College Partch Dances premiering Molissa Fenley's new choreography of *Castor & Pollux*), REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater, their annual multimedia survey of Partch's music), LA's outdoor festival Grand Performances, and were awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Copland Fund for Music to record Partch's monumental *Bitter Music* for Bridge Records. This fall, they will be presented by the Carlsbad Music Festival (September 28) and by Jacaranda in the inaugural season of the Broad Stage in Santa Monica (October 17).

### III. even wild horses

~ Dance Music for an Absent Drama ~

#### Act I

scene 1 • A Decent and Honorable Mistake • *Samba*

scene 2 • Rhythm of the Womb, Melody of the Grave • *Heartbeat Rhythm*

scene 3 • Happy Birthday to You! • *Afro-Chinese Minuet*

#### Act II\*

scene 1 • "Nor These Lips Upon Your Eyes" • *Rumba*

scene 2 • "Hunger, Thirst, Shout, Dance!" • *Nañiga*

scene 3 • "Land of Darkness and of Whirlwinds" • *Slow, Fast, Wild!*

#### Act III\*

scene 1 • "Had I Not Once a Lovely Youth?" • *Conga*

scene 2 • "Let Us Contemplate Undazed the Endless Reaches of My Innocence" • *Tahitian Dance*

\* texts from Arthur Rimbaud: *A Season in Hell* (trans. Louise Varèse)

### PROGRAM NOTES

Although foreshadowed by the dance sequences of King Oedipus, the ***Plectra & Percussion Dances*** are the first of Partch's major works to be wholly instrumental in conception. They stand in relation to Oedipus as a satyr play in relation to a Greek tragedy—hence the work's subtitle, "Satyr-Play Music for Dance Theater." He felt that after the prolonged period of composition and production of Oedipus it was "almost a necessity to give vent to feelings and ideas, whims and caprices, even nonsense, that seem to have no place in tragedy." Like Oedipus itself, ***Castor & Pollux*** draws on an ancient Greek source, but this time one with

an optimistic tone: Castor and Pollux are the twin stars of good luck. On the jacket of the original record release of the *Plectra & Percussion Dances* in 1953, Partch wrote of the work: “Begins with the always-ready Zeus—as the fertilizing male swan—and his encounter with the beautiful Leda, continues with the laying of two eggs as the result of this happy visit, and ends with the eggs hatching. Each twin begins with pairs of instruments, for the various paired creative processes, which eventually combine to accomplish the triumphant delivery from the respective egg. Each has exactly 234 beats. The undeviating beat indicates a situation, of course, where all the right heavenly houses are in conjunction, where—by divine edict—misfortune is impossible. A reverse Oedipus.”

***Ring Around the Moon*** is, by any standards, one of the oddest compositions in Partch’s output. A reworking of a rejected instrumental piece called *Sonata Dementia* (premiered at REDCAT in 2006), it is loosely slung together in four “phases” lasting a total of nine minutes. The piece seems willing to gamble any claim to coherence on the chance of unleashing, before an unsuspecting audience, an outrageous satire with one of the most superbly inane texts ever devised for a “concert” work. Indeed, it is hard not to laugh out loud at the singer’s farcically irrelevant contribution to the proceedings: He injects, at sporadic intervals, a succession of nonsense phrases, all to be delivered with precise timing and delicate expressive control. In the notes for the original recording Partch describes *Ring Around the Moon* as follows: “A satire on the world of singers and singing, music and dance; on concerts and concert audiences, where the occasional perception of an understandable American word is an odd kind of shock. Also a satire on the world in general, on whimsy and caprice, on music in 43 tones to the octave, on people who conceive such things, on grand flourishes that lead to nothing, on satyrs, or on nothing.”

Musically speaking, while hardly one of his more “important” works, *Ring Around the Moon* has a refreshingly alert feel: a willingness to take risks, to explore new ensemble sonorities without worrying about their ultimate persuasiveness. The music is laced with Partch’s idiosyncratic humor, from the amusingly meandering, densely microtonal chord sequence for the Chromelodeon at the beginning, to

the wonderfully melodramatic ending when the voice, accompanied only by glissandi on Adapted Guitar II, declares (and for no apparent reason): “Look out! He’s got a gun!”

The conception of ***Even Wild Horses*** is a treatment of the poet Arthur Rimbaud’s exile in Africa, forging a striking link between fragments from *A Season in Hell* and the rhythms of Afro-American and Latin American popular music. While bemoaning the fact that “the African sense of rhythmic subtlety has degenerated, in the course of its evolution from tribal ceremony to Cuban ritual to Hollywood nightclub,” Partch recognized that, paradoxically, it was in these supposedly bastardized forms that the rhythmic motivations for the piece had presented themselves to him. In his treatment, “the samba, the nañiga, the conga, are metamorphosed, developed into something different from their starting moods ... and all become infused with an altered character as they move toward the child-like and explosive words of Rimbaud.”

In his liner notes for the second edition of the *Plectra and Percussion Dances* record in 1957, Partch wrote: “Music and dance enter the consciousness through the gate of illusion, lost recollections, and dimly seen prophetic projections. This music might be considered as autobiographical by almost anyone, in darkly humorous moments. His beginning is a decent and honorable mistake, and long before his life has run its course he is obliged to contemplate—both dazed and undazed—the endless reaches of his innocence.”

—Bob Gilmore (author of *Harry Partch: A Biography*, Yale University Press, 1998)

*Tonight’s performance is the first time this music has been heard in its entirety since its 1953 premiere at Berkeley’s International House (broadcast on Pacifica Radio’s KPFA) and the two Sausalito house concerts which immediately followed. It has yet to be presented as originally conceived: “... a synthesis of music with the other arts: with dramatic dancing, with lights, with costumes, with stage sculpture ... This music very, very aggressively demands cooperation with other arts in order to achieve fulfillment—very aggressively.”*