

Parteh

JUNE 2-3, 2010 | 8:30 PM

presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS



Partch

Even Wild Horses

<i>Cloud Chamber Music</i> (1950).....	Harry Partch (1901 - 1974)
<i>Canticle #3</i> (1942).....	Lou Harrison (1917 - 2003)
<i>Rotate the Body in All Its Planes—Ballad for Gymnasts</i> (1961) [film - dir. Madeline Tourtelot]	
intermission	
<i>Southern Ephemera</i> (1993).....	Anne LeBaron (1953 -)
<i>Even Wild Horses</i> (1952).....	Harry Partch

- 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!” • *Naniga*
- 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”
• *Tabitian Dance* •

* Rimbaud - *A Season in Hell* (trans. Louise Varese)

Harry Partch was notorious for injecting vernacular speech into such Americana works such as *Barstow, US Highball* and *Bitter Music*. He protested loudly and often that music and its instruments should follow speech, and not the other way around. But he was also inspired by vernacular music, such as the ancient chant of the Isleta tribe from his native New Mexico which he transcribed here in Los Angeles in 1933 at the Southwest Museum. In fact, all of this evening’s music is inspired by vernacular music of one type or another – from Lou Harrison’s imagined pre-Columbian ocarina melodies to Anne LeBaron’s quotes of folk songs from America’s rural South. Partch’s transformation of music for marching band (*Rotate the Body*) or

the rhythms of Latin American and Afro-American dance music (*Even Wild Horses*) from the nightclubs of the 1950s predate such now familiar postmodern techniques by decades.

Cloud-Chamber Music opens with a sonorous carillon on four Cloud-Chamber Bowls, their distinctive bell-like tones yielding to a mournful microtonal lament on Adapted Viola and Adapted Guitar. Following this, in a faster tempo, the Viola introduces the melody of “Canción de los Muchachos” of the Isleta tribe of New Mexico. This is then sung by all the musicians, accompanying themselves on their instruments, except the Kithara, whose player takes up a Native American deer-hoof rattle. This ritual provokes another outburst on the Cloud-Chamber Bowls. Ben Johnston has suggested a scenario implicit in this sequence of musical events: “Cloud-Chamber Music,” he writes, “begins as a depressed reaction to a false clarion, but then seizes American Indian incentives as a reinvigorating antidote.”

During the time during which I composed my Canticle # 3 I was intensely interested in the history of Mexico, in all its elaborately beautiful arts. I had long since heard and treasured the wonderful recordings by the great composer Carlos Chávez of his reconstructions of possible pre-Columbian music, replete with whistles, tongue-drums and the grandeur of blown conchshells. I had also composed a piece for percussion ensemble which I hoped might accompany a photographic study of the Quetzalcoatl codex. The latter dream has never come true. The ocarina in this Canticle is intended to remind of ancient things, of Mexican pyramids and frieze carvings, while the shamelessly strummed guitar suggests a later, Hispanic mode.

The musical texture is composed of a number of small rhythmic and melodic lines woven together (so to speak) into a form which is roughly a-b-a in shape. As the piece gained power and intensity it occurred to me that the climax would be a contrast between full silences and full sounds, thus the interruptions in the center. The ending suggests a kind of procession moving off into the high distance.’ – Lou Harrison

Early in 1961, while Partch was rehearsing *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*, Charles Pond, the University’s gymnastics coach, came over to see how this odd opera was putting his athletes to use. Pond was very taken with the sequence, which is called “Tumble On”. As it happened, the U. of Illinois was slated to host the NCAA’s National Collegiate Gymnastics Championship Meet in April of that year. Pond asked Partch if it would be possible to perform the scene “with added music” at the championship. Partch went to the gym, timed some of the actions of tumblers and trampolinists with his stopwatch, and composed the new parts of the score.

Rotate the Body had its first performance at the NCAA Championships, at Huff Gymnasium in Urbana, on April 8, 1961. It used a large assortment of the Partch instruments, which made a striking visual impression in the spacious surroundings of the gym, among all the gymnastics apparatus. It also required a brass band, making future performances unlikely outside of situations where *Revelation* is being performed. Partch’s friend Madeleine Tourtelot, a filmmaker who had previously collaborated with him, filmed the performance, which was shown to high acclaim at the 1961 Edinburgh Festival, and the following year in New York and Czechoslovakia.

Gymnastics, in ancient times, grew with the arts of music, dance, and drama, in rituals, festivals, and fairs. This situation prevailed even into the Middle Ages, and still prevails among peoples generally, outside the West. The Greek word gymnasium implied a center for the development of both physical and mental disciplines, a place for acquiring understanding through philosophical discussion. In this modern era of specialization gymnastics have largely been confined to the modern gymnasium, implying only physical competition, and creative music has generally been confined to the modern concert hall, implying—more and more frequently—remote and intellectual art. The present idea tends to fill a mutual need: the need of music to rediscover a creative meaning in the daily activities and the common rituals of our lives; the need of gymnastics to rediscover a rightful place in music, dance, and drama—in shows and extravaganzas. – HP

Southern Ephemera evokes the fleeting, fragmented, elusive perfume of memory. Imagine lying on barely damp grass at dusk, the balmy night sky awakening with stars near and far... I’m grateful to **Newband** for commissioning, premiering, and touring *Southern Ephemera*, and to John Schneider & Partch for bringing it to the West Coast. An arrangement for standard orchestra also exists: *Southern Ephemera for Orchestra* – Anne LeBaron

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 & 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.”



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 Bogdanowitsch 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.

Their 2006 performance of *Castor & Pollux*, choreographed by Liz Hoefner, was released on the DVD *Enclosure 8: Harry Partch* (Innova Records). 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*), Disney Hall (their annual REDCAT 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. Their 2008 season included the world re-premiere of Partch’s hour long *Plectra & Percussion Dances* (1952), a week-long residency at Salt Lake City’s RDT (Repertory Dance Theater, and performing opening week at the exciting new Broad Stage for critically acclaimed Jacaranda music series. In 2009, Partch gave the LA premiere of the composer’s *11 Intrusions*, and traveled to Mexico on a NEA sponsored exchange with the Guadalajara International Book Fair. On June 29th, Partch will celebrate the opening of LACMA’s **Pure Beauty** retrospective of John Baldessari’s work with the world premiere of a new work commissioned for the occasion.

Erin Barnes (Diamond Marimba, Eroica & cymbal), **T.J. Troy** (Bass Marimba), **Paul Berkolds** (voice), **Shirley Hunt** (Adapted Viola), **David Johnson** (Cloud Chamber Bowls & Chromelodeon), **Mike Kudirka** (Canons), **John Schneider** (Guitars & Canons), **Derek Stein** (Cello), **Nick Terry** (Bowls, Bass Marimba, Eroica), **Janice Tipton** (flute, ocarina), **Paul West** (Kitharas), **Matt Cook** (HypoBass, Woodblock, Marimbas)

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