

Parteh

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presented by

REDCAT

Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater

California Institute of the Arts

CaLARTS



Partch

at the Edge of the World

Castor & Pollux

Castor: Leda and the Swan (1952)

1. Insemination: Kithara + Cloud Chamber Bowls
2. Conception: Harmonic Canon + Bass Marimba (Hi)
3. Incubation: Diamond Marimba + Bass Marimba (Lo)
4. Delivery: All Instruments

Pollux: Leda and the Swan

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Li Po Lyrics [excerpts] (1933)

A Midnight Farewell
An Encounter in the Field
The Night of Sorrow
The Long Departed Lover
The Intruder
On The City Street
baritone/Adapted Viola

Music Studio—Harry Partch (1958, 18 min)

film by Madelaine Tourtelot

intermission

from **SUMMER 1955**

Ulysses Departs from the Edge of the World

-A Minor Adventure in Rhythm- (1955)

Boobams, Bb trumpet, string bass

Two Settings from Lewis Carroll (1954)

1. The Mock Turtle Song
2. O Frabjous Day

"Potion Scene" (1931) *from Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet*

voice, Adapted Viola

Barstow: Eight Hitchhiker's Inscriptions (1941/3)

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|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Today I Am a Man | 5. Possible Rides |
| 2. Gentlemen | 6. Jesus Was God in the Flesh |
| 3. Considered Pretty | 7. You Lucky Women |
| 4. A very Good Idea | 8. Why in Hell did you Come? |

Voices / Adapted Guitar / Chromelodeon / Diamond Marimba

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Josh Aguiar (Trumpet), **Erin Barnes** (Diamond Marimba, Spoils of War), **Matt Cook** (Boobams, Bass Marimba), **David Johnson** (Cloud Chamber Bowls, Chromelodeon), **Michael Kudirka** (Kithara), **Andrew McIntosh** (Viola), **Barry Newton** (Bass), **John Schneider** (Guitar, Viola, Canon), **Tara Schwab** (Kithara), **T.J. Troy** (Boobams, Bass Marimba), **Argenta Walther** (Voice)

with special guest

Emil Richards (Boobams), *who worked with Harry Partch from 1963–1974*

Notes

For those who have only come to know the work of Harry Partch through his ultimate masterpiece *Delusion of the Fury*, where only a few sentences are uttered in over an hour of exquisite dance, drama and music, it may come as a great surprise to learn that in the beginning of his musical life, he was obsessed with the natural utterances and contours of the single, human voice. From his earliest acknowledged works, which set the highly personal texts of the medieval Chinese poet Li Po, Partch used microtonal melody to mimic the gliding curves of human speech. All else flowed from that basic truth: that, and the fresh harmonies created by the scales he created with knowledge gleaned from basic acoustics via Helmholtz, received truths of ancient Greek music, and his highly artistic intuition. Manifesting this vision first meant adapting existing musical instruments (viola, guitar, harmonium) to play his *Monophonic Fabric*, but eventually Partch was famously “Seduced into musical carpentry.” The introduction of percussion instruments to his orchestra of adapted instruments, coupled with his setting of *King Oedipus* (1951) set Partch in a new direction. Eventually, he created six major stage works as well as hours of exquisite chamber music, several films, and over two dozen instruments.

Like so many of Partch’s works, ***Castor & Pollux: A Dance for the Twin Rhythms of Gemini*** 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 and Percussion Dances* in 1953, Partch wrote that 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.” The divine coupling of Zeus and Leda is mimicked by a parallel coupling of instruments, a compositional technique that the composer called ‘multiple exposure’. Each movement features three successive two-minute duets which then culminate in a sextet in which *each* of the previous duets are played simultaneously. The resultant riotous polyphony is like no other music—and has been choreographed by Mark Morris, Virginia Storie, Elizabeth Waters and most recently Liz Hoefner (Innova DVD *Enclosure 8*).

His first acknowledged compositions, Partch described his ***17 Lyrics of Li Po*** (1933) as ‘tone declamations’ rather than ‘songs’, often intoning excerpts from the cycle while accompanying himself on his newly created Adapted Viola. While the texts of the celebrated medieval Chinese poet (701–762 A.D.) explore the political and social life of the Tang Dynasty, from the thrills of young love to the disappointments of exile and old age, these brief excerpts trace the amatory exploits of a dashing young horseman. We are soon reminded that heartbreak and solitude are not modern inventions...

Though Partch’s collaborations were few and far between, perhaps the most productive relationship was with the independent filmmaker Madeline Tourtelout, with whom he produced six films. While Partch was recording the final soundtrack for *Windsong*, the filmmaker decided to document the process. In the resulting ***Music Studio—Harry Partch***, we meet the composer, his Chicago apartment, his instruments and the charmingly antique Berlant tape recorder that was the tool of classical music’s first inveterate overdubber.

The compositions gathered in ***Summer 1955: “A Collection of Small Compositions Written or Rewritten in Summer 1955”*** were created just before Partch left his storied Gate 5 studio in Sausalito for a residency in Champaign-Urbana. One of Partch’s Sausalito houseboat neighbors was percussionist Bill Loughborough, who not only helped him build the Marimba Eroica, but also created Boobams (“bamboo spelled sideways...”), which Bill used to accompany Chet Baker on a few gigs, including the Today Show. Partch wrote ***Ulysses Departs from the Edge of the World*** for Chet Baker, David “Buckwheat” Wheat on bass and a set of Boobams, though the jazz great never found time to play it. The Boobams inspired a Partch instrument, the 64-key Boo, and the piece was re-orchestrated several times using this delightful new instrument.

A program for the Young People’s Concert Series of the Mill Valley Outdoor Art Club inspired the composition “Oh Frabjous Day”, a setting of the famed nonsense rhyme “The Jabberwock” from *Alice in Wonderland*. A few months later, Partch composed a companion piece “The Mock Turtle Song” festooning his HypoBass with seven tuned brass artillery shell casings, thus transforming it into the *Spoils of War*.

Partch first set the contours of Juliet’s famous soliloquy in 1931, as spoken by his first collaborator, the San Francisco soprano Rudolphine Radil, who was not only a pupil of Mahler, but also the first to sing Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* in America. The ***Potion Scene*** was premiered at Henry Cowell’s New Music Society in San Francisco, and was often performed along with the *Two Psalms* and several *Li Po Lyrics* in the many small demonstrations that Partch and

Radil gave to introduce this new style of musical composition to the world. Though the composer re-orchestrated the work in 1955 for three voices and five instruments, this first version starkly depicts the loneliness and horrors faced in Tybalt's tomb.

Partch's legendary 1969 Columbia recording of **Barstow** imprinted the work in the imaginations of a generation, and like *US Highball* it also underwent numerous orchestrations from 1941 to 1968. Actual hitchhiker graffiti is set to music, telling the tale of eight wanderers—some funny, some sad, but always engaging when seen through the lens of Partch's re-telling. Tonight's performances marries the 1942 voice/guitar/Chromelodeon version with the infectious Diamond Marimba ritornello from 1968.

A handwritten signature of Harry Partch in black ink, written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The name 'Partch' is clearly legible.

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 L.A. 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 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 (their annual multimedia survey of Partch's music), L.A.'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), residencies at Salt Lake City's RDT (Repertory Dance Theater), the Carlsbad Festival, and performing opening week at the exciting new Broad Stage for the critically acclaimed Jacaranda music series. In 2009, Partch gave the L.A. premiere of the composer's *11 Intrusions*, and traveled to Mexico on a NEA-sponsored cultural exchange along with four other performing organizations to represent Los Angeles at the Guadalajara International Book Fair. 2010 included a new work for the instruments by Victoria Bond, commissioned by LACMA for their John Baldessari *Pure Beauty* exhibition.

Partch's CD *Just West Coast* was *CD Reviews* "CD of the Year" in 1994, and was inducted into *Fanfare's* "Classical Hall of Fame" (2003), while their recording of two of Partch's early song cycles is found on Bridge Records' *Just Guitars* (2003). Their 2006 REDCAT 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. Their three-disc NEA-funded recording of Partch's *Bitter Music* (1940) will be released by Bridge Records in Fall 2011.

As always, our gratitude to the L.A. artisans who have helped recreate Partch's instruments: Skip Abelson (Marimbas, Cloud Chamber Bowls & Spoils of War), Kent Arnold (Chromelodeon), Greg Brandt (Adapted Guitar), Scott Hackleman (Kithara, Surrogate Kithara and Harmonic Canon), Robert Portillo (Adapted Viola) & Chris Banta (Spoils of War)