

Harry Patch



1942

LIVE at Eastman

1942 was a pivotal year for Harry Partch. After more than a decade of obscure but steadfast devotion to his unique musical vision, his bold move from the idyllic isolation of California's Big Sur to the busy streets of Chicago brought him new recognition, putting him before a series of audiences across the Northeast. Those performances were the springboard that soon catapulted him onto the stage of Carnegie Hall, the pages of the *New York Times*, and eventually secured his place in the pantheon of great 20th Century composers. Luckily, one presentation of his radically new "Speech Music" was recorded at the Eastman School of Music. These long lost direct-to-disc recordings reveal not only a charismatic lecturer but also a powerful performer, able to transform his arcane theories into captivating music. These are the earliest recordings of this unforgettable repertoire—including Partch's only solo recording of his famed hitchhiker saga *Barstow*—captured in stunningly intimate detail.

DEMONSTRATION

- 1 *Introduction: True vs. Tempered, intervals & triads* (9:10)
- 2 *Scales* (2:15)
- 3 *Progressions Within One Octave* (4:26)

SPEECH MUSIC

- 4 *Setting texts* (7:13)
- 5 ***The Lord is My Shepherd*** [1941] (*Psalms* 23) ~ Voice & Chromolodian (2:46)

Seven Lyrics of Li Po [1933] ~ Voice & Adapted Viola

- 6 *Intro* (2:32)
- 7 *A Dream* (5:02)
- 8 *On the City Street* (0:31)
- 9 *An Encounter in the Field* (0:44)
- 10 *The Night of Sorrow* (1:37)
- 11 *With a Man of Leisure* (1:14)
- 12 *A Midnight Farewell* (1:20)
- 13 *Intro* (0:48)
- 14 *I am a Peach Tree* (2:33)

Barstow: Eight Hitchhikers' Inscriptions [1941]

Voice & Adapted Guitar 15 *Intro* (3:18) 16 *Barstow* (9:08)



**EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
RECORDING**

COMPOSER Harry Partch

TITLE Kilbourn Hall Lecture

DATE 11/3/42

PART

1

98.1

MAX. PRESSURE ON
NEEDLE POINT 3 OZ.

THIS RECORD NOT TO BE USED COMMERCIALY

Harry Patch



1942

Kilbourn Hall, Eastman School of Music
November 3, 1942



I am first and last a composer. I have been provoked into becoming a musical theorist, an instrument builder, a musical apostate, and a musical idealist, simply because I have been a demanding composer.

I hold no wish for the obsolescence of the present widely heard instruments and music. My devotion to our musical heritage is great - and critical. I feel that more ferment is necessary to a healthy musical culture. I am endeavoring to instil more ferment.

“Plans for Work”
Guggenheim Application
September, 1942

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He also couldn't know that in a year's time, he would find himself on stage at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, performing his music for a rapt audience of music students and—most importantly for us—a microphone. Nor could he possibly predict that 1942 was to be one of the most pivotal years of his life.

Hitchhiking and riding the rails all the way from California must have been quite a challenge for Partch, since getting 'galvanized' for this cross-country trip entailed putting his newly finished Kithara and the Chromatic Organ console in storage in Carmel. But that also meant that he was travelling with both his Adapted Guitar & Adapted Viola, as well as carrying the reeds from his failed experimental organ "The Ptolemy" along with whatever music and clothing he brought with him.

When he finally reached Chicago, Partch contacted the divinity student's friend, finding a place to stay as well as introductions to the new music scene. In just seven weeks time, Partch was presenting his work at Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus School of Design on Ontario Street, sharing the evening with another young Californian who was also a recent arrival. John Cage had been hired to teach a "Sound Experiments" course in the Fall of 1941, and Partch's performance culminated an evening of new music offerings to celebrate the opening of National Art Week:

School of Design in Chicago 247 E. Ontario St. L. Moholy-Nagy, Director

cordially invites you to the opening of its

Nov. 18
8:00 p.m.

- 1** National Art Week exhibition of faculty and students
- 2** History of the motion picture, an exhibition assembled by the Museum of Modern Art in New York
- 3** Improvisation by the Class in Sound Experiments conducted by John Cage
- 4** Recordings of percussion compositions by John Cage, Lou Harrison, William Russell
- 5** Tone declamations by Harry Partch using the 43 tone scale
 (a) Chinese Poem (b) Hitch-hikers Ballad

Dec. 1
8:00 p.m.

Symposium on Lettering
 Participating: Raymond Da Ball, Ernest F. Detterer, Hubert Leckie, R. H. Middleton, L. Moholy-Nagy

Concert Announcement (from Partch's scrapbook)

Presenting a Resume of

The Music Philosophy and Work of Harry Partch
Composer - Instrument Builder and Player - Theorist

A Modern Renaissance of
the most ancient of civil-
ized Musical Ideals -

SPEECH-MUSIC

In a Flexible Scale

Utilizing new instruments having a
gamut of 43 true tones to the octave.

-0-

INTRODUCTORY

Harry Partch's musical philosophy has evolved through nineteen years of lonely searching. It was conceived by an inner need, cultivated through study in American public libraries and in the British and South Kensington Museums in London. It grew through constant experiments in tonal relationships, in the alteration of old instruments, and in the building of new instruments. It found human bedrock around hobo jungle fires and cross-country freights. And, finally, it gained some measure of rapport in other searchers after musical truths, and in that prophet of ancient souls, William Butler Yeats.

Partch does not claim priority for his musical system, his instruments, or his manner of musical composition. But he believes in it as a new beginning, a renaissance, that may stimulate a re-examination of materials and forms generally accepted without question.

stances. He moved often, endured chronic health problems, while his only source of employment during the Chicago tenure was menial labor because, as he wrote to Luening, "I am ill equipped for, and ill adjusted to, this factory-office building civilization - the only work I can land, apparently, is that which no one but an itinerant would contemplate." This often meant washing dishes ten hours a day for a meal and \$2.50. At one point, surely remembering his 3-week service on an inter-coastal oil tanker back in January of 1930, he even re-joined the Merchant Marine as an "Ordinary Seaman" and qualified for duties in the Engine Department as a Coal Passer & Wiper,



though he didn't stick around long enough to get an assignment. In early July, he wrote to Luening,

My musical work has been in complete abeyance since my trip east in April. And for just one reason: a precarious means of existence. I have had two dishwashing jobs in Chicago restaurants in the past two months and I have occasionally been aided by friends who can ill afford the luxury of a penniless composer... Day after tomorrow I am taking a blanket and going north to try to participate in the fruit and grains harvests.

If this system were well known, I wouldn't consider these worth playing because they're just experiments. But since it isn't known, they afford a little vision into a new world of musical resources—hardly more than a glimpse through a keyhole.

before commencing three full minutes of astounding harmonic sequences that even today are capable of jarring the most seasoned Modernist sensibilities. The view through that keyhole also turned out to be a peek into the future, as this music would soon become the opening of his *Sonata Dementia* (1949), exquisitely orchestrated with the addition of six newly built instruments:

PROGRESSIONS WITHIN ONE OCTAVE

G to G

Chemo.

(square brackets added in pencil)

Reduced letters in red pencil

What he doesn't say, however, is that he also adapted the bridge. A standard viola bridge has a curved top, allowing the performer to play on each string individually or, if needed, two strings simultaneously, a technique known as 'double stops.' Yearning to play 3-note chords, Partch invented a new flattened bridge that would allow triple stops by filing down that part of the curve that supported the A-string, so that it was on the same plane as the 1st and 3rd strings:



What was lost, of course, was the ability to solo on the second string, so he also created a small white 'tooth,' a kind of miniature crutch (now lost) that slid underneath the lowered string, bringing it up to its original position when needed. Seven of the *17 Lyrics of Li Po* (1933) use the flattened bridge—as described in the original title page—including the last three performed at Eastman:

17 Lyrics of Li Po

as translated by Shigeyoshi Obata

A Scene from Shakespeare
and
Two Psalms

Set to Monophonic Music
—To Be Spoken on Tones—

With musical completion by Adapted Viola (Monophone)

Li Po Nos. 11 to 17, inclusive, and Shakespeare for viola
with bridge flattened under 1st string to
make three higher strings
playable at once.

So that knocking sound was surely the act of moving the bridge into place, perhaps after the reinsertion of the ‘tooth,’ a ritual that we will hear repeated later in the recital.

Once the rather detailed verbal introduction to the first selection was over, Partch apologetically goes off stage for a drink of water, and the recording engineer switched to a new disc to prepare for the next set of music. When the new recording begins, there is a faint echo of the bridge being moved again, followed by 45 seconds of tuning, focusing first on that mobile A-string. He then launches into the first of seven *Lyrics*, the most dramatically virtuosic & hallucinatory of the set:





THE · WORKS · OF
LI · PO
THE · CHINESE · POET
DONE · INTO · ENGLISH · VERSE · BY
SHIGEYOSHI · OBATA

WITH · AN · INTRODUCTION · AND · BIOGRAPHICAL
AND · CRITICAL · MATTER · TRANSLATED · FROM
THE · CHINESE



E · P · DUTTON · & · CO
NEW · YORK · CITY



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69. I AM A PEACH TREE

I am a peach tree blossoming in a deep pit.
Who is there I may turn to and smile?
You are the moon up in the far sky;
Passing, you looked down on me an hour; then went
on forever.

A sword with the keenest edge,
Could not cut the stream of water in twain
So that it would cease to flow.
My thought is like the stream; and flows and follows
you on forever.

*These two stanzas are taken from a poem written by
Li Po in behalf of his wife, expressing her sentiment to-
ward himself.*



"Barstow"

Hitch-hikers Ballad of the Desert Sung to New Instrument

By HARRY PARTCH

It's January 26. I'm freezing.
Ed Fitzgerald, Age 19. Five
feet, ten inches.

Black hair, brown eyes.

Going home to Boston, Massa-
chusetta.

It's 4:00, and I'm hungry and
broke.

I wish I was dead.

But today I am a man.

The scribbling is in pencil. It is
on one of the white highway rail-
ings just outside the Mojave Des-
ert junction of Barstow, Califor-
nia. I am walking along the high-
way and sit down on the railing to
rest.

Idly I notice the scratches where
I happen to drop. I have seen
many hitch-hikers' writings. They
are usually just names and ad-
resses—there are literally mil-
lions of them, or little meaningless
obscenities, on highway signs, rail-
ings, walls.

But this—why, it's music. It's
both weak and strong, like uned-
ited human expressions always
are. It's eloquent in what it fails
to express in words. And it's epic.
Definitely, it is music.

Intrigued, I look further along
the same rail, and immediately
see another inscription:

Gentleman: Go to 530 East
Lemon Avenue, Monrovia,
California, for an easy hand-
out.

Though we may be hungry, we
are still presumed to be "Gentle-
men." A third inscription is right
beside it:

Marie Blackwell, age 19.

Brown eyes, brown hair.

Considered Pretty.

118 East Ventura Street,
Las Vegas, Nevada.

Object: Matrimony.

And at this "Lonely Hearts
Club" of US 66 Marie gets a bite:

Dear Marie: A very good idea
you have there . . .

The message doesn't end. Why?
There is only one things that
would distract a hitch-hiker from
romance on such desert wastes.

In a March 27th thank you letter to Luening, he reported, “I am working in a creative fever—the most intense I have experienced in years—on ‘U.S. Highball,’ seventh of the ‘Monophonic Cycle’ which I submitted to Guggenheim as project.” He immediately sent for his Kithara & keyboard, and in the white heat of composition that followed, completed a second draft of *U.S. Highball* for Adapted Guitar, Chromolodeon (sic) and Kithara, the compositions *Dark Brother*, *San Francisco*, *Letter from Hobo Pablo*, and added Kithara parts to *Two Psalms* and *Barston*, finishing that October.



Ithaca, New York (1943)

It became clear, once these works were done, that the time had come to leave Ithaca and put together an ensemble to play them. That winter, he traveled to Bennington, Boston, & finally New York, meeting with an impressive list of musical Who's Who that included Virgil Thomson, Henry Cowell, Douglas Moore, Quincy Porter, Henry Brant, Joseph Yasser, and Nicolas Slonimsky. He also met Martha Graham, who expressed great interest in a collaboration which unfortunately never took place. Many of the visits included guitar/voice performances of the new *U.S. Highball*, which impressed all who heard it.

One result of his travels was a successful November lecture/recital at the New England Conservatory, prompting an invitation

In the coming two and a half months, he would need to find, train, and rehearse three new musicians to play this challenging unknown repertoire. He found them in Henry Brant (*Chromolodeon*,



tin flutes, tin oboe), Alix Maruchess (*Kithara*), and Ethel Luening (soprano). Rehearsals began immediately, and for the next two months, the group met more than forty times.

Rehearsing with Alix Young Maruchess and Ethel Luening

As Partch wrote to Henry Moe after the concert, the volunteer musicians' efforts were "little less than heroic," as the final two weeks before the concert found them rehearsing between fifteen and twenty times a week. By the time they walked on stage they were thoroughly prepared, both musically and otherwise. Years later, Henry Brant recalled that the composer brought a hammer, screwdriver, and pot of

glue with him, and actually fixed instrumental problems as they arose throughout the program.

The composer's historic Carnegie Hall debut was relatively well received, remembering that it was a 5pm Saturday afternoon invitation-only performance before an audience of critics and composers. As to the audience reaction, Henry Brant relates,

I believe that everyone felt themselves in the presence of a formidable new contender. They reacted in various ways. Some were annoyed, irritated, perhaps envious, a little hostile...many of them took [Partch to be] an eccentric amateur. But in 1944 things were so Stone Age that many of those same people would have said the same thing of Ives.

The response from the press was equally varied:

<p>"All the News That's Fit to Print"</p>	<h1>The New York Times.</h1>	<p>LATE CITY EDITION Reviews today; includes home pages and morning article. Telephone T-9-3000; 1st fl. n.</p>	<p>Section 1</p>
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UNUSUAL PROGRAM BY HARRY PARTCH

**Composers' League Sponsors
His 'Speech-Music' Concert
—New Instruments Seen**

What might be called the season's most "sophisticated" concert, or the most boring or the funniest, according to the point of view, was given late yesterday afternoon at the Carnegie Chamber Music Hall by Harry Partch, American composer, under the auspices of the League of Composers. Mr. Partch, who comes from California, is known for his new form of "speech-music" and for his adaptations of antique instruments for regional texts.

Credits

Producer: John Schneider

Audio Restoration: Scott Fraser (Architecture)

Art Direction & Design: Erin Schneider & Jasper McMahon

Liner Notes: John Schneider

Audio

Partch's 1942 lecture in Kilbourn Hall, Eastman School of Music made available with kind permission of the Eastman School of Music.

Photos

Cover: Partch in Ithaca NY, 1943. Photographer unknown.

Partch with guitar in Ithaca NY, 1943. Photographer unknown, Agnes Albert Collection of the San Francisco Symphony, used by permission

Partch at Desk, Ithaca, NY 1943: photographer unknown, from Martin Skamletz Collection, with thanks to Eleni Ralli.

Partch with Adapted Viola, Pasadena Star News, Feb 16, 1933. The Works of Li Po: Derek Rath Photography.

Partch, Ethel Luening, and Alix Maruchness rehearsing: photo by Larry Gordon, courtesy of Philip Blackburn, used by permission

Adapted Viola, flattened Bridge: Photo by Charles Corey, used by permission.

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Harry Partch/Otto Luening Correspondence,
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Images

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**EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
RECORDING**

COMPOSER Harry Partch
TITLE Kilbourn Hall Lecture

DATE 11/3/42

PART 4

98. 4

MAX. PRESSURE ON
NEEDLE POINT 3 OZ.

THIS RECORD NOT TO BE USED COMMERCIALY