



# THE WORLD OF HARRY PARTCH

DAPHNE OF THE DUNES  
BARSTOW  
CASTOR & POLLUX

"Harry Partch is an American visionary and stubborn individualist. . . . He has built his own musical world out of microtones, hobo speech, elastic octaves and percussion instruments made from hubcaps and nuclear cloud chambers. Recently . . . an army of young music lovers stormed New York's Whitney Museum to hear Harry Partch and his thirteen disciples produce a music that was totally personal and eclectic in the best sense. African polyrhythms, and ancient Greek modes, bits of Babylonia and the pulse of the American diesel engine all gathered into a richly erotic, primitive, fresh and stirring drama of sound." —Newsweek

# THE WORLD OF HARRY PARTCH

MQ 31227

Side 2

Conducted by Danlee Mitchell  
under the supervision  
of the composer

Produced by John McClure

Side 1

## DAPHNE OF THE DUNES

(17:25)

Harry Partch, Adapted Viola;  
Frank Berberich, Gary Coleman,  
Dean Drummond, Richard Lapore,  
John McAllister,  
Robert McCormick,  
Todd Miller, Emil Richards,  
Michael Ranta, Linda Schell

## BARSTOW

Eight Hitchhiker Inscriptions  
from a Highway Railing  
at Barstow, California (9:20)

Harry Partch and John Stannard,  
Voices; John McAllister,  
Danlee Mitchell, Michael Ranta,  
Linda Schell

## CASTOR & POLLUX

A Dance for the Twin Rhythms  
of Gemini from Plectra &  
Percussion Dances (16:20)

Gary Coleman, Dean Drummond,  
John McAllister, Danlee Mitchell,  
Emil Richards, Michael Ranta,  
Linda Schell

A change is in the wind. Western music is a little tired and wants to sit down. By electronic synthesis, prominent practitioners have diagnosed its ailment as an acute case of serialism with side effects attributed to aleatoritis. Rock now having reached a harmonic and contrapuntal respectability, we are ready for a breath of fresh air—a new season! Is Harry Partch just around the corner?

The musical world of Harry Partch is new and strange. His instruments, all hand-made by himself, have rarely been seen, and the sounds they produce have seldom been heard, at least not on this planet.

Forty years ago, Partch realized that American music wasn't really American but was only a facsimile of European convention and fashion. Serialism was only another step along this path, a path Partch wasn't interested in taking. In an attempt to retrace his steps, he found it was necessary to completely reinvestigate the nature of sound as music, and, for his point of departure, he chose to use the inherent musicality of the American language.

Partch's early compositions, dating from the 1930's, are all vocal, with small instrumental accompaniments. They are masterpieces of Americana, employing the language in a natural style uninfluenced by European traditions. BARSTOW comes from this period.

Although based on his earlier music in vocal style and structure, the more recent music of Partch provides a striking contrast. It is integrated theater on a grand scale. Partch calls his esthetic position Corporeal, a music that is essentially "tactile." Not a believer in concert music, Partch mounts theater pieces that combine the senses of sound and sight. His instruments are part of the stage set; the musicians are in costume and sometimes involved in the stage action. Partch describes this dramatic staging as ritual, illuminating life and its psychological forces. At times, story line is communicated by the spoken word; at other times, by mime movement. Sight and sound, each complementing and intensifying the other, transport the viewer to a plane of catharsis.

The particular personal level from which Partch begins his works can be seen in this recent statement:

"The work that I have been doing these many years parallels much in the attitudes and actions of primitive man. He found sound-magic in the common materials around him. He then proceeded to make the vehicle, the instrument, as visually beautiful as he could. Finally, he involved the sound-magic and the visual beauty in his everyday words and experiences, his ritual and drama, in order to lend greater meaning to his life. This is my trinity: sound-magic, visual beauty, experience-ritual."

The bulk of Partch's work dates from the past thirty years. THE WAYWARD, a collective title for four compositions—BARSTOW; THE LETTER; SAN FRANCISCO (newsboy cries); and, U. S. HIGH-BALL—was finished in 1943. It is a setting of Americana, much of it coming out of the hobo experiences of Partch during the Depression, exploiting the natural rhythm and melodic contour of the American language. His first large-scale theater work, OEDIPUS (1951), is the definitive musical setting of this drama. Out of this, the Partch theater style emerges. PLECTRA & PERCUSSION DANCES (1952), a dance-theater work, is comprised of three compositions—CASTOR & POLLUX; EVEN WILD HORSES; and, RING AROUND THE MOON. Another dance-theater work, THE BEWITCHED (1956), was performed in New York in 1959. REVELATION IN THE COURTHOUSE PARK (1960), billed as an "extravaganza," is a music-theater work of large proportions, employing not only a large cast of actors, dancers, and on-stage musicians, but also a marching brass band, acrobats, gymnasts on apparatus, and a filmed fireworks display. WATER! WATER! (1961) saw his instruments moving on stage as participants.

In 1963, Partch started a study work, AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY PETALS FELL IN PETALUMA, in preparation for his latest work, DELUSION OF THE FURY (1966). DELUSION has the potential of establishing a new style in Western music theater. Partch has always wished for a more diversified, less specialized type of performer; the type of performer who not only plays instruments, but who can also sing, act, and dance. In DELUSION, the musicians do sing (as was

done in THE BEWITCHED), but their instrumental passages are so arranged that they could dance also, if such people were available. Such concepts are quite ancient, Partch acknowledges, but he feels that in present practice this has all been abandoned. It is his purpose to reunite the intellectual with the sensual, in his Corporeal concept.

As the basis for his music, and the tuning of his instruments, he has formulated a 43 (or more) tones-to-the-octave scale tuned in just intonation, with each tone being a frequency ratio to a fundamental 1/1 (392 cycles per second). Partch describes his theories in his book GENESIS OF A MUSIC (University of Wisconsin Press, 1949; now out of print but tentatively scheduled to be reprinted by Da Capo Press):

"The major contribution of Monophony [Partch's name for his system] as an intonational system is its realization of a subtle and acoustically precise interrelation of tonalities, all stemming or expanding from unity, 1/1. This interrelation is not capable of manifold modulations to "dominants" or to any other common scale degrees; it is not capable of parallel transpositions of intricate musical structures; it does not present any tone as any specific tonality identity. Conversely, it is capable of both ordinary and hitherto unheard modulations to the natural limits imposed by Just Intonation and the arbitrary limit of 11; it is capable of an expanded sense of tonality, from Identities 1-3-5 to Identities 1-3-5-7-9-11; it is capable of great variety in that expanded sense; it does offer twenty-eight possible tonalities, more than are inherent in Equal Temperament, and therefore a greater total of tonality identities; or assumable senses, that does Equal Temperament."

Composer as well as theorist, Partch gradually evolved his array of instruments as his musical concepts expanded. One of his earliest, dating from 1930 but preceded by other experiments, is the Adapted Viola, a viola with an extended fingerboard that is played between the knees. Two lyre-like instruments, Kitharas I & II, date from 1938 and have twelve hexads per instrument; glass rods produce gliding tones on four of the chords.

Six Harmonic Canons have been constructed since 1945; five feature forty-four strings on one plane, while one is designed with two planes of forty-four strings each. The first set is horizontal while the second set dips from a high nut at the right to a lower set of tuning pegs at the left. The two sets intersect about seven inches from the right. Consequently, there is a choice of either set, or both together. Moveable bridges are placed underneath the Canon strings, which are plucked by fingers and picks as well as struck with sticks.

Also dating from 1945 are two Chromelodeons, reed pump organs tuned to the complete 43-tone octave with total ranges of more than five acoustic octaves. All the other instruments are tuned to the Chromelodeons.

Another stringed instrument is the Surrogate Kithara, with two banks of eight strings, and having sliding glass rods under the strings for stopping. Two Adapted Guitars also use a sliding plastic bar above the strings; one tuned to a six-string 1/1 unison, the other tuned to ten-string chord whose higher three notes are but a few vibrations apart.

Providing contrast to the strings and organs in Partch's orchestra is his percussion. The highest is the Eucal Blossom, its dry, brittle pitches produced by solid lengths of bamboo. The oldest percussion is the Diamond Marimba, 1946, its thirty-six blocks arranged diagonally in major and minor hexads. Its exact opposite, the Quadrangularis Reversum, is arranged in reverse order to the Diamond Marimba with two rows of additional tones on each side of the diamond. The Bamboo Marimba (Boo) is constructed of ascending rows of hollow bamboo closed at one end; a tongue is cut in the opposite end and struck with a stick. The Bass Marimba has important lower range tones, while the sub-bass Marimba Eroica enables one to feel musical tone; it consists of four bars, the lowest eight feet long and vibrating at 22 cycles per second. The Mazda Marimba is made up of tuned light bulbs severed at the socket, while the bright, piercing timbre of the Zymo-Xyl is reproduced by suspended liquor bottles, auto hub caps, and oar bars. The Spoils of War consists of artillery shell casings, Pyrex chemical solution jars, a high wood block and low marimba bar, spring steel flexitones (Whang Guns), and a gourd *guiro*. Japanese Buddha bells attached to gourd resonators and mounted on a eucalyptus branch are collectively called the Gourd Tree; to the player's right are two Cone Gongs, airplane fuel tank sections Partch salvaged from Douglas Aircraft surplus in Santa Monica.

The most fragile of all the instruments are the Cloud-Chamber Bowls, Pyrex chemical solution jars cut in half, suspended on a rack, and hit on sides and tops with soft mallets. Each bowl has at least one or more inharmonic overtones, and if broken are almost impossible to duplicate, due to the nature of inharmonic overtones. A Japanese Koto, with its characteristic bending tones, is also employed, tuned to the Partch system.

Every sound produced by the instruments is a tone in Partch's tuning and consciously used as such in acoustic relationships. Notation for each instrument is different; nothing is left to chance.

BARSTOW, begun in 1941, is a setting of eight hitchhiker inscriptions copied from a highway railing on the outskirts of Barstow, California. This work shows Partch's style with language, as well as his approach to harmony and structure. Each inscription is stated, then humorously expanded, sometimes sung, other times intoned. Tonality is strong but ever-shifting. The over-all harmonic effect is quite smooth, as it would be in just intonation, with tones resolving to others by a subtle few vibrations as well as larger leaps. A masterpiece of Americana in song, it is more than that; it is musical dramatic narrative. Partch calls it his Hobo Concerto. As the word hobo itself is an American word, so is the music of Harry Partch an American music—probably the first truly American music since the American Indian.

CASTOR & POLLUX is a dance-theater work with a beguiling program. It is structured in two large sections, each section comprised of three duets and a tutti. The first section is entitled CASTOR, the second, POLLUX. The first duet of each section is titled Leda and the Swan (insemination); the second, Conception; the third, Incubation; and the tutti, Chorus of Delivery From the Egg. By its contrapuntal texture, CASTOR & POLLUX shows well the melodic capabilities of the instruments, and the two tutti section grand finales to the glory of birth. In the liner notes to PLECTRA & PERCUSSION DANCES, first issued by Partch on his own GATE 5 record label, he relates the story:

"It begins with the encounter of Zeus, the male swan, with the beautiful Leda, and ends with the hatching of the fertilized eggs—first Castor, then Pollux. From the moment of insemination, each egg uses exactly 234 beats in cracking. All of the right heavenly houses are in conjunction, and misfortune is impossible. Pairs of instruments tell the story in characteristic ways."

DAPHNE OF THE DUNES is here recorded for the first time live. Originally the sound track for Madeline Tourtelot's film WINDSONG, Partch recorded it alone, by the process of overdubbing. The film, a modern rendering of the ancient myth of Daphne and Apollo, is a classic of the integration between visuals and sound. Partch explains his approach to the score:

"The music, in effect, is a collage of sounds. The film technique of fairly fast cuts is here translated into musical terms. The sudden shifts represent nature symbols of the film, as used for a dramatic purpose: dead tree, driftwood, falling sand, blowing tumbleweed, flying gulls, wriggling snakes, waving grasses."

Melodic material is short, haunting, and reoccurs motivically. Arpeggiated harmonic texture contrasts melodic sections. Meter is ever changing, almost measure for measure, with pulse sub-divisions of five, seven, and nine common. A trio of the Bass Marimba, Boo, and Diamond Marimba written in 31/16 meter is structured with 5 unequal beats per measure, the beats sub-divided into sixteenths of 5-5-7-9-5. A duet of the Boo and Harmonic Canon is written in a polymeter of 4/4—7/4 over 4/8—7/8. —Notes by Danlee Mitchell

The instruments heard in this recording:

#### DAPHNE OF THE DUNES

Adapted Viola	Spoils of War
Kithara II	Gourd Tree
Surrogate Kithara	Diamond Marimba
Harmonic Canons	Boo (Bamboo Marimba)
II and III	Bass Marimba
Chromelodeon I	Pre-recorded Tape
Cloud-Chamber Bowls	

(Note: No more than four instruments are used simultaneously.)

#### BARSTOW

Surrogate Kithara  
Chromelodeon I  
Diamond Marimba  
Boo (Bamboo Marimba)

#### CASTOR

1. Leda and the Swan (Kithara II, Surrogate Kithara, and Cloud-Chamber Bowls)
2. Conception (Harmonic Canon II and High Bass Marimba)
3. Incubation (Diamond Marimba and Low Bass Marimba)
4. Chorus of Delivery From the Egg (All the foregoing instruments)

#### POLLUX

1. Leda and the Swan (Kithara II, Surrogate Kithara, and Low Bass Marimba)
2. Conception (Harmonic Canon II and Cloud-Chamber Bowls)
3. Incubation (Diamond Marimba and High Bass Marimba)
4. Chorus of Delivery From the Egg (All the foregoing instruments)

Engineering: Edward T. Graham; Quadraphonic remix engineer: Ed Michalski

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