

GEMS FROM MY SCRAPBOOK--1930 to 1957--H.P.

Selby Noel Mayfield, New Orleans Times-Picayune, Nov. 16, 1930.

General  
"Unlike other critics of modern music who want it to develop along certain lines, Mr. Partch doesn't care how it develops. It has been on the wrong track from the beginning centuries ago, he thinks, and should return to the musical method of the ancient world: voice accompanied by one instrument. . . . the composer of today is gagged unless he has an enormously ~~and~~ complicated and expensive structure, the orchestra, through which to communicate his idea . . . ."

"Its music is melancholy and Oriental in effect."

San Francisco News, Feb. 9, 1931. "The music is melancholy."

Oakland Tribune, Nov. 12, 1931. "The effect when heard is eerie, exotic and unmodern."

Redfern Mason, San Francisco Examiner, Nov. 29, 1931. "It is curious how blind--or deaf--musicians have been to the music of the spoken word." "It has remained for a young San Franciscan, Harry Partch, to rationalize, so to speak, the musicality of speech."

Alexander Fried, San Francisco Chronicle, Feb. 10, 1932. "It did not even prove itself a superior substitute to the ordinary recitation of sonorous poetry. But it may very well have possibilities as a distinctive means of musical expression."

Marjory M. Fisher, San Francisco News, Feb. 10, 1932. "Partch's ideas are more interesting than his exposition was convincing."

Paul S. Nathan, Oakland Post-Enquirer, March 1, 1932. "The music is interesting always, hypnotic in its power and capable of expressing great subtlety."

R.D.S., Oakland Tribune, March 1, 1932. "This writer blandly (and perhaps smugly) confesses that for him monophony . . . offers little of musical value."

Bertha McCord Knisely, Los Angeles Saturday Night, May 14, 1932. "It is, indeed, impressive. . . . What Harry Partch has already achieved represents enormous application . . . in exceptional degree."

Isabel Jones, Los Angeles Times, Feb. 12, 1933. ~~His~~ "Many of his startlingly different ideas were born, as he was, in China."

Bertha McCord Knisely, L.A. Saturday Night, Feb. 25, 1933. "Delicate suggestion . . . of imagistic type . . . (descriptive music of high order.) A viola used for the accompaniments was beautifully appropriate, in fact, one felt that more sound would have been undesirable."

Noel Heath Taylor, Pacific Coast Musician, April 16, 1938. "In a home in Santa Barbara lies an organ which accommodates forty tones to the octave, a product of some young neglected genius who will probably (be a bearded angel before he hears even the first public whisperings of his ideas rising from the earth.)"

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~~Noel Heath Taylor~~ Noel Heath Taylor, California Arts & Architecture, July, 1939. ~~His~~  
"If his music were beyond the comprehension of the average man, too abstract, too mystical, there would be reason to ignore him. But (nothing in music was ever so simple as that which he has composed. It has the immediate appeal of lyric Irish speech the charm of spontaneous Negro music, the power and emotion of the Hebrew chant.)"

Nov. 27 (?), 1946.

gen  
Millikin U. Student paper, letter to ed. "I very definitely did not like that 25th century jam session." "I received opinions ranging from 'It sounds like the D.T.'s set to music' to 'No wonder the creator of U.S. Highball used an 'on the road' theme. (He) should be on the road--most of the time." "a waste of time." A few hardy souls did muster up enough courage to leave, and I . . . wish to ~~congratulate~~ offer them my congratulations."

Editorial in same paper, same issue. " . . . we did not like, or thought we could not like, Partch's music because it was too new. Yet how many other assemblies and chapels have we criticized because the material in them was too old. . . . one is confronted with the disappointing spectacle of seven hundred students closing their ears to an innovation because it was unfamiliar. . . . snap judgments and prejudices have no place here. . . . only one other university refers to us as a bunch of hicks. At the rate we are going it may not take long for the reputation to become nation-wide."

Illinois

gen  
Decatur/paper (?), Nov. 27, 1946. "Almost a capacity audience . . . were rewarded with the kind of evening about which they can talk for days, if they can find words to describe it." "Each instrument has a wailing emotional voice in minor key." "Mr. Partch's music has no melody."

average  
for 1st  
William K. Archer, The Daily Cardinal (Madison), Oct. 11, 1946. "He writes music of vigor and sensitivity, of inherent worth." " . . . he tends toward the sardonic and grim. There are haunting notes of bitterness in most of the pieces I have heard." "Musically, it (U.S.H) is a startling journey." "Partch seems to take a new philosophical approach. He attempts to recreate the emotion superimposed upon the reality. In other words, he portrays the three levels of: reality, the emotional acceptance of reality, and the deeper appreciative emotion. That is a tenuous idea to put into words, and the music expresses it far more clearly." "We are proud that Partch has worked at Wisconsin."

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The Wisconsin Journal, Feb. 23, 1947. (Quoting me) "young Johnny . . . picks out an instrument that other centuries have designed and other generations have made. He practises exercises that someone else has prescribed, learns rules that someone else has devised, and plays--generally with reluctance--little pieces which someone else has written." " . . . to get back to his music -- it's different, and it's disturbing. It's strange violence and turbulence, in places, bemuses some." "Partch doesn't defend his music, but he defends his principles."

Marshall Glasier, letter to Cardinal Forum (Daily Cardinal), Sept. 29, 1948. "The problem of Partch is an interesting one. . . . all his opposition came from the Music school. . . . One faculty member suggested his instruments be smashed. . . . they were scared of Partch, had never seen the likes of him before. But don't worry. They've forgotten all about Partch. Everything is quiet and peaceful since he's gone."

Keith McGary, Antioch Review, Fall, 1949. "Unlike the ruck of critics and theorists of music, Partch examines the core of music: tones, notation, instruments, composition. (He runs the gamut from physics to inspired creation.) Step by step, he questions the philosophic assumptions behind these various problems. The result is an exciting book. . . . illustrates a basic difference between Partch, who is after all a creative artist, and those other composers who accept without question. . . . His judgments are strong and will perhaps be offensive to some. But the spirit is one of inquiry and of impatience with the acceptance of what is handed down just because it has been handed down."

Oed. C  
Sacramento Bee, (who???) , March 22, 1952. "The occasion was billed chiefly for the score composed by Harry Partch . . . It is a high tribute to Partch's score that the drama turned out to be more important. . . . The music was . . . predominantly doleful and tragic; almost completely without familiarity in its phrases, working strange and sometimes fascinating effects on the ear and mind."

quote in controversy  
Oed. C  
Time, March 24, 1952. "Harry Partch is a composer who has most of his critics completely flummoxed. . . . It was mostly what Hollywood calls "Mickey Mouse music" . . . The Partch orchestra produced cacophonous sounds . . . ~~sounded like~~ the rat-a-tat-tat of one of the percussions . . . sounded like mice in the attic. . . . Composer Partch, in deep purple shirt and tweed jacket, came onstage to a roar of bravos."

Oed. C  
Marjory M. Fisher, S.F. News, March 17, 1952, ". . . it was nothing less than astounding to find the most modern musical creation coupled with a classic Greek tragedy--and have nothing but beautiful sounds assail the ears."

Oed. C  
Clifford Gessler, Oakland Tribune, March 17, 1952, ". . . the music, gentle and unobtrusive as it mostly remained in its auxiliary function, emerged on the whole as the most interesting feature of the combination. . . . The mellow tones of Partch's massive redwood marimbas; the wailing effects of his plucked and bowed string strings and ~~in~~ of the microtonal reed organ; the bell tones of his suspended glass bowls, revealed a wide-reaching extension of the range of musical expression. . . . The music was remarkably easy on the ears, and often of compelling beauty."

Joseph Biskind, The Argonaut, Mar. 21, 1952. "This work cannot be judged on the same basis as the ordinary type of opera, which it is not intended to resemble at all."

Oed. C  
Alfred Frankenstein, S.F. Chronicle, March 16, 1952. "Microtonal music does not lend itself to complex harmonic effects, and that of Partch is no exception . . . His score--fragmentary, subdued, elusive--vastly enhanced the menace, torment, and bewildered, ominous tension of the tragedy. . . . it was completely unsuccessful when it obtruded on the text and forced the actors to use a queer, timid, narrowly intoned kind of chant. . . . derived at least 80 per cent of its dramatic power from the magnificent interpretation of . . . Allan Louw. . . . the spokesman of the chorus and the principal sufferer with the above-mentioned chant."

Oed. C  
Lillian Bos Ross, Monterey Peninsula Herald, April 2, 1952. "~~The ten new musical instruments became articulate~~ " . . . they (the instruments) seemed as much a ~~part~~ living part of the scene as King Oedipus, the seer, the suppliants . . . (they) became articulate; heightening, intensifying all; becoming the emotional salt and savor of every word and mood."

Oed. C  
Peter Yates, Arts & Architecture, July, 1953. ". . . a highly cultivated discernment in the setting of poetic texts translated from other languages." ". . . this (Oed.) is a major contribution to our national music . . ." "Even in the recording one feel the liberated emotion of the music, stemming from the profound resonances of the heavy-planked marimbas, inflected instrumentally as if an abstract concourse of speaking, wailing, chanting voices, which carry forward the vocal melodies of the chorus after its own voices cease." " (instruments) are about as portable as a one-man show of totem poles."

Judy Stone, Independent Journal, San Rafael, Jan. 24, 1953. (quoting me) "Any art that is not in ferment or flux is dead. I don't care how many orchestras there are. I don't care how much interest there is in music, if there is no interest in contemporary creative music."

Wilford Leach, Theatre Arts, Jan., 1953. ". . . the western theatre has been given one of the most challenging and revolutionary potentials in its history. For the first time, a full score was composed for a spoken drama . . . The speeches of the play were integrated harmonically and rhythmically with some of the most emotionally provocative instrumentation yet devised for the theatre. . . . he was able to create the illusion of voices doing things far outside the traditional scale and of creating an emotional climate for the words above and beyond their impact without music. . . . The music's intention at times is to impart to the audience the emotion simultaneously with its birth, not its articulation. . . . the emotional music that might accompany a dream. . . . The characteristic of speech--this gliding up and down and variation of stress--is used not only with the words of the drama but transferred to the instruments so that they produce an abstraction of the emotional charge of the words."

R.H.Hagan, S.F.Chronicle, Oct. 4, 1953. ". . . the intensely rhythmical music (castor and Pollux) . . . with its skittering microtonal glissandos, its fantastically and subtly compounded rhythms, and (above all) the peculiarly new and fascinating sound of the instruments . . . his music has a life and an appeal that exists in all genuinely creative music . . . As for its humor, I challenge anyone to resist the whimsical appeal of such items as his Afro-Chinese mimet ( . . . the most delirious version of 'Happy Birthday to You' that has ever been pressed on Vinylite) or the fourth section of 'Ring Around the Moon.'"

Thomas B. Sherman, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Nov. 15, 1953. "It is possible that the prevalence of strong motor rhythms in the three compositions may be the ~~strongest~~ ingredient with the strongest appeal; and it may be that Mr. Partch's inventiveness, which is quite evident not merely in rhythmic devices and in combinations of timbres but in melodic subtlety as well, would operate effectively in any system."

Back to Sacramento Bee, Mar. 22, 1952. "It seems beside the point to ask if the job could have been done just as well with conventional instruments and a conventional scale. The choice was the composer's right, and his attainment of his goal is the final criterion of his success."

Clifford Gessler, Oakland Tribune, Oct. 11, 1953. ". . . somewhat lighter in conception (than Oedipus), but just as inventive and fascinating for sheer charm of sound and rhythm. . . . culminating in the final exclamation, 'Look out! He's got a gun!' which is obviously Partch's good-humored recognition of the reaction of extreme conservatives to his music. . . . Beneath the spoofing, the music makes sense."

Harold Rogers, Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 1, 1953. "For more than 30 years he has been blazing his lonely trail. . . . A monumental achievement! . . . naturally akin to the Oriental. . . . One has the feeling that his music would have little distinction if set in the conventional idiom."

Albert Goldberg, L.A.Times, Nov. 24, 1953. "The sounds are fascinating and invite repeated listening. If nothing else, this record is (a superb conversation piece, but we suspect there is more to it than that.)"

*Dances*  
Schonberg (?) N.Y. Times, Dec. 13, 1953. "His music is very, very avant-garde. But even if it may make no sense to you, it contains sounds that are, to say the least, provocative. And it certainly shows off the potentialities of a high-fidelity set."

*Dances*  
Joseph Marshall, Radio Electronics, April, 1954. ". . . the musical equivalent of the famous pre-War (I) painting entitled NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE and is quite likely to make the same impression of wondrous bewilderment when heard for the first time. . . . I know of no record which can approach the concatenation of percussive instruments of all sorts on this disc. . . . the music grows on you. . . ."

*Dances*  
Good Listening, Dec., 1953. ". . . regardless of Mr. Partch's musical philosophy, regardless of the so-called "impractical" nature of his system, a dynamic fact remains. The man produces music that packs a fascinating punch. . . . reminiscently Oriental . . . rhythms, complicated as they are, are definitely Western."

Edward Tatnall Canby(?), Audio Engineering, March, 1954. ". . . That is the background for the very strange noises here produced, in utmost seriousness and after fantastic labors . . . you will immediately be reminded of our old hi-fi ~~friend~~ friend Edgar Varese and his 'Ionisation' --this is a sort of feminine counterpart, minus the furious energy, the superb rhythm, the furiousity of Varese. (Varese, Cage, Cowell) Yes, all these movements are cracked, more or less. . . . There are interesting tone colors here, a good sense of rhythmic counterpoint, the interchange of rhythms from one instrument to another."

Peter Yates, Arts & Arch. (date???) leave blank

Alfred Frankenstein, High Fidelity, March, 1954. ". . . as is usually the case with microtonal music, the novel excitements of the color do not, in the long run, compensate for the losses which the rigid limitations of microtonality impose. Partch's melodic tissue is a series of reiterative short phrases in rather monotonously reiterative rhythms; harmonic and contrapuntal interest is slight, and the few efforts at sustained melodic line do not come off. But the satiric literature on the back of the record sleeve is almost worth the price of admission in itself."

Harper's Bazaar, June 1954. "During a rehearsal of the highly experimental 'Plectra and Percussion Dances,' he got lost in his own music and wryly admitted that sections sounded so much alike he didn't know which he was playing."

Marjory M. Fisher, S.F. News, Sept. 13, 1954. "(Oedipus) The recording does not convey the full effect of the original stage show."

Albert Goldberg, L.A. Times, Oct. 17, 1954. ". . . only an examination of the score could detect whether any organized system of composition is involved. After the first novelty wears off one is inclined to doubt that there is much real creative force or originality to Partch's innovations. . . . the others (aside from Louw) are obviously amateurs."

R.H.Hagan, S.F.Chronicle, Oct. 24, 1954. ". . . a tremendously effective amalgamation of music and drama."

Alexander Fried, S.F.Examiner, Sept. 26, 1954. ". . . you may add good, sly humor to the list of his merits, for his music is full of experimental fascinations of rhythm, oriental strummings and delicate coloristic novelty. The instruments that he himself has invented make sounds quite out of this world."

Harold Rogers, Christian Science Monitor, Oct. 19, 1954. "There are times when Partch's music is equal to the poignancy . . . and there are other times when it is but a tiresome ostinato to some declamatory passages. . . . But there are many brilliant moments on the first three sides, and the climax upon the denouement found on the fourth is tremendously powerful and exciting."

Peter Yates, Arts & Parch., Dec., 1954. "The rich resonances of the great marimbas throb through and rhythmically intensify the movement of the drama. . . . The melodies refer ~~to or respond~~ to or respond but do not lead. . . . It (the music) marks time without beating, by cross-accents; it heightens tensions, emphasizes silences, responds often more fervently than the chorus to the dramatic implications of the speech. . . . At the end . . . the emotion is translated entirely into music . . . and we meditate as we listen on the fatal drama suspended before us by this extension of its rhythm. Partch's Oedipus is a powerful act of the imagination, recreating the Greek drama more truly by means more suitable to its origins than the frenetic bloodshed and bawling so common in our efforts to recover the secret of Attic tragedy. . . . Partch is one of those inspired, stubborn radicals of creative thought who never exactly fit in anywhere . . ."

Alan Tory, Fortnight, Oct. 6, 1954. "This bold experiment (Oed.) deserves a careful hearing on the West Coast, where we so often and rightly listen to complaints that our theatre is derivative from Broadway and we are shy on originating."

Peter Hugh Reed, American Record Guide, Jan., 1955. "(quoting Barzun). . . he seems with each new work to deserve a greater place among contemporary artists. He is a born musical dramatist and in all his productions, particularly when he himself takes part as a singer, one hears the unmistakable note of power." ~~More~~ (More) also Barzun) . . . accompaniments which defy description in the usual critical jargon." quoting me) "nowhere in the world is the convention of discrete steps so academically rigorous as it is in the West." (Reed) "One might call Partch the poet of musical instrument-makers. His Oedipus moved me in a way that no other performance of this drama has ever done." (quoting me) "The conventions of Greek tragic poetry can mean nothing to us, but I believe that we can reach its spirit if we feel more, and in a realm beyond knowledge." (about Dances) Castor and Poolux) ". . . one can find a strange allure in its unique assessment of unusual instrumental effects and subtle rhythms. . . . A composer who can spoof himself is a rare individual. (Even Wild Horses) . . . beguiling in its wily defiance of any recognized musical law or order."

Oliver Daniel, Music at Home, Jan-Feb, 1955. "Partch has added some of the most deliciously provocative new sounds that have come to the music world in a very long time. . . . In the matter of setting his texts, . . . they sound unabashedly amateurish. . . . I have directed too many radio and television dramas to award even an A for effort to Partch for all his thought-out singsong intonings." "Any of the Partch records is a collector's item, not only to hear but to keep because it will appreciate in value."

Thomas B. Sherman, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Jan. 13, 1955. "The weakness of the total presentation is that the straight dramatic dialogue is spoken by performers who are not quite capable of the high style that Greek tragedy demands. Partch himself is quite good as the blind Tiresias but the roles of Oedipus, Jocasta and Creon certainly lack forensic ~~ability~~ nobility. As a whole, though, the album holds the interest steadily and the music is central to the general effect."

KPFA program, March 20, 1955 (letter to station) "My wife asks if the pieces were composed in a booby hatch." . . . there have been several instances of listeners who have become subscribers simply because they appreciated our broadcasts of Partch's music."

Independent-Journal San Rafael, July 30, 1955. (Quoting me) "People call it experimental music, but I don't. I know what I'm doing."

The Daily Illini, Sept. 21, 1956. " . . . described by a faculty member as a 'very radical composer' . . . " John Garvey, a faculty member of the Festival Committee, explained the giant kithara was modeled after a harp that was used by the Mayan Indians during their ceremonial rites which included cutting out the heart of their human sacrifice. He also noted that an arrangement might be made to loan the instrument to the Athletic Assn. in case the Illini do not do too well in football this year."

Wilson C. Krebs

The Daily Illini, March 27, 1957. "From the moment the first musician walked on stage switched on the light atop the 'marimba eroica,' and tried several rhythmic patterns with gloved hands, until he switched off the light and retired alone from the stage, the audience found itself inseparably bound up in the action of Harry Partch's ballet, 'The Bewitched,' which had its world premiere Wednesday evening. . . . On the whole it can be said that none of us have witnessed anything quite as exciting or fantastic as his performance."

Charles Menees, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, March 28, 1957. "It was possible to feel emotional content without following the lengthy program outlines of intentions of the 10 episodes that have such titles as 'Three Undergrads etc.'"

Francis A. Klein, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, March 28, 1957. "Weird is the word for it (Bewitched), and also exciting, stimulating, colorful. . . . it is powerfully persuasive and not at all unpleasant, despite some strange harmonies and strange sounds from altogether unfamiliar instruments. It is no haphazard work . . . but is carefully built, episode by episode."

Wilson Krebs, The Daily Illini, April 3, 1957. "A particularly odious factor in the matter is that after months of preparation of the musical score and its performance by specially trained musicians, Partch was obviously helpless to complain successfully of Nikolais' lack of artistic cooperation, the performance date being so near at hand. . . . any collaborative work of art, whether it be opera, ballet, etc., is essentially a unity of the various parts in the whole."

Peoria Journal Star, April 3, 1957. " . . . it was agreeable, beautiful, hilarious, challenging to the imagination. . . . The vaunted meaning was obscure and far-fetched not clearly conveyed or readily discernible. . . . the dance episodes bear almost no relation to his purported subjects. . . . he says (Partch) they finally resolve into an entity. I failed to perceive it. . . . People really liked it whether or not they understood it."

Ray Ellsworth, High Fidelity, date??????

*Bew* Irving Sablosky, New York Times, July 21, 1957. "His music doesn't sound especially chromatic; rather, it is chantlike in its melodic lines, vigorously rhythmic and percussive in general effect—closer to the music of the Japanese Kabuki theatre than anything else that comes to mind. . . . Now, after thirty years as a "displaced musician" himself, Partch notes with some comfort the widening circle of those who believe in his work."

*Bew* Francis A. Klein, St. Louis Globe-Democrat, June 30, 1957. "The Bewitched" was (and is) so tantalizing a piece that one longed for further and extended looks and listens . . . the musical values are all there (in the recording) and the recording is surprisingly clear and wide-ranged. . . . grows on one the more one listens to it . . . ~~repays handsomely the closest attention~~ a closely integrated work that repays handsomely the closest attention. . . it is one of the most ~~original~~ highly original works that has come along in many a moon; a shot in the arm for the jaded listener; a distinct and distinguished addition to the Twentieth Century repertory. . . . Anyone who can take Bach, or Beethoven, or Brahms, not to mention Berlioz, Busoni, or Bartok, can take Partch. He is that listenable."

*Intro* Editorial page, The Dayton Daily News, Aug. 17, 1957. "The very world in which he lives is strange because, after 35 years, he alone is fully at home in it. What is not strange at all is that Partch's music is intensely dramatic and pictorial. His first rejection, after abandoning conventional music, was any temptation to be obscure and abstract, to set himself aloof on an artistic pedestal. His first concern has been with enlargement of communication between human beings, telling their stories, speaking with their voices, aiding their struggle to maintain identity and aspiring nature in a culture harnessed to the machine. This is in character. It has been historically true of explorers, whether geographical, scientific, or artistic, that they sought extension of the human domain and enrichment of man's experience in it."

Harold Rogers, Christian Science Monitor, July 9, 1957. "A noted Boston musicologist . . . was not too impressed with Mr. Partch's achievement. In form and rhythm, he reported, Mr. Partch is rather conventional; the unusual character of his music derives from his use of fractional tones and odd timbres. . . . he uses almost eight pages to explain his esoteric meanings in words that often strike the ears as oddly as his music. He apparently has a private frame of reference, a personal semantics. . . . there is little if anything in his music that would cause a listener to do more than cock an amused ear. . . . it begins to sound monotonously the same along about the middle of the second side. But though one may take issue with his subject, his attitude, his writing, his music, there is one quality that dominates all the rest—his superbly rugged individuality."

*Intro* Newsweek, April 8, 1957. "To the vast curiosity and delight of two audiences in the Middle West last week . . . the composer's musical contrivances were seen and heard. . . . They were rare events, for Partch public performances are few and far between. . . . Now 56 and with a record of pursuing his own independent way for nearly 30 years, Partch is disarmingly unpretentious about his theories. . . . (quoting me) "I'm a hobo. I go back long before Christian times for my traditions and spiritual affinity." "Heard on records, without its accompanying drama or dance, it can get monotonous, but then Partch terms records a 'compromise' anyway."

Woman's Day, November, 1957. "

Jacques Barzun, *American Panorama*, edited by Eric Larrabee, N.Y.U. Press, 1957.

" . . . intimations of a wholly new genre which has already produced some remarkable works. . . . To the skepticism with which any large departure from venerated means is bound to be greeted, Harry Partch offers the comforting answer that he will accept nothing as proof of his ideas except musical works that shall persuade by themselves. . . . a vigorous attempt to escape from the impasse of the major-minor mode plus enharmonym and at the same time to resist the mechanical influences that threaten to sterilize the modern artist. . . . disclosing his unique and provocative position as theorist and composer."

*Genesis*