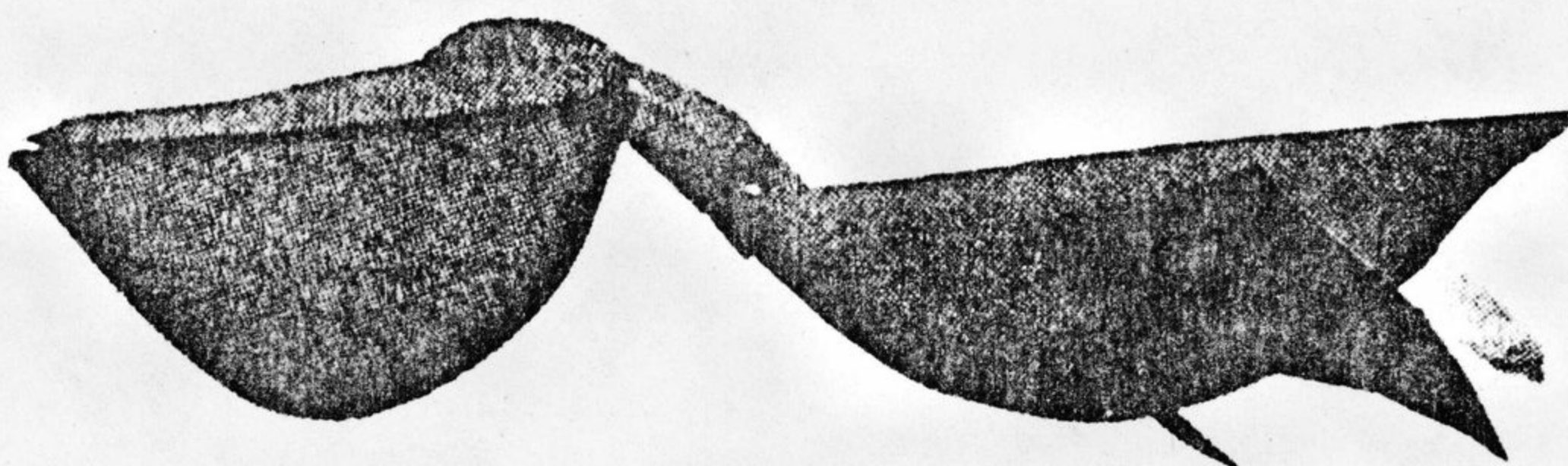


PARTCh



of a number of things including seven brass artillery shell casings. The Zymo-xyl (pronounced zi-mock-sil with accent on the first syllable) is made of two rows of empty liquor and wine bottles stacked upside down on a wood block, played by striking with a wooden mallet. In *Genesis of a Music*, Partch helpfully lists the tone ratios by brand. For instance, Jameson's Irish Whiskey is 8/5, Taylor's Sherry is 11/6, Bristol Cream Sherry 1/1, etc. The adapted violas and guitars obviously bear the most resemblance to standard instruments. There are also, among others, the cloud-chamber bowls (a series of hung glass shapes that are struck), a gourd tree, and several marimba variations.

After much skeptical response by the music world and the public, Partch finally achieved some acceptance in the '40s, with larger popular success from the '60s onward. Partch's dislike of specialized technical mastery translates to his requirements for performance. A "typical" (if such a word can ever be used with Partch) presentation involves a highly visible orchestra made up of people who can both play and sing, and when applicable, dance. The renaissance-type personality that allowed Partch to write music, build and repair instruments, and act as vocal and drama coach, also requires a similar versatility from his performers. Partch believed that live performance was the best way to enjoy music, as it is so involved with culture and community.

Partch's work has been filmed for NET as well as various small features for museums. Albums are available on Columbia Masterworks and CRI among other places.

Harry Partch by Danlee Mitchell from *Genesis of a Music*



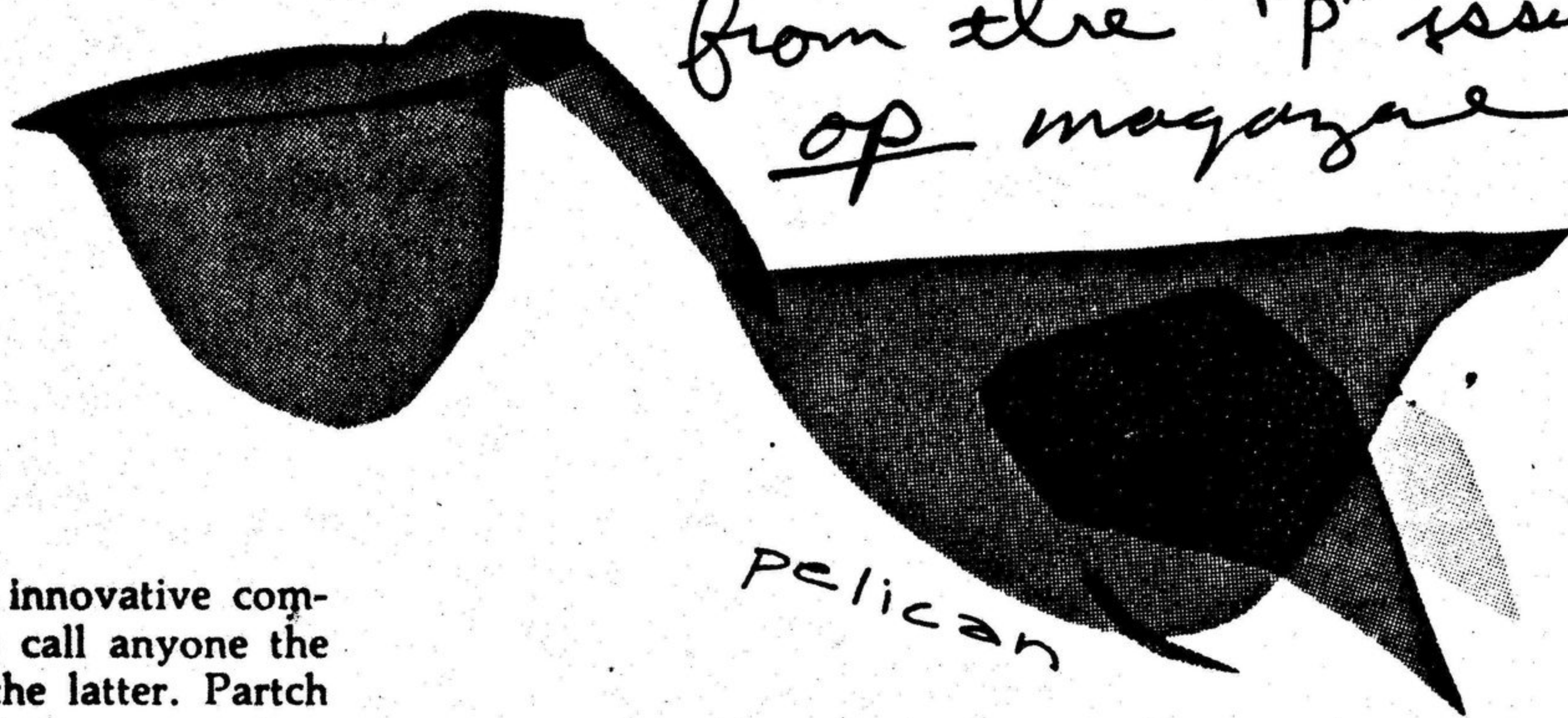
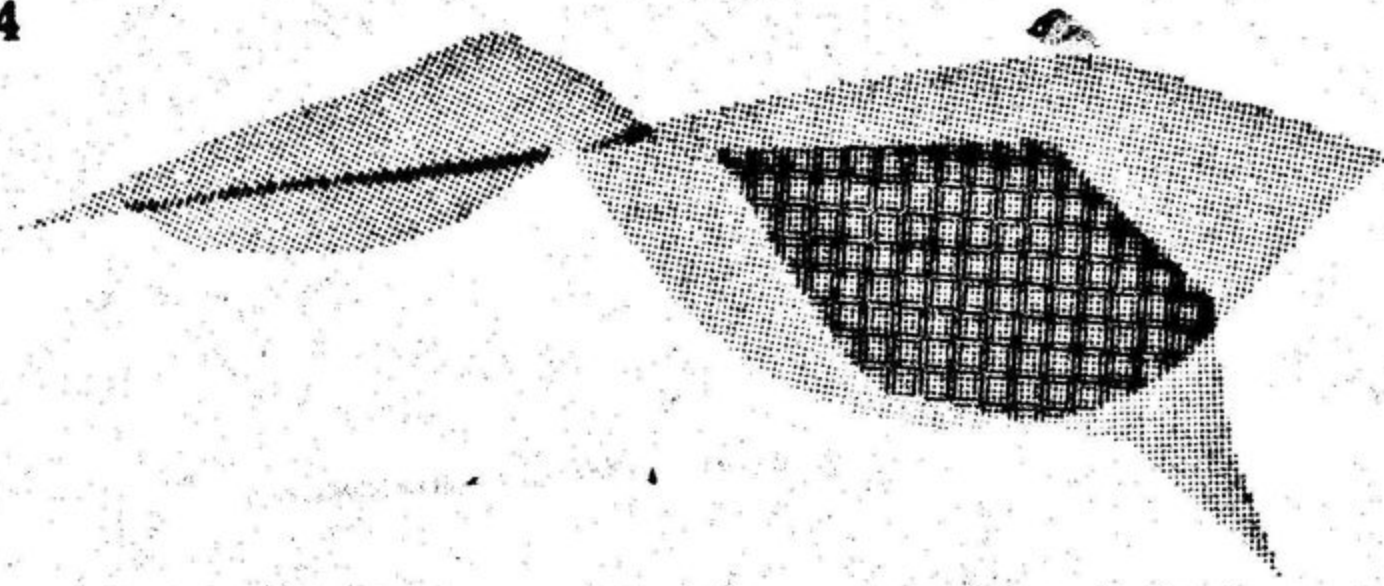
After the completion of *Dreamer* in 1973, Partch threw himself into the task of revising *Genesis of a Music*, which finally was published on July 11, just two months before his death. He also renewed his struggle for the commission check for *Delusion*, completed ten years before. That, too, came in the last two months of his life.

Since Partch's death, Danlee Mitchell and the ensemble have worked hard to keep his music in the concert halls. Money is always a problem, as are the constant repairs necessary to keep the old and brittle instruments in playing condition. The biggest break yet came in 1980 when the Berlin Music Festival gave \$150,000 to bring the ensemble to Germany to perform during a two-month new music festival. Other than that, the ensemble performs at least twice a year, mostly on the west coast, and the members play mainly for free. Future goals of the ensemble include repair and replacement of the instruments currently housed at U.C.-San Diego (where Mitchell is a faculty member) and plans to restage some of the works more in keeping with Partch's desires. There are plans for new recordings of Partch's earliest work *17 Lyrics by Li Po*, set for adapted viola and intoned voice, and perhaps a reissuing of the old independent Gate 5 recordings.

As for any new composers writing for the ensemble, theory presents the greatest barrier, as well as technical mastery of the instruments, although some of the performers from the '60s now work in Hollywood, and in 1977 recorded 15 minutes of music using the instruments. A fear expressed by some Ensemble members is that the works of Partch will reach a point where they are considered just beautiful set pieces, to be dusted off every five years, when someone raises the money to stage a new series of performances, without the immediacy, what Partch called the "corporeality" of music.

Whatever the eventual fate of Partch's music, it is thanks to him, to Mitchell, and to the Harry Partch Ensemble that there is a new generation of composers who have learned microtonal theory before studying conventional music.

[Much of the material for this article comes from interviews with Danlee Mitchell and the Harry Partch Ensemble, conducted by Jeffrey Bartone and myself, which will be aired on KAOS-FM, Olympia, Washington, in the near future. I am interested in hearing from other composers who use unusual tunings concerning cassette compilation of new works, and/or airplay on KAOS. Please contact me c/o OP. Thanks.]



Here are two short articles
from the "p" issue of
op magazine

HARRY PARTCH by Rebecca Brown

He's been called the greatest and the most innovative composer of the 20th century. It's silly to try to call anyone the former, but Harry Partch is most certainly the latter. Partch broke all the rules of traditional Western music by composing, performing, and building the instruments for his special brand of sound. His influences were as diverse as Chinese lullabies, Yaqui Indian rituals, Hebrew chants, and hobos' voices. And if you listen to his work with a little imagination, they're all there, as well as a million other things.

Partch outlined his view of the uses and abuses of traditional Western music in his 1947 book, *Genesis of a Music* (Da Capo Press). Partch's thesis was that traditions remain undisturbed when generations try to merely improve upon them. These undisturbed traditions Partch calls "senile" and suggests a radical rethinking of basics in their stead. Partch divides world music into two types, Corporeal and Abstract. Corporeal includes chants, folksongs, poetry, some dramatic music, dance music which tells a story or calls to mind ritual movement, and Partch's own work. Partch characterizes the Corporeal as essentially "tactile." Abstract music on the other hand, does not accompany words, or accompanies words that don't mean much. It relies more on technique than meaning or effect. Partch has very little use for it. He looks at music from Emperor Chun's 2300 B.C. dictum about the use of words in song, through Greek drama, 15th century Florentine opera, to modern American composers, to demonstrate the vitality of the Corporeal thread in music.

During the thirties, Partch worked a lot on the monophonic concept of the single human voice. "Barstow," for example, which dates from this period, is subtitled "Eight Hitch-hikers Inscriptions from a Highway Railing at Barstow, Ca." It is one of the four pieces that comprise "The Wayward," a collection of Americana that largely resulted from Partch's hobo days during the Depression. "Barstow" includes sung/spoken lyrics such as "It's January 26th. I'm freezing. I'm 23 and broke. I wish I was dead. I'm going home to Boston, Massachusetts," direct, unadorned quotations from United States's drifters. Much of the accompanying music sounds like it could be played on things hobos could find—empty bottles and cans, wooden boxes. Some of the rhythms imitate popular American songs and hymns, Native American chants. Some of it only comes from God knows where, Partch's imagination filtered through the unique instruments of his creation.

Partch is as well known for the instruments he designed and built as his compositions. Probably most well known is the chromelodeon, of which Partch made several models, originally adapted from a melodeon. This adapted reed pump organ is tuned to a 43-tone octave with a range of more than five octaves. The "chrome"lodeon uses an arbitrary color scheme to code the keys. All other instruments in Partch's outfit are tuned to this. Some of these others include the "Spoils of War," made

HARRY PARTCH & THE HARRY PARTCH ENSEMBLE by Norm Sohl

Harry Partch died on September the 3rd, 1974, at the age of 73. In the year before his death, filming and recording had been completed on what has to be his last major work, *The Dreamer that Remains*.

Previous to that work was a creative hiatus stretching back to 1966, and the composition of *Delusion of the Fury*. Difficulties surrounding the commission for *Delusion* disheartened Partch, and he turned the production work over to Danlee Mitchell (whom he credited with its final success, as well as encouraging him to finally write a second edition of his magnum opus, *Genesis of a Music*).

Danlee Mitchell feels that perhaps the most revealing work by Partch was the complex production *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*. Based in part on the *Bacchae* of Euripides, it was also based on the myth of Elvis Presley. Partch used *Revelation* to work out problems with his parents. He felt both love and hate for his parents, and this dichotomy is reflected in the work, as it is in the myth of Bacchus itself. Produced around 1960, this work involved lights, projections, and other media.

Everyone who knew him described him as a "very emotional person," and his music, his whole notion of corporeality, was based on emotional impact, not on abstract musical theory. As he grew older, however, he seemed to grow more depressed, and he once remarked to one of his performers that his collection of unusual instruments would "probably be regarded as a mere curiosity someday."

Around 1972, however, he received a commission from film producer Betty Freeman to write a piece to be used in a documentary called *The Dreamer that Remains*. This new interest in his work brought Partch actively back into composing, and, perhaps more importantly, into performing. It was also responsible for the formation of the group which remains today as The Harry Partch Ensemble.

Partch was described during this period by an ensemble member as "real fire and ice," not always getting along with others involved in the production. Once off the set, however, he could be charming. He liked drinking brandy and whisky, and told tales from his 10 years as a hobo during the Depression. He also had a broad knowledge of philosophy and literature.