

Boo (Bamboo Marimba)

Paul McAdams Photo

His about-face in music became complete between 1923 and 1928, and he wrote and performed the first music in his new medium in 1930-31. The first draft of his book, *Genesis of a Music*, he wrote in 1928, and twenty-one years later, after many rewritings and revisions, he found a publisher. In it, he expounds his philosophy of music, and his 43-tone-to-the-octave system of just intonation.

Aid has come to him from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (1934), Guggenheim (1943-45 and 1950), the University of Wisconsin (1944-47), and the Fromm Foundation (1956). Because of a small but highly partisan following, mostly in California, he manufactured records under his own label, *Gate 5 Records*, financing three works through subscriptions paid in advance. Previously, three pressings were made under the auspices of friends, all on 12-inch records at 78 rpm and now out of print. One set of two records contained Partch's earliest music in his present direction, settings of Li Po poems for voice and Adapted Viola. Another, a set of three records of *U.S. Highball*, for voice and four instruments. The third, a set of five records, *Twelve Intrusions*, mostly for voice and small combinations of his own instruments.

"Any of the Partch records is a collector's item, not only to hear but to keep because it will appreciate in value," wrote Oliver Daniel in *Music at Home*. Ray Ellsworth, in *High Fidelity*, called them "the con-

Kabuki theatre than anything else that comes to mind."

—*Irving Sablosky, New York Times*
 "... a closely integrated work that repays handsomely the closest attention. . . it is one of the most 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." —*Francis A. Klein, St. Louis Globe-Democrat*

THE RECORDS

Plectra and Percussion Dances. One 12-inch LP (two sides).
Oedipus. Excerpted from one 12-inch LP (two sides).
The Bewitched. Complete; two 12-inch LP record set (four sides).
U. S. Highball. One 10-inch LP (two sides). Also available in tape stereo.

Address: Gate 5 Records
 P.O. Box 989, Evanston, Illinois

FILMS—16MM

Windsong. Produced and directed by Madeline Tourtelot. Sound track by Partch. Shown at the Brussels Exposition, 1958. Copy requested for archives of Cinématique Belgique. *Film Images* Collection.

Music Studio: Harry Partch. A film showing Partch performing on the ten instruments he used in the *Windsong* score. Camera, Charles Dee Sharp. Producer, Madeline Tourtelot. *Film Images*.

HARRY PARTCH — AUTHOR

GENESIS OF A MUSIC, University of Wisconsin Press, 1949.

"Attentive reading . . . should rank this book among the most significant musical documents of many years. Were every theory, every mathematical computation, every musical judgment proved wrong, the book would still be significant. For Mr. Partch's treatise stimulates basic thinking on the nature of music." —*Review of General Semantics*

" . . . a vigorous attempt to escape from the impasse of the major-minor mode plus enharmony, and at the same time to resist the mechanical influences that threaten to sterilize the modern artist."

New York University Press (edited by Eric Larrabee)

"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."

—*Keith McGary, Antioch Review*
 . . . represents a rare combination of autobiographical seriousness, agile wit and enthusiasm, technical thought, and a refreshing lack of dogmatism."

—*Music Library Association Notes*.

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Harry Partch

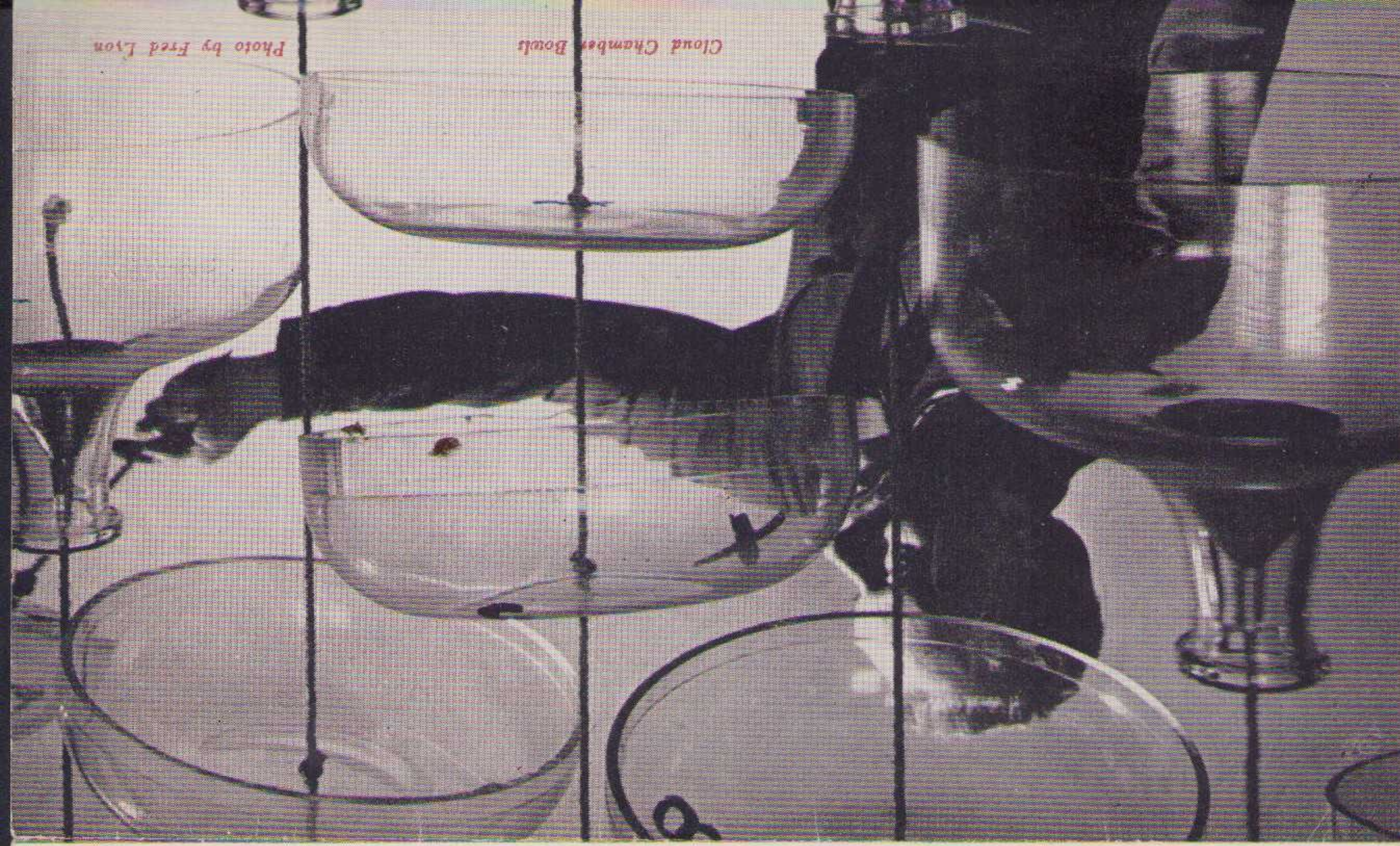


Photo by Fred Lyon

Cloud Chamber Bowls

HARRY PARTCH

NOT in a musical criticism but in an editorial appearing in the *Dayton Daily News* do we find this perceptive comment on Harry Partch:

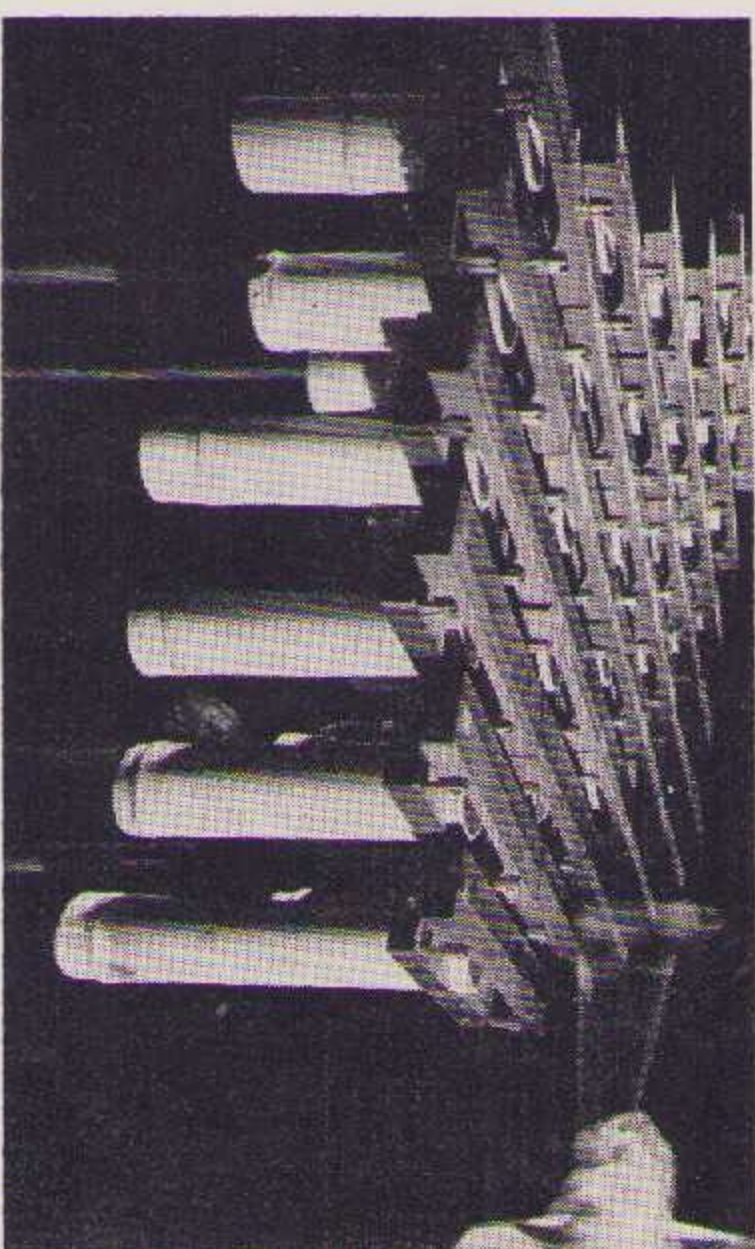
"The very world in which he lives is strange because, after 35 years, he alone is fully at home in it. What is not strange at all is that Partch's music is intensely dramatic and pictorial. His first rejection, after abandoning conventional music, was any temptation to be obscure and abstract, to set 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."

His world is "strange" because, beginning in 1923, he felt compelled to pursue a musical way all his own, built instruments over the years to implement it, trained musicians to play the new music, and—finally—in recent years, issued his own recordings. Out of this have come "intimations of a wholly new genre which has already produced some remarkable works," according to Jacques Barzun. "Partch is one of those inspired, stubborn radicals of creative



Bass Marimba

Fred Lyon Photo



Diamond Marimba

Fred Lyon Photo

thought who never exactly fit in anywhere," wrote Peter Yates.

The same critic called Partch's instruments "about as portable as a one-man show of totem poles." The difficulties that beset presentations of his music are only occasionally surmounted. Thus, *Newsweek* spoke of them as "rare events," and of the "vast curiosity and delight of two audiences in the Middle West, when his ballet was performed."

Because he demonstrates little affinity for the main stream of Western music, Partch gives the music reviewer, sympathetic or adverse, few familiar landmarks for verbal orientation. Said *Time*, "Harry Partch is a composer who has most of his critics completely flummoxed." According to one New York newspaper, "when the music was moving, it was so only in so far as it cursed, groaned, released sounds of pain," while another, covering the same program, called it "the season's most 'sophisticated' concert." His work has evoked printed descriptions ranging from "pieces composed in a booby hatch" and "a potential Pandora's music box," to "hypnotic," and a "25th century jam session." A Middle Western paper spoke of the "capacity audience" at one of the Partch affairs, and called it "the kind of evening about which they can talk for days, if they can find words to describe it."

Partch believes passionately in an American music that grows from an awareness of world-wide and millennium-old cultures, not limited to either the instruments or the musical philosophies of Europe's 18th and 19th centuries, and he aims all of his own music toward a synthesis of arts, in a union with narrative, drama, ballet. He has never been associated with a music school, either as student or teacher, and nearly all of his work has been pursued in the Far West and Middle West, away from the Europe-oriented Atlantic seaboard.

Reviewers in California were already covering his

programs in the early 1930's. One, describing his settings of Li Po and Biblical passages in the *Pacific Coast Musician*, declared that "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 Hebrew chant," and he predicted that Partch would be "a bearded angel before he hears even the first public whisperings of his ideas rising from the earth."

But this reviewer, as do most, misjudged the degree of persistence and dedication in Harry Partch. He was born in Oakland, California, in 1901. He had little formal music training in the remote areas of the Arizona and New Mexico deserts where he grew up, but pursued studies on his own in public libraries, and in small experiments on stringed instruments.



Kithara II

Emmett Smith Photo