

Tuesday 30 March 1993

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Several days of drizzle then this morning extremely bright glare with the dawning--have to go to the other room because even with the shades down I can't have that much glare in my face.

Forerunner of what Summer is going to be like. Obvious remedy is to write at night and in late afternoon.

Advantage is that the Solar EnergyDept., the clothesline will dry all the clothes quicker and I can run the washing machine today.

Jonathan showed up Sunday with Bill Wesley so I was able to hand him X B 12.

People sending me clippings on this and that I can't keep it clear of the junk mail on the desk so worry about throwing them away by accident. Usually no such problem.

Chalmers sent me some CMJ pages so I will report later.

Marlin Halverson called me from El Paso TX recently--he disappeared from San Berdoo naborhood a while back and I wondered what happened--he got a position as gallery director at Univ. of TX El Paso which of course is a long way from Houston. This position may not last so he wants to find zanother place before it is too late. (My instruments were exhibited in San Bernardino vicinity for a while before my having to leave Glendale and I had no way of getting a ride out. there to see the exhibition.

He sent me colpies of the college paper after the show was over and I had my things back.

One of the articles you sent me: Non keyboard Intonation in 17th & 18th centuries: This is the sort of thing that Johnny Reinhard would dote on. While it establishes that because of the use of d $\sharp$ comma meantone and the other Meantone varfeties mentioned in the article, there were wind instruments and special fingerings which distinguished between G sharp and A-flat, it does not give us any moral support for new compositions today which can use this diēsis as a new melodic interval or to use G-sharp and A-flat in the same chord. That is, by publicizing historical material of this kind, we do not gain new members for a Xenharmonic Composers Network. Instead we might get scoldings from members of the Rear View Mirror Religion which is against all musical progress. I found that out back in 1933 or so when trying to write about 50 measures of microtonal stuff for a string quartet and they got as angry as the members of some religious sect would have!

Another fact I learned before 1940 already, was that string quartets play everything so FAST that you cannot get them to sustain a chord to find out its degree of justice or injustice! Theorists don't seem to realize this affair that I learned about in my teens.

One evening I was invited to the back room of a photographic studio in Portland to hear the photographer's friends perform a Mozart Quartet and no chord was ever sustained long enough to ascertain its Twelvitude or Nontwelveveness. They just zipped through the whole thing. Back in the 1930's there were nowhere as many metal strings with plastic interwindings for violin family instruments as there are today. This means that during a typical string quartet or other standard kind of chamber composition there was always enoiugh time for the gut strings to go out of tune.

We have to be very careful in writing abolut tuning questions, not to extrapolate contemporary instrumental characteristics back in time, not even back 50 years when nylon strings were not yet standard, nor 60 years ago when they weren't known by the standard musical world. It is impossible for me to convey in writing or retrospective how repressive, oppressive, and suppressive life was in the early thirtie
It alone the twenties when I was a little boy.

How much of that was due to Portland Oregon as compared with San Francisco or Los Angeles I have no way of knowing because I didn't get to California till mid 1935.

Grinding out copies of Cassettes ## 419 & 420. Fortunately the double speed duplicator hasn't quit yet. However, about one cassette in 25 will have something wrong with it.

Quality Control and all that stuff!

I do what I can to verify my copies, but obviously can't play every copy all the way through.

Some checking is afforded by playing them back on a different machine made elsewhere.

I have hopes of hearing from someone who has attended that expensive songwriters' seminar which was held in San Diego on the 27th and the 28th. Indeed I wonder if there are that many neophyte songwriters in the San Diego area under present economic conditions who could afford to squander \$200 on a thing like that. Under all the doom and gloom being bandied about these days regarding San Diego Economics.

I found out how tightly restricted the form of popular songs was, way back as a teenager, so I never planned to do any such thing. They were all standardized and interchangeable.

* * * You asked me at the beginning of one of the articles you sent about the early electronic instruments.

I probably showed you my collection of early electronic music patents. Coupeleux and Givélet did some photoelectric things in the organ line. I probably have one of their patents. The idea, about 1938-39, was that I wanted to study the Basic electronic music patents before trying to invent anything serious. In the course of this I got horribly disillusioned with the patent system. I needn't elaborate here, for you saw the tragicomic antics of the would be inventors at that church meeting room in East San Diego that night! Ugg.

If I remember correctly, the Hellertion was a vacuum tube oscillator deal.

Probably sounded like some of the timbres that the analog synthesizers can play.

The Trautonium was a sawtooth-wave deal. The Emicon was a Russian affair apparently using vacuum tube oscillators that actually was presented in a Moscow auditorium during the Soviet Dark Ages.

Los Angeles in 1939 somebody in an invention development company told me about Nuttall's invention which was a photoelectric organ:

I went to the L A Library and read through the patents, but of course, never heard it.

In 1945 I did have a chance to hear the Pendulum instrument of John H. Whitney senior -- infrasonic swingings of pendulums worked a shutter exposing a film sound-track, which was then played back (after developing of course) at anywhere from 64 to 300 times the speed at which the pendulums had been recorded.

Mostly very dull sinewave stuff not in 12-tone nor just--not sure what scale was intended. Anyway some of this got heard by avant gardists right after WW II was over. Then Whitney went Computer Graphics and I don't know how this ended.

Musical Curiosity Dept.: I was able to get an album of 78's played on the Hammond Novachord when it was at its height right after WW II. Now I have to find a working 78 turntable and pickup so I can play it and copy it. However, today's analog synthesizers sound much better than the Novachord did. The Novachord when I had several chances to play one and hear it played over the radio, had a nerve-racking whining quality that didn't bother at first but after ten minutes you were Up the Wall! Hammond had invented it back in the Thirties to be the Successor to the Piano, but the piano manufacturers and the Musicians' Unions battled him to the death so that didn't happen. I have copies of a few important Novachord and rivals' patents here someplace.

It was agonizing to have to live through the nearly forty years domination by the Hammond Organ that was on all the radio and TV. I was sure glad when that era ended, and when all the synthesizers and samplers including those here had imitations of it which actually are IMPROVEMENTS OF ITS SOUND. That is for reasons you can easily deduce.

Back to early tube instruments: the standard vacuum tube oscillator circuits gave rise to instruments using the very same circuit but having different NAMES. More names than actual timbre differences.

The Conn Organ's Hartley oscillator circuits were among the best electronic organ tones.

Held back during World War II but briefly getting marketed right after the war was over.