

Thursday 26 February 1981
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Greetings---

Cold morning after some rains last night, but of course I have much more plastic to cover things this time.

I couldn't actually get hold of an OMNI until about 4 PM yesterday, when the big paperback store about 3 blocks from here had it. You should have seen the man at the counter jump when he saw the picture on p. 47. So that's three full days it took to get here as compared to Houston. My new neighbors saw it Tuesday evening, however. After leaving the bookstore I stopped in at the tiny new collector's record shop one block from here. And got a similar reaction.

While Cris Forster is mentioned and quoted, his instruments didn't get in. Ervin is mentioned, then Hacklemann and Secor, all on the subject of new keyboards for non-12. While the Scalatron is mentioned, mainly from the quote they got from Mandelbaum, nothing about Motorola or Harasek strangely enough. Some computer people got mentioned. (But cheek-by-jowl, the other principal article in this issue is How To Rob A Bank With A Computer).

So far no strange phone calls or inquiries, but this is only the first day--presumably no subscriber got theirs before Tuesday at the earliest. But think of the million or more subscribers! Somebody is going to want a Megalyra or to hear it at least.

I am surprised at CME not being there either. The level of the article is more technical than I expected--I was sort of expecting an idiot-popularization, but they got most of the non-12 idea over.

Trying to figure out how you can take advantage of the article--note that the cover of the magazine says Music For the 21st Century although that article-title Endless Scale does not immediately clue the reader that they have turned to the right page. "Endless Scale" refers to an illusion of infinitely descending, which was recorded on a disk several years ago but I have never heard it. Hammond Organ Co. had a patent some time before on a "Circular Scale" which is the same thing--the quality of tone is so adjusted for each note by adding and removing partials with each note, that when you reach the octave you are right back where you started so the scale goes on forever (pace Gödel-Escher-Bach, which I believe mentioned this thing also). Now maybe this is a curiosity but I doubt its usefulness in a real composition.

If Interval wasn't mentioned, Xeh Btn and X H weren't either. I suspect this might be they don't, as a matter of policy, advertise other magazines--yet Guitar Player did. No, they did not send me an OMNI, but I am not the author of this article now, while I was the author of the GP article.

At the paperback store I saw Wallace/Wallachinsky book of Predictions.

A number of the predictions pertain to music--such as electronic advances--the orchestra in the home--the tempo of a recording being controlled by the amateur violinist or what ever slowing down or speeding up and the record will follow him. Nothing about new scales.

For about the year 2030, pick up somebody's brainwaves and retrieve the correct compositions from a library of records to match the mood of the moment.

Well, we are ahead of the Futurists this time. Lots of things already down in solid hardware that they can't even imagine for 2050.

As matters stand, you have an array of instruments and are ready to appear with them so probably that is the best way to take advantage of the article--appear with them, be seen and heard, and in the case of the Megalyra and Drone and Kosmolyra, in some way call attention to the fret-line patterns which fortunately do show in the picture. Then you have gourds and percussions and the Godzilla and other affairs which make the ensemble of instruments yours, and your version of the Harmonic Canon is quite distinct from Forster's. Or the beat-up ones in the Partch Ensemble either.

This is going to be touchy perhaps to certain other people--but don't look backward too much! Forster brought up Back-To-Bach and has been acting out Back-To-Partch while also doing a Debussy Image. Don't emulate this! By publishing Partch's own words in Interval, you have paid your due debt to him. But the Interval Foundation is not the Partch MEMORIAL Foundation! This OMNI thing where I am tied in with the FUTURE, and s-f people and High Technology, sharpens the issue. Which is why I bring it up.

The issue is even sharper after last Monday, when I was taken over to John Campbell's place where three people share it and here he is with TV monistors and facsimile machines and videotapes, but an ancient grand piano which is woefully out of tune and Beethoven and Chopin et al. on the music-rack and here he takes me to a cello recital which was Nothing But Bach Beethoven & Brahms, although the cellist and pianist were only 23 each. And Ambassador Auditorium (Where Walter Unterberg's orchestra has performed twice I believe) looks like an import from Vienna ca. 1870. He isn't looking forward to a synthesizer but instead to that \$30 000 Bösendorfer in the Ambassador Auditorium.##

We can quote ~~Partch~~ Partch and cite the book, but this backward trend to acoustical instruments ONLY and the manner in which some of the CME people are doing everything the hardest old way and the most expensive way, when we are surrounded with new sounds and new electronic devices pouring out of everywhere, amounts to SPURNING opportunity. Well maybe your New Age Natural Living people are still young and can afford to go Back On The Farm to the Simple Life, but in my physical condition and at my age I can't. I don't have time.

Partch was using reed-organs and such because he did his basic research at the time they were plentiful and affordable. Now they are extremely expensive nostalgia.

At the time he was putting his orchestra together and figuring out and putting his System into practice, amplifiers were not good enough. Speakers weren't good enough. There was no electronic organ that could have been put in his system, so this accounts for his disdain--it was justifiable at that time--the 20's the 30's the WW II period. I could have built the bodies of the Megalyra and Drone Instrument in the 30s if I had had the idea, but the amplifiers of the time would not have had the bass volume and impact that today's amplifiers and speakers do have.

There were no recordings, even professional, that would have done justice to it. So he had to build marimbas that take up a whole auditorium. But why emulate that now? Why crowd ourselves out of house and home?

Especially after 41 years with the amplifying clavichord and watching it go to rack and ruin not once but four times with each wrecking-by-moving-and-storage.

You are living in the 1980s, not the 1920s as Partch had to. So I feel no guilt about using 1980 technology, and that two-page spread in the magazine links me up with the synthesizer because there is no caption telling whose synthesizer it is--something like Guilt By Association--I am offered a free Synthesizer Connection! Almost as though the OMNI editors had done a new Treasure Map for me. And printed a million copies which by now are resting in a million locations! This means the Images of the Future Music are now in the air all over the place, not the Images of 1850 or 1920 or even 1935. For the month ending March 23rd at least.

That is, we must acknowledge our debt to Partch for having withstood all the opponents and abuse and slanders and having evolved a system in opposition to the Symphony Orchestra Establishment and the Piano Manufacturers' Cartel, but nevertheless all that is now History, 1910-1975 or so. The Partch Memorial Foundation does the memorializing with their concerts and the Preservation at San Diego State, as I have been told by those who visited there. Interval is a NEWSmagazine so should be more like Time or Newsweek than like a HistoryBook.

Interval is not the Second Partch Memorial Organ. Your Partchiana show where you come from, not where you are going to. When you quoted his own words, you gave them in the Historical Present narrative style--that was the situation in 1930 or 1940 or whenever. Those were his problems, not yours today. You have to keep on quoting Partch or otherwise showing where the non-12 movement originated, and so for Carrillo and Novaro and all the other dead-and-buried people who did thus and so--Haba Vyshnegradski and please don't forget Helmholtz and Ellis and Oetigen and Hauptmann and Huygens--but my respect for all these ghosts and shades and souls-departed does not compell me to use only their limited non-electronic instruments.

I don't have to do long division by hand and consult tables of logarithms to work out tuning-systems just because Alexander John Ellis had no other way to write his Appendix to Helmholtz. I don't have to get a tuning-fork tonometer made just because that was all that Helmholtz could use to tune with. But it looks that way to the newcomers because of all this Forest Lawn Mausoleum Memorializing stuff.

Take Cris Forster's depressing the audience by reciting somebody's requiem for the victims of the Alamo, for instance. That is hardly inducing newcomers to join in for Progress Into New Musical Systems! That is to say we don't have to worry about him because he is caught in his own trap. He had too much conservatory training and too much piano-rebuilding so got "hung up" back there.

- Ervin was drafting at Lear-Siegler and had a chance, just after I met him, to learn some electronics since he was drawing the masters for printed circuits and the plans for contemporary electronic equipment, but somehow missed or spurned the opportunity and now it's too late. I'm not quite sure just how we go about doing anything for him but of course Glen will help and there might be some way he could benefit from being mentioned in the article. The tubulong idea is at least affordable and constructible by the average home-workshop buff, so because it uses standard available materials is practical.

If I get a copy-cassette of my 31-tone piece as performed by 4 persons instead of 1 and twice as fast and five times as loud as I did it originally, it will be interesting for you to make the comparison. 18 years after my composing it. Improvisation, tape recorded and then transcribed. Glen expanded the compass of the piece from one octave to three. Then added a percussion part.

If I wanted to do it over myself I would have to rewrite and take advantage of 31-tone harmony. I may never have the time.

The point is, you are a contemporary person and in an ultramodern environment, so take advantage of that fact NOW, instead of tying yourself back to History and Bygone Dead People. For instance, the Godzilla and Wing and some of the other things are very-up-to-date as Visual Art, while technologically they are about 1940-50 (I mean San Diego Style Aircraft Welding and Materials etc.). The sounds are more o modern than the technology-stage they reflect.

While k most of my ammunition has been shot off at the Pianosaur, there are some other holdovers from the past and memorial museum relics holding back musical progress--I don't have to detail them to you because you know all about them. The point is that certain instruments cannot play in the new scales and thereby hold us back. I'm Glad that Doug Garr got the point about COSTING TOO MUCH until the Electronic Age. And didn't present me as the re-incarnation of Somebody Or Other. (That's another trap--forcing role-playing or play-acting on another person--We were V I P's back in Atlantis for something.) Or, there is an available pigeonhole or image to categorize you or me by, so somebody files us there! (Re-reading Ellis the other evening, I ran across his complaint that instruments to demonstrate Just Intonation were too expensive so he had to invent the Harmonical Tuning for Harmoniums of his time. How about that?)

We can't convert enough Millionaires to non-12 to start the movement. So the prices of instruments have to be down within reason. And guitars for other scales would not cost any more if originally made with the new fretting. This applies equally to synthesizers. Never mind the conventional keyboard--I had no trouble with my organ using the conventional keyboard with 17 19 22 and just mapped onto it. That is a pseudoproblem.

I can close with this question to all the Interval Foundation personnel: What century and what decade are you living in? Yours.