



Harry Partch

The Harry Partch Collection Volumes 1 & 2

New World CD 2005

Harry Partch

The Wayward

Wergo CD 2002

Harry Partch: the militant tuner's militant tuner? With his tailor-made 43-note Just Intonation, his self-invented instruments and the reach of his influence – he was a source of ideas for every composer mentioned so far who wasn't alive during the Baroque and classical eras – he deserves his place more than anybody else here, but to me his work throws up awkward, unpalatable questions.

My first problem is this. While Harrison's *Simfony In Free Style*, Young's *Well-Tuned Piano*, Riley's *Harp Of New Albion* and Pauline Oliveros's concept of 'Deep Listening' all crash the threshold of our perception of how music can move through a space-time continuum, sucking us inside sounds hitherto beyond us, despite Partch's nuanced tuning system, his motor rhythms, his square metres and his singalong melodies are broadly within the syntax of music as we already understand it. My second problem is that, simply, I can't enjoy listening to his music. I find the counterpoint between seeming gestural naivety and the bureaucratic grip of Partch's tunings an uneasy mix. The original scroll version of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, the whole book in one 600-page long paragraph, puts form and content in tune; the neatly paragraphed edited version is a shoddy compromise.

And yet I feel terrible for even raising objections because Partch's art was entirely without cynicism, deriving as it did from his remarkable on-the-road lifestyle; collecting graffiti to use as text in pieces, trying to persuade WB Yeats into collaborating and finally receiving a Guggenheim award in 1943 that allowed him to move his self-invented instruments from paper to reality. *The Harry Partch Collection* documents his own recordings from the 1950s and 60s, including totemic works like the graffiti based *Barstow* and *And On The Seventh Day Petals Fell In Petaluma* for a large group of Partch's instruments, all tuned in Just Intonation. But *The Wayward*, featuring Partch scholar Dean Drummond's Newband ensemble

and the classical singers Stephen Kalm and Robert Osborne, highlights how Partch jammed himself inside a creative cul de sac: without his whiskied voice, the music is drained of personality and feels uncomfortably like a Broadway musical.

Pauline Oliveros/Ellen Fullman

Suspended Music

Periplum CD 1997

Ellen Fullman

Body Music

Experimental Intermedia Foundation CD 1991

Pauline Oliveros & University Of Michigan Digital Music Ensemble

Sound Piece

Deep Listening Institute DVD 2010

In her recent book *Sounding The Margins: Collected Writings 1992–2009* (published by her Deep Listening Foundation), the scope of Pauline Oliveros's aspirations for what music *could* be if only musicians might listen first and play later, is writ large. Oliveros questions all our assumptions about how music is made, and why we want to play it. Like Riley, she began foraging around the West Coast underground, working with the San Francisco Tape Music Center, but unlike Riley and other SFTMC affiliates such as Steve Reich, Oliveros has remained admirably wary of classical music institutions. And presumably the distrust is mutual: if her ideas were to catch on in any big way, orchestras and opera houses would need to be closed down immediately.

Because you can see her strategies in action, the *Sound Piece* DVD is an excellent Oliveros primer in itself. There's an option to experience each of the works – *Sound Piece*, *Sound Fishes* and *Heart Of Tones* – in 5.1 surround sound, and all three text based scores are included as a DVD 'extra'. For *Sound Piece*, each musician is invited to define a sound source of their own and play within a grid system of durations, the only condition being that the sound must not be "identifiable as a fragment or

phrase of music". Performing *Sound Piece* requires faith in Oliveros's system, in her invitations to make sound inside a proactive listening environment where classical performers, who prefer to be led, rarely flourish. "The essence of musicianship is the ability to discern the least change in pitch or tempo and relate that discernment to a field of ongoing sound or musical relationships," she says. "The more I listen, the more I learn to listen."

Suspended Music includes performances of Oliveros's *Epigraphs In The Time Of AIDS* and *TexasTravelTexture* by Ellen Fullman, whose 'long string instrument' – 100 90-foot strings with electronic pickups at each end played with rosin-coated fingers, rather like walking around the inside of a giant grand piano – reverberates in sympathy with Oliveros's ideals. She describes the mission of Deep Listening as "seeking out, listening to, and interacting with unusual spaces in order to make music. Space is an integral part of sound. One cannot exist without the other. We explore natural, constructed, imaginary, and virtual spaces to savour and enjoy their salient acoustical characteristics." It's the natural vibrations of Just Intonation that allow Oliveros and Fullman – whose *Body Music* demonstrates how powerfully her long string instrument walks the walk – to realise these heady ambitions, making me aware that Partch's music can somehow never escape the gestural silhouettes of equal temperament.

Joe Maneri & Peter Dolger

Peace Concert

Unheard Music Series CD 2008, rec 1963

It's a paradox that the expressive cry-point of Billie Holiday, Johnny Hodges, Pee Wee Russell and Ornette Coleman – melodic contours that fall and bend around 'equal' harmonic fundamentals – rely entirely on equal temperament for those derivations from 'the norm' to be heard. Just Intonation bebop, or modal jazz, is a horrible thought, and that's presumably why there has

Pauline Oliveros (centre) and Ellen Fullman (right) playing *Suspended Music*, 1997

