

## DELUSION'S ENCLOSURE: ON HARRY PARTCH (1901-1974)

*Stephen Motika*

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“This is my trinity: sound-magic, visual beauty, experience-ritual.”

*-Harry Partch*

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I.

a gist (of origin) to say born Oaklandia on 6.24.01

later

child of deserts

“the dying gasps of the old West”

til in Tucson

Benson (three hundred people and eleven saloons)

& @ Albuquerque

in nights, long freight trains passing

antiphonal then

steam whistle 60 miles yonder

small garden : Phoenix : rising, then falling

books in Mandarin  
(parents who lost their missionary zeal)

trips to Kansas City & musical studies & jobs as porters

but at 14, he knew that it was

SOUND

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II.

what early music?

hymns  
Chinese lullabies  
Yaqui Indian puberty rituals  
Hebrew chants  
Edison cylinder records  
Okie songs  
(working the vineyards)

took a trashing from proper musical lessons in Los Angeles but

no  
deep  
&  
abiding  
tie

mother struck dead by a streetcar

father dead a couple of yrs

age 20 / alone from there on and ever

this young metropolis and trips to Philharmonic hall

triumphant love  
a roll/ hay roll with  
lost  
Roman Novarro

(murdered by two hustlers four decades later)

always a love for the body

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III.

with parts

p-a-r-t-c-h

study : history of tone

fifty-three tone system proposed by the Chinese in the first century  
by Nicholas Mercator in the 17th

- microtonal mishaps in the west -

as if to say

just-intonational scales

then to New Orleans and New York and London and Malta

a return to

Li Po verse

on adapted viola

*where do you live?*

*off a city street*

*and ten thousand houses among drooping willows*

1930-1947 singing Biblical passages, hitch-hiker transcripts.

Why all the trouble?

MUSIC

“a language in itself“

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IV.

Greek &  
Noh  
drama,

Japanese  
kabuki

Mummer's  
plays

CREATION

dramas containing music, dance, mime, shouting, whistline, and slapstick

so early (to have known) so late (to have been discovered to have known)

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V.

back from San Joaquin

(keeping music in hobo bundle)

at Big Sur

coast work camp

met Jean Varda

an understanding, as iff to say we're in

synchrony

synchrony

for painters

always loving, loving, loving, loving

(men)

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## VI. BITTER MUSIC (DEPRESSION ERA SUITE)

*-alpha-*

convict camps, coast of magnificent

descend-  
ings

CALI

black mountain to coast(line)

every starry  
whiten  
ed

ridge

clasp  
coast road

in moves north

and east

return south to

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-beta-

warm (to) sleeing bag

Pablo's soup in hand

willowed sands

river'side

entihillion stars

"Why wander?"

*gone away for-ever*

in the eternity of finity

& thumb my nose at tomorrow



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*-gamma-*

Slate's hot springs

long since

dead

an ownership

a Bright Angel leads to the baths

on board to Big Creek (wink, wink)

*evening campfire, San Simon*

at Cone Peak

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*-delta-*

at Ojai dry leaved pepper tree body  
    riddled white snaked water  
    in the blackness  
an inky o-high oak  
    a beauty of hands stroke

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VII.

August beach, ocean breath

Mount Diablo

sinking beneath the horizon

stay & move

to pass peak

with men

food and flops and "well-made chaps"

yes yes

all this

brazen talk

by creeks and woodsheds and more along side the highway

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VIII.

to make:

“U.S. Highball,” hobo trip with music

*going East mister? (plucked)*

*Freeze another night tonight*

*Stay out of Denver*

*It moves back and forth*

*Is that blanket big enough for two?*

*Chicago, Chicago, Chicago*

end at Sparks division yards

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IX.

in red  
wood

groves of

euca-  
lypt

after several durations at Ithaca and Madison

for isolation, interview

founded his instrument workshop

“a philosophical man seduced into carpentry”

river camper  
woodworker

“an acoustical ardor and a conceptual fervor”

tuning:total gambit of dissonance and consonance

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X.

Orchestra at Gualala:

a. zymo-xyI

“excerise in hither and thither aesthesia”  
with kettletop, oak block, on hubcap, wine and booze bottles

b. Gourd Tree Gong

twelve bells (exotic fruit) on eucalypt bar  
& piece of aircraft bomber

c. Mazda Marimba

god of light sounds like the percolations of a coffee pot

d. Spoils of Wars

seven brass artillery casings hanging here “instead of  
shredding young men’s bodies on the battle field”

e. Cloud-Chamber Bowls

chemical-solution jars from the university’s radiation lab

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XI.

activation of investigation and interventions with Yeats

and enticement

HP: "I have read his prefaces—I love his prefaces, incidentally."

WBY: "A California musician called a few days ago and is coming again tomorrow. He is working on the relation between words and music.... He speaks to this instrument."

HP: "The minute I brought out my viola and sang, Yeats just loved it. He's not one for the theory."

the taking of Oedipus and opera written

happily written here, the land of no there there.

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## XII.

compelled by kithara

Partch built a great lyre of 72 strings

Orpheus's lyre had three stings.

Timotheus (446-357 BC), who dared to expand the scale on the Kithara by adding four strings to the eight approved of by Pythagoras was driven out of Sparta forever.

“These days, when someone does something different, they ignore him to death.”



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XIII.

intoned dialogue god, then help us assemble

by way of chorus

Oh--- Oh--- Oh--- Ah--- Ah--- Ah---

in way of applicant's branches

*with such cries of sorrow*

good news of lights, curtains

suffering in homeless sea, thunder, lightening, lost to

as "death himself is dead"

Tiresias, presented by spokesman,  
regales Creon

anger of mattering, basest of men,

a filling  
this rage  
against

evidence of

proof?

a tumult of iron, prophets forgotten

Oh- Oh-      Lo-      Oh-      Lo- Oh-

where is Bold Oedipus?

(quick sketches by Lebrun, Baskin, Kolwitz)

appointed end, free from

pain

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XIV.

euphoric

aside  
warehouse

descending  
*narrow*  
stairway

in scene six from 1956

baroque leaps

“Anyone can dream of bringing control to Sausalito love affair.”

but only the witch can accomplish it

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XV.

back from Urbana:

Ancient Chorus in "Revelation in the Courthouse Park"

this palace  
alights to be seen by  
piccolo

transient

(Dionysus, Pentheus, Agave, Cadmus,  
Tiresias, Guard, Herdsmen, and Chorus)

Greek melodrama arrived in  
rural Illinois

kithara & instruments

here, on the seventh day,

petals

fell on

Petaluma

in voiceless score

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XVI.

west Los Angeles boulevard:

chromelodean, counts six 2/1 harmonium

collapsed

a monophony: the might of the HUMAN e-a-r

the breeze as perceived by Marin Mersenne, on the throat

equivocation of the *klang*

in components of tone

in ratios,

cycles

in intervals,

immediacy

in frequencies

systems

in procedures

limits

tasks to Pasadena Museum

All to be tasked by "Delusions' Fury," chance dramas on stage.

HP: *I would choose to be anonymous.  
Who cares who wrote it?  
Who cares about what the name was?*

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XVII.

*The Dreamer that Remains*

Viet's time

soul's chance, five decades apart, was Stephen Pouliot

"turn left on Orpheus Drive, left on Sunset"  
in this small town

Pacific, a sexy beach

where, to find

Peace  
Love

stairway's chant

volcanic Harry: looking down, laughing

Etruscan touchstone

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XVIII.

how to see him, on film, all too late

kimono purple

Partch sees

a loss of rose petal jam

a harmonic convergence

in this study for loving (underwritten by Betty Freeman):

in red/ yellow/ pale blue tank tops & jeans

a set of constructions to hold beautiful boys

in floating atmosphere of white

at San Diego State

“tongue must couple with the cavity or there’s no resonant tone. yes, this is sexy.”

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XIX.

and with Lou Harrison

stackside, found each other in the SF public library

clearing house for books, for s-x years

to speak to each other.

mentorship. of generosity. and of knowing.

teased about inflexibility of his "systems"

hosted in redwood park

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## XX.

1974: back again: *Genesis of Music* springs from the *Dreamers* creation.

“Note: the widely current practice of using the word note to indicate a musical sound, or pitch, is not followed in this work.”

final interview ater interview, lost road, the sign ever propped before

generation of youth

## LISTEN TO THAT

piet piper

red-lamped light

shaded Socrates

looking out, a letter to the world, in this enclosure

“I went outside. I’m still going outside.”

**Stephen Motika** is the editor of *Tiresias: The Collected Poems of Leland Hickman* (2009) and the author of the poetry chapbooks *Arrival and At Mono* (2007) and *In the Madrones* (2011). His first book, *Western Practice*, is forthcoming from Alice James Books in 2012. Recent work has appeared in *The Brooklyn Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, *The Boog City Reader 4*, and *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. A 2010-2011 Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Resident, he is the program director at Poets House and the publisher of Nightboat Books.