## Henry Cowell: Giving Us Permission

By Peter Garland



Peter Garland (third from left) with Charles Amirkhanian, Nicolas Slonimsky, and Conlon Nancarrow, at the home of Betty Freeman in Beverly Hills, CA, during New Music America, November 3, 1985. (Photo © 1985 Betty Freeman) [See note at end of Garland's essay]\*

When I think about what makes US composers different (some of us, that is) from our European colleagues (and most composers from non-European countries, where European musical values and ways of thinking still seem to dominate), all the various factors and issues boil down to a very simple answer: we had Henry Cowell. Of course, that is overly simplistic, but there is a core of truth there. The only comparable "alternative" figure that Europe has offered has been Erik Satie — but Satie was, and remains to this day, an eccentric outsider (I doubt he would be welcome at IRCAM or Darmstadt). In the 1920's and 1930's at least, Henry Cowell was at the very center of US musical life, and if he became marginalized later, in the shadows of Copland populism and academic serialism, he seems to be staging a comeback recently, at least since his centennial celebrations in 1997.

Let me make it clear from the start that when I speak of US music or composers, I have no nationalist or patriotic agenda whatsoever. All that has been knocked out of me over the past quarter century by the utterly sinister mercantile and militaristic, and religiously fundamentalist, turn our society has taken; which has been reflected in our cultural life too. All I can say about the US is I'm sorry — I just happen to have been born here, for better or worse. I think I need to say this, just to get it out of the way.

Other people have written very eloquently and well about Cowell — I think especially of the book, *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium*, edited by David Nicholls and published in 1997. So I really have no new insights to offer, other than my own personal appreciation: as a composer who works in the same country and musical tradition, and as someone whose own mentors were influenced by, or were even friends and students of, Cowell. I am thinking especially of John Cage and Lou Harrison. Like Cowell, there are no equivalent figures to those two in European music, and their presence and influence have had a profound impact on who we are and "why we do what we do" (as a young hippy, I was once approached by a man who asked me that rather odd question; so that phrase has stuck with me). Of course, the influence of Cowell extends to other composers central to this musical tradition: Rudhyar, Nancarrow (both personal friends and mentors of mine), Ives, Varèse and Ruggles. Cowell even impacts on Arnold Schoenberg's presence in the US.

All these very unique and different composers have lineages (tracing back and moving forward) that connect with Henry Cowell. I myself have been especially influenced by Cowell via Cage and Harrison; the three of them together represent something that has set our music apart. What they have given us is a wonderful and unique permission: a permission to be different, permission to be ourselves.

\_\_\_\_\_

There are several conceptions or myths about these composers (not only Cowell, but also Cage and Harrison) that need to be dispelled. First, there is the idea of the self-taught composer. I have claimed in the past to be one myself. But I've come to think that there's no such thing as a self-taught composer. In Cowell's case, he studied with Charles Seeger, the most important musicologist in the US in the twentieth century. What better teacher than that? Cage and Harrison both studied with Arnold Schoenberg — one cannot think of a more authoritative figure in mid-twentieth century music than him. Okay — none of them "graduated" from a university music department or conservatory. Creatively, instead of an impediment, that may have been their salvation. It's important to realize that not only is what one chooses to study important; but equally significant can be what one chooses not to study. Also one may choose to study something that is outside the normal curriculum of musical training, and that can be deeply meaningful. And too, what one rejects from one's teachers can be a crucial factor in developing an authentic, individual musical identity. Harrison was a favorite pupil of Schoenberg's ("He taught me simplicity," Lou surprised everyone by saying, when I asked him about his teacher's influence at the 1997 Cowell conference; simplicity not being the first adjective that would come to mind when thinking of Schoenberg!). Cage rejected the autocratic rigidity of Schoenberg's teaching style. The famous story of Cowell's departure from a harmony class based on the study of Bach's Chorales is also illustrative of this point. Cowell tired of the teacher's pedantic insistence on Bach's "perfection" (music still suffers to this day from that religious cult); so he brought into class one of Bach's actual Chorales, in disguise as it were. And he quit the class in disgust (and no doubt laughing! when the teacher proceeded to "correct" Bach. There is a similar story of Rachmaninoff circling 41 (41 — not 40, not 42!) "wrong notes" in a sheaf of Cowell's scores, and assuring the young man that the rules of harmony were "divine" rules. I had a similar experience when I once showed a pianist who is a famous new music specialist (but has never played my music) one of my piano works, Jornada del Muerto. She exclaimed that I "had broken all the rules!" I looked at her in honest astonishment and replied, "I didn't break any rules at all!" Obviously one of us has a problem with "the rules" — either she has too many, or I have too few. And I don't think the problem is mine... After all, when I was 17, I was taking classes at Harvard (Summer School) and then listening to lectures (in Ussachevsky's Introduction to E1ectronic Music class) at Columbia by the likes of Milton Babbitt and Mario Davidovsky. But — influenced by the poet Gary Snyder and hearing the Grateful Dead in a bar at the height of their psychedelic period — I left all that behind (I once played some of the Grateful Dead's "feedback" music for Davidovsky. He seemed bemused, but was ultimately condescending. Obviously this music was too free — i.e. it didn't have "analyzable" structure — and hence it had little value for him.). For Mr. Ussachevsky I wrote a term paper on World Music and Improvisation (this was 1969, mind you), dropped out of Columbia, and nine months later moved to California and the new Cal Arts, where study with Harold Budd and James Tenney (and playing in a Javanese gamelan) awaited me. My assignment after my first lesson with Harold Budd was not some text by Walter Piston or Paul Hindemith, but rather ... Zen in the Art of Archery! (a book John Cage has cited also). Let us recall Henry Cowell, receiving a Guggenheim fellowship in 1931 at the age of 34 (unthinkable these days, for anyone in the "Cowell tradition"). What did he do? He moved to Berlin ... to

study at the Hornbostel Archives of world music recordings. He also studied Javanese and Indian musics with native scholars and friends resident in Berlin, two styles of music that remained favorites of his for the rest of his life. Back then this was music completely "outside the curriculum" — while at the same time he was getting to know Arnold Schoenberg. Let us also recall that it was Cowell who helped Schoenberg when he first came to the US, and that people like Roger Sessions (whose students later so wholeheartedly enshrined Schoenberg, like Bach) were initially hostile (who was it, on the Guggenheim panel, that turned Schoenberg down for a fellowship to write Moses and Aaron? I am frankly surprised that scholarship hasn't answered that question, to this day).

So, self-taught Henry Cowell was, and was definitely <u>not</u>. Let us discuss a little more this question of musical technique. I am often at a loss to explain, when I hear a piece for symphony orchestra by one of these Pulitzer Prize type composers or the young upcoming ones in that vein, how anyone could possibly like this music. I say symphony orchestra because I would never pay money to hear music by these people (i.e. buy a CD or concert ticket), so my only chance to do so is when one is played on the radio, more often than not by an orchestra. So I force myself to listen to it under the rationale that if I'm going to be critical of something, I have to expose myself to it once in a while. Each time I find it almost embarrassing that professional musicians could want to play — not to mention commission and pay for — such patently uninteresting music. It is either aggressively severe in a dry formalist manner; or the reverse, very timid and textbook-correct usually in a "neo-classic" (or "neo-romantic") late nineteenth/early twentieth century way. Or the music is bombastic, achieving dramatic effect (sic) by the cheapest, oldest tricks in the books (i.e. drama equals surging brass, banging timpani, crashing cymbals etc.). I.e. this is just godawful stuff, and no wonder people stay away in droves from contemporary music, to the extent that composers have become irrelevant figures in modern society. But there is one quality (I shouldn't call it "quality," because it's not) that all this music shares: socalled technical competence. That fact alone is the most damning evidence of the artistic bankruptcy of our musical education system — in that the schools keep churning out composers who write this stuff and performers who are so brain-dead or de-sensitized that they want to play it. It is also the most cogent affirmation of the validity of the "self-taught" composer. This is an academic system that perpetuates itself, especially by its stranglehold on the political structures of tenure, grants and commissions, and prizes. My late friend, the performance artist Jim Pomeroy of San Francisco, sat in on a meeting of the (now defunct) Composers Panel of the NEA, and complained that "it did not resemble a grant panel so much as an academic tenure committee." And the great shame and scandal (and cause for sadness) is that through this system, so much good money has just been poured down the drain (if not, in many cases, flushed down the toilet). Our music schools are not turning out future composers so much as future professors of composition. Definitely a good reason, now more than ever, to "tune in, turn on and drop out."

But I do not mean this as a total condemnation of "technique," nor am I advocating that "ignorance is bliss." Technique, of course, is absolutely necessary, and music reaches its highest power when technical and expressive means balance each other. "Expressive" is a tricky word here, because it can run a wide gamut of meanings, from emotional and romantic quasi-literary association, to a painterly sense of form and energy (as in "abstract expressionism") to a more scientific type of rigor. There are many possibilities just as there are many possibilities as far as how "technique" is defined. For me, it all boils down to two questions and rules: how does it sound? and does it work? If it works, fine — because by now we should be living in an era in the arts where nothing is prohibited. Why is music so far behind all the other arts in this regard? There are many

com-posers I admire who have a thorough, and more or less standard, technical grounding: at Cal Arts James Tenney provided such a foil and contrast to someone like Harold Budd, as we worked our way through scores by Schoenberg, Ives and Ruggles. His most frequent exclamation would be "Listen to that! Hear that!" and then we would subsequently discuss what we were hearing (i.e. it was rarely the dry "analysis on the page" that passes for music analysis, the dissection of a work of music that makes the classroom resemble a forensics lab. To dissect something, it must first be dead, not alive.). Some of my — and Cowell's — favorite composers wrote wonderfully complex music — just think of Ives, Ruggles and Varèse. Some of our best, and earliest, descriptions of these composers come from Cowell — his (along with Sidney, his wife) pathbreaking book Charles Ives and His Music, his essay on Varese in his 1933 anthology, American Composers on American Music, and his amazing description of Ruggles in his Vermont studio, with his butcher paper-size musical scores and the image of Ruggles pounding out a chord over and over again, giving it the "the test of time!" The self-taught" Lou Harrison carried on this advocacy, editing (often with astonishing accuracy) the music of" Ives, and writing an early pamphlet on Ruggles in the 1940's. I like too the image of Ruggles giving his lectures on American music: "I thought that music had reached the lowest possible point when I heard the works of John Alden Carpenter. Now, however, I have been examining the scores of Mr. Henry Hadley!" Too bad Carl Ruggles is not alive today: he would have a field day with many of our current "respected" composers, and his abrasive criticism might well be just the tonic our musical life needs.

So: technique, rather than being a pre-set canon of "rules," instead is a question of what works and what is necessary for the desired creative purpose. In that sense, the "self-taught" composer often has to work harder than the composer who already comes "equipped" with a pre-fab set of tools. This is also where the idea of the composer as "inventor" comes in. For such a composer often has to create his own "techniques" for whatever piece is at hand. No one worked harder this way than the self-taught Cowell — his book New Musical Resources alone is proof of that. But invention and technique need not only be functions of complexity — they can also respond to the needs of clarity and simplicity. Nothing illustrates that better than Cowell's early tone cluster piano pieces. In some circles those pieces have been viewed with disdain because of their lack of extended formal structures. But — like Satie's music — these pieces sound as fresh and alive today as when they were first composed, almost a century ago; whereas all the more technically "proper" pieces of people like Roger Sessions or the composers of the so-called "Boulangerie" sound increasingly turgid or tepid with the passing years. It's worth remembering that the "ultra-modernist" and complex Varèse was also a fervent admirer of Satie, conducting his Messe des Pauvres with a workers' chorus in New York in the 1940's. Another "self-taught" and "inventor" composer who comes to mind is John Cage, who was as fervent a theorist and inventor of techniques" as his mentor, Cowell. Cage's prepared piano, a direct descendant of Cowell's piano techniques, still continues to astonish and enchant. And anyone who studies John's later work, of the so-called "chance" period, cannot but be impressed with how hard he worked; and how complex and painstaking the processes and techniques of this seemingly "random" music were. I remember a reply the normally patient Cage made late in his life to the by-then tiresome critique that "anyone could make this music." He tartly snapped back, "Well, not many people are, are they?!" A point well made.

Another important point to make is that frequently the "self-taught" composer has as many — or more — teachers than the more normal conservatory-manufactured ones. And that this teaching and learning do not end with the bestowing of a musical diploma, but rather can continue over an entire lifetime, and in some unusual ways and contexts. John Cage attending D.T. Suzuki's classes on Buddhism at Columbia in the early 1950's is

a classic example. Or Lou Harrison studying Javanese gamelan with Jody Diamond when he was already in his sixties and had built and written wonderful music for his own and Bill Colvig's American Gamelan. Cowell had numerous teachers throughout his life, especially connected with his studies of non-European musics. I love the photos of Cowell playing shakuhachi for an attentive Edgard Varèse, and of Henry trying out a Sri Lankan drum with a native musician in Colombo in 1957 — for Cowell learning was a lifelong process. In my own case, my teachers, along with Budd and Tenney, have included Dane Rudhyar, Philip Corner, Harrison and Nancarrow; also (at Cal Arts) teachers of American poetics, anthropology, performance art and video, and Asian music. Other teachers have included a Javanese shadow puppet master, a Pure pecha Indian maskmaker in Michoacan, a Pitjantjajara elder and singer in Australia, and a legendary jarocho singer and tambourine virtuoso in Veracruz. That's a lot of teachers for a "self-taught" composer! In each case, it's a matter of us searching out the knowledge that was needed at the time (and place). There's a Zen saying that when there is a need and one is ready, a teacher will appear. I would suggest that this is a more courageous path to follow than simply entering the "degree factory." Though of course those diplomas are redeemable at any number of grant institutions and prize committees — places where free-thinking (i.e. "selftaught") individuals are not so welcome.

One final thought on this self-taught phenomenon is that in many cases, traditional teaching in the degree factories often demands a rather slavish devotion to the ideas and methods of the teacher. I enjoyed a comment that Stuart Smith once made, that students of Milton Babbitt were unaware that John Cage had written any books! Whereas the "self-taught" moniker implies a certain independence and autonomy between teacher and student, that perhaps allows more space for a young composer to develop their own originality. I would suggest, in Cowell's case, that some of his more radical ideas (which people seem to lament that Cowell himself did not develop more fully) were in fact realized by his (self-taught) students, especially Cage and Harrison (Nancarrow too, of course). Cowell perhaps seemed aware of this, as evidenced by his admiration and praise for Harrison's music that comes through in Cowell's letters to him (he describes a piece on a program as "thoroughly professional, but not as good as yours," which echoes my earlier remarks on technical competence). And though he may not have always understood or agreed with John Cage, he always stood by his friend and pupil. I like the story of him defending John against jealous detractors to the effect that John couldn't be so rich and famous as they were accusing him of being, because John had just borrowed \$10 from him! (this was circa 1960).

Ultimately the self-taught composer is one who often takes more creative risks. And risk implies occasional awkwardness and even failure. But a pre-fab musical technique avoids those risks. Everything you do is competent and technically perfect — and perfectly uninteresting. I find a similar phenomenon in the jazz world, in what I call the "Berklee" (School of Music) syndrome — musicians who know every chord change and solo transcription, can play fast, but essentially have little or nothing new to say. If you already know how to do something ahead of time — then, I ask, what point is there in doing it? Creativity for me is about discovery, pushing in to the unknown, discovering the unknown in yourself. If there are awkwardnesses and failures in Cowell's prodigious and prolific output — and there are — these are as much cause for admiration as disparagement. This is the legacy of a man constantly in search of discovery and willing to risk himself, and a certain awkwardness and vulnerability are always a part of that search.

\_\_\_\_\_

The other myth about Cowell that I want to refute and put to rest is the idea of an early career-late career, radical-conservative split in his work. I do not agree with that idea, and in fact believe that the implications of his later work, and many of the pieces themselves, are just as radical as that of the early "enfant terrible" — though perhaps in a different way, unrecognized by most people up to now. These implications have also had a profound impact on composers that have followed Cowell, notably Harrison and Cage — and myself. I see a clear continuity in the work, although with certain shifts of emphasis. Such changes during the course of a long career (and Cowell's lasted a good half century) are natural in many composers' work — John Cage and Morton Feldman are two obvious examples. People have also posited an early-late dichotomy in Cage's music (centering around the pivotal year of 1952), which I likewise do not agree with; but that is beyond the scope of this essay. That there could be such a strong belief in an early-late career for Cowell is of course due to his four years imprisonment in San Quentin from 1936 to 1940; so all too often a simplistic understanding of his work has boiled down to a "before" and "after."

My only real regret about the collapse of my small press, SOUNDINGS, in late 1991 was that I was halfway through a project of editing and publishing a Selected Songs of Henry Cowell. One of the features of this collection was that it contained music that spanned Cowell's entire career, from the 1910's up to the 1960's, including early "tone cluster" songs to ones with fairly simple diatonic accompaniment. One of my intentions with the Selected Songs was to provide such an overview of Cowell's music, one that suggested a relatively seamless continuity. Alas, it was not to be. I am very surprised, frankly, that no conductor has had the vision or energy to present the cycle of Cowell's Symphonies — I am certain that there are gems to be found among them, and that there is an audience for such music, with its sincerity and clarity. The directness and communicativeness of this music contrasts sharply with the dryness and/or bombast of so much of the so-called "contemporary" (sic) offerings. Whatever structural simplicity detractors might find in the music (does that explain why the uninteresting — to me Symphonies of David Diamond have been revived, but not Cowell's?) is more than made up for by the simple forthright energy of the music. Whether they are "masterpieces" or not is irrelevant — we do not need more "masterpieces;" our need is for vital and honest music. And the symphonic repertory is especially starved for such.

I think there are three fundamental pillars of Cowell's contribution to modern musical theory and understanding. The first two are related to each other in their emphasis on what might be termed a "modernist" sensibility (the reader must excuse me if I throw terms around quite freely that beg for deeper explanation and analysis — I'll leave that to others). The third points to a potentially "post-modern" vision and has perhaps had the most profound impact on my generation, though many people seem not to credit Cowell with that influence; despite the fact that, indeed, it springs from him and from no other composer, and may be Cowell's most significant and radical contribution to the way we think about music today.

The first pillar is theoretical, on music as an acoustic phenomenon, with a vision grounded in science (the new "religion" of the 20th century for some) and traditional musical theory inherited from Europe. That is exemplified by his book, New Musical Resources (I recommend Kyle Gann's insightful essay, "Subversive Prophet: Henry Cowell as Theorist and Critic" in The Whole World of Music, and I hope to not be too redundant with what he says). The second pillar is historical/critical, and is particularly represented by Charles Ives and His Music and American Composers on American Music. Without a doubt Cowell was the most

perceptive (and generous) writer on his fellow composers and the music of his own time. And a very unselfish writer, to boot — it must be apparent to any reader by now that this appreciation of Cowell is a very thinly veiled defense of my own work as a composer. Cowell rarely if ever indulged in that. Perhaps that's indicative of his own originality and self-invented nature as a composer, that he had so few figures to acknowledge as predecessors. That marks him as a beginning of a tradition, rather than a continuance (in the manner that Schoenberg is a continuance of a 19th century Romantic tradition, Webern is a continuance of Schoenberg, and Boulez and Stockhausen etc. are continuances of both these earlier composers, etc. etc.). The "composer as inventor" thereby links Cage as directly and uniquely to Cowell and "his" tradition as much as it does to the European tradition; whereas Harrison retains more ties to the latter, along with a global view also inspired by Cowell. Cowell's vision of a modern tradition is inclusive and generous, and embraces both the famous European "masters" (sic) of the first half of the 20th century (Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartok etc.) and their less acknowledged American counterparts (Ruggles, Varèse, Rudhyar and others). It is curious that to this day the most famous European composers are spoken of in semi-veneration as "masters," whereas that rarely or never occurs with American composers. Cowell does not posit himself as a composer at the center of that tradition — i.e. as its most significant figure — rather he assumes the role of its most enthusiastic and significant spokesperson. That is another reason perhaps why Cowell has been somewhat underestimated people expect or look for the dominant composer-figure, such as a Schoenberg or Boulez. Though I would suggest such dominance is not so much authentically creative as merely autocratic. I for one have never shared the almost worshipful veneration of Schoenberg (and his 12-tone system) — to me he is just another composer (and as for Boulez ... hahaha!). Anyway, Cowell's writings to this day are still obligatory and illuminating for any understanding of Euro-American "art" (sic) music in the first half of the 20th century.

The third pillar of Cowell's contribution to our understanding of music — an expanded "theory" of music exists principally in recorded, rather than written, form, though there are a group of articles relevant to the subject. I would call this Music of the World's Peoples, after the title of the weekly radio series Cowell hosted for years on New York's WBAI Radio. I consider it a great shame that all these tapes for these shows were eventually erased and recycled. That shows a great historical shortsightedness and lack of appreciation for Cowell's achievement and its significance. Sadly, in many ways such oral documents are far more ephemeral and threatened than written material, as is well illustrated by the history of the KPFA recordings of The Old Time Stories by Cowell's long-time friend Jaime de Angulo (whereas the abbreviated book version, Indian Tales, has been in print for years, and has taken its place as a classic of West coast literature). What does survive as a cohesive and comprehensive document are the series of recordings Cowell edited for his friend Moses Asch's pioneer Folkways label, including five volumes entitled Music of the World's Peoples. (We are also lucky to have another Folkways recording from 1963 of Cowell playing his own piano pieces — what a treasure! and contribution to a sense of living history.) As preparation and research for the 1997 Cowell centennial conference, I acquired all the available Cowell-edited recordings on Folkways (they currently exist commercially only on cassette, which can be special-ordered from Smithsonian-Folkways). They number eleven volumes, of which one appears not to have been compiled/edited by Cowell himself; rather he only supplied an introductory essay. Curiously enough (especially for me) that is a collection of Mexican corridos (not all of which happen to be corridos; and some were recorded in the US, rather than Mexico. There are a few similar errors in the other volumes too, but they are relatively insignificant). Altogether this is all we have left of Cowell's Music of the World's Peoples legacy — but it's gratifying to at least have these. Other than general descriptive comments, I was unable at the time (1997) to draw any special conclusions or insights into this collection; but now,

combined with his writings on the subject, I think this third pillar of Cowell's theoretical contribution can be appreciated for its pathbreaking and radical originality (the book *Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music by Henry Cowell*, edited by the late Dick Higgins, only came out in 2001; though I had searched out many of these writings myself in their original sources). It also provides the key to the continuity of and changes in Cowell's own musical development.

First of all, the title is significant. He did not call it "World Music" (a term I recently found out was coined by a former teacher of mine, the late Robert Brown), nor "Music of the Whole Earth" (the title of a wonderful book by composer David Reck, whose title is a take-off on the then popular and very influential Whole Earth Catalog, where I reviewed Reck's book when it came out in 1976; Reck's book is a direct descendant, and a going-further, of Cowell's own pioneer efforts). The crucial word in Cowell's title (besides "Music," which perhaps should have been in the plural rather than the singular) is: "Peoples" (which is indeed plural). Musics of the world's peoples — because music is not a universal language, although it appears to be a universal activity (I know of no culture without musical activity, though it would be interesting if there were! Though there may be ones where the word "music" does not exist). To think that somehow Beethoven or Bach (or for that matter, Bob Marley) represent some kind of universal value or expression, is mere colonialism and marketing (and implied racism): as presumptuous as ascribing these same values to English, or baseball (with its "World Series"). Cowell and Harrison certainly recognized this. Harrison may have had a more utopian vision of this, both in his music and in the fact that he was an avid student of both Esperanto and Sign Language, the latter two because of their supposed "universality." But the best we can do (and which they both did, and subsequent generations, to a greater or lesser extent) is to become musically multi-lingual — which is not the same as multi-cultural. I'm not sure a true or total multi-culturalism is ever possible, having lived in several different cultures and being married to someone from another culture. One is invariably and inevitably shaped by the culture one is born and educated into (including family, society and schooling). At best we can acknowledge and celebrate our similarities — and differences. It has been suggested that cultural diversity is as healthy for ecological survival as species diversity, and I would probably go along with that. Hence, apart from art-for-art's-sake, there's a socio-cultural and political dimension to this concept of "musics of the world's peoples."

When I was in school, at the beginning of the 1970's, there was a predominant emphasis on music as "sound," on music as an adjunct of the physical sciences, that of acoustics and physics. That reflected of course the rise of electronic music on the one hand (I to this day do not like the term "electro-acoustic," for being so broad as to be almost meaningless) and the writings and ideas of John Cage on the other. The 1960's had seen the flourishing of Happenings and movements like Fluxus (i.e. music as "activity"), but by the 70's their influence was waning (to be replaced near the end of the decade by "pop culture" (sic) influenced performance art and music). Those of us who had no taste for math or science (and hence for "gadgets" like synthesizers, and later computers) found ourselves in kind of an awkward place. As much as we admired them, or their music, there was no way people like me could wade through Helmholtz or Partch's Genesis of a Music (I read all the non-theoretical parts) or James Tenney's Meta-Hodos (I was more into "meta-hobo" Partch style wanderings!). And as much as Lou Harrison's music enchanted us, and how much we were convinced by the rightness of what he and Partch said about just intonation and alternative tunings — and what Cowell wrote about the overtone series in New Musical Resources — it was just those numbers we couldn't get beyond. I mean, I can handle 3/2 or 4/3 maybe, but my eyes start to glaze over at anything more difficult than 16/15. I'm sorry!

That's who (how) I am ... It was a bit difficult; because there was an implication (never explicitly stated, but there nonetheless) that to be a "good" composer (i.e. complex, therefore "serious"), one had to also be something of a scientist or theorist. All the rest of us were just doomed to our I-IV-V chords, or "an infinity of puerility and stupidity!" (as a French critic who suffered from the "Boulez Malaise" once described my music at Darmstadt in 1984). For all these quasi-scientist composers, Cowell's New Musical Resources is like a Bible, and his most important theoretical work. These are the composers most likely to believe in the "early-late," and "radical-conservative" dichotomies in Cowell's career. Implicit too here is a belief in a kind of linear historicism — step A leads to step B, simplicity "evolves" (sic) towards greater complexity, technology "advances" etc. (what is "advancement," when both "forward" and "backward" disappear? I ask...).

Let me interrupt here, just to defend us "dodos," and to say that being simple is not simple-minded. I was lucky, as I earlier mentioned, to have Harold Budd as a teacher. In 1971, I once did an hour and a half concert of his music, that used only 3 sounds! (with two other musicians, plus an intermission). Granted these were complex sounds — the slow rolling of a gong with all its rich harmonics, and two piano chords hovering on the threshold between pianissimo and inaudibility. And it worked! It was an incredibly beautiful, Zen-like experience. Yet Harold also taught a course on advanced chromatic harmony, and introduced many of us to ... Albert Ayler! Not just that, but the Ayler of New York Eye and Ear Control perhaps his most radical work ("Listen to this!" Harold said, with a smile and a twinkle in his eye). Lou Harrison, who's received his share of disparagement from the Pulitzer crowd (John Luther Adams, sitting on a grant panel with Elliott Carter, once told me, "You wouldn't have liked what he said about Lou!") ... well, Harrison conducted the world premiere of Ives' Third Symphony and edited/reconstructed an extensive passage from Ives' Browning Overture that was lost. When the missing original showed up, Lou's version turned out to be almost verbatim-exact. This is not the work of a "selftaught" simpleton! And I, who have received the damnation of Darmstadt and so many other organizations/ensembles/grants and awards that I've lost count (remember: I glaze over after 15-16!) ... well, among other things, I was a good friend of Louise Varèse, and played a major role in the rediscovery of Conlon Nancarrow's music (whose scores which I published in the 1980's are still the only ones available); and I also edited the first in-depth study of Tenney's music. So like Budd, Harrison and Cowell, my modernist credentials are solid. Like them, I have chosen "to do what I do."

Anyway, for composers like myself, it is *Music of the World's Peoples*, but more importantly the totality of Cowell's music and theoretical work, that have provided a key that opens many doors, and the permission to enter them. These include both a general approach to the idea music-making, and more specifically technical modes (no pun intended) of doing so. And for me, Cowell's work implies an original and radical redefinition of the very language of our so-called "classical" music. Before going further, I wish to back-track and emphasize the total validity of the scientific, electro-acoustic, linear historical approach that I was just complaining about. A key part of Cowell's legacy is the celebration of diversity. That there are many paths to truth, not just one. What works for me does not necessarily work for someone else, and vice versa. I just wish those people in positions of academic and musical-political power would view things that way, and with a Cowell-like tolerance, and the openness to diversity and musical joy of Cowell, Cage and Harrison!

Cowell's use of the phrase *Music of the World's Peoples* suggests another attitude towards music: one that is humanist rather than an adjunct of physics, and that looks to anthropology/ethnology for new understandings. Music is not just sound as an acoustic phenomenon, but also people (peoples) making sounds in a socially meaningful and expressive manner (as I said earlier, I'm not going to be picky about my definitions). I.e.

without people, there is no such thing as music. Birds may sing (and whales), but that is "music" only insofar as we (people) confer that meaning on it. The same goes for sounds found in Nature. There's a story about Louie Armstrong snorting when asked what he thought about "folk" music — that it was all folk (peoples') music, "because he'd never heard of a horse that made music!" I came to this understanding of music early on, because my very first music teacher (aside from piano teachers) was an ethnomusicologist; so instead of Helmholtz, he had me at the age of 16 reading Curt Sachs; plus essays from a classic book appropriately entitled The Anthropology of Music (edited by Alan Merriam). At Cal Arts, there was an anthropologist on the faculty of the Critical Studies department, who luckily for a lot of us, was friendly with many of the composer faculty (parties at his house became even more interesting and important than classroom work, in the way that there was an inter-mingling of people and ideas). I was intrigued, fifteen years later, when I read articles by Morton Feldman where he drew analogies between music and tribal rugs from western Asia — because I had attempted a similar essay on music and patterns of rhythm and color in Navajo blankets (there having been a major exhibit of Navajo blankets at the LA County Museum in the fall of 1971); unfortunately my inspiration remained largely intuitive and I was unable to complete the paper. It is my guess that Cowell's investigations into other musical traditions — which began well before his 1931 fellowship in Berlin — gradually led him towards this more "humanist" view of music. Let us not forget that neither "music" nor "science" are universal or monolithic -"science" can depend on its cultural context for definition just as much as music can. New Musical Resources, first published in 1930, is all "science," a product of the young and brash Henry Cowell who with good reason is trying to substitute laws of acoustics (principally the overtone system, and the mathematical ratio nature of the harmonic series) for what he viewed as the "artificial" (as opposed to Rachmaninoff's "divine") laws of European harmony and counterpoint, and their tonal and rhythmic limitations. This was indeed a revolution, with a more profound and lasting impact, I would argue, than the 12-tone system of Schoenberg and his followers Its implications led to electronic music eventually, to investigations of alternative tuning systems, and to the innovative music of Conlon Nancarrow — among other things. For this alone, Cowell would be (and often is) acclaimed as one of the true revolutionaries of twentieth century music. But roughly a quarter century later, in his remarkable statement, "Music is My Weapon," for the radio newsman Edward R. Murrow's This I Believe series, there is not a single mention of the word science." Rather he ends his text with the moving words: "In any event I believe that a truly devoted musical" work acts to humanize the behavior of all hearers who allow it to penetrate to their innermost being." Any examination of Cowell's later output will reveal that these are not the words of a teary-eyed mystic, but rather as someone who had come to see music as firmly grounded in human society (societies) and in the needs of real people, in terms of (in the opening words of his statement) "its spirituality, its exaltation, its ecstatic nobility, its humor, its power to penetrate to the basic fineness of every human being." Wow! Not an "extended parameter" in sight! Does this mean that the young Cowell the revolutionary, pounding out his "tone clusters," has given way to the older Cowell the conservative, writing his Hymns and Fuguing Tunes? I don't think so.

I'm not sure, as a composer, that the "world music" revolution has been the most important part of Cowell's impact on me (though it certainly has been as a listener, and how I think about music). The question of incorporating non-European influences into one's music continues to be a very tricky one (and the term "non-European" itself is misleading because, as Bartok showed, there are plenty of European traditions that are out of the mainstream; and Europe has been feeling these influences since the inception of its "art music" tradition, with the Moorish presence in southern Spain for example). Each generation contributes to this ongoing dialogue between traditions. We have the well-known examples of Stravinsky, Bartok and Revueltas from the

first half of the twentieth century. At mid-century we have Cowell, Harrison and Cage, with a more radical, or further developed approach, especially the latter two (Europe at that point having fallen into a dodecaphonic black hole, one that it has yet to climb out of). My own conclusion, from studying these composers, is that use of non-European musical ideas and materials is least effective and interesting when it is simply a case of appropriation or imitation; and that it is more exciting and profound when it involves a real shift of a composer's musical language. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than the development of the US percussion ensemble tradition in the 1930's (and parallel with that, the evolution of Harry Partch's work). This was probably the very first "alternative music scene" within the context of Euro-American art music (I sometimes can't bring myself to use the phrase "classical music," because that's so inaccurate). This percussion music was WAY beyond Stravinsky's or Bartok's uses of disjunct rhythms or expanded percussion sections within the orchestral context. In his article, "Learning from Henry," in the Whole World of Music book, Lou Harrison directly credits Cowell:

Mention must be made here of Henry's adventurous promotion of automobile junkyards for the finding of new sounds. It is to him that I attribute the use of brake drums ... as well as other finds. In a very real sense, Henry's suggestions were charmingly wicked for, in effect, he offered a way of simply by-passing the establishment altogether. (p. 165)

Although this music incorporated many influences ranging from Asian to Afro-Cuban and indigenous Mexican, this was not a case of exotica — rather this represented a real revolution in our twentieth century musical language. Proof of this is how directly it led to the development of electronic music on the one hand, and to the evolution of different ensemble and textural concepts on the other, especially in the music of Harrison. This was also the germinating seed of the entire musical career of John Cage, one which in itself also revolutionized twentieth century music. In "The Future of Music: Credo" Cage writes: "Percussion music is revolution ... Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard influenced music to the all-sound music of the future." We now know these to be prophetic words, because we have seen (or rather, heard) them come true. It is sometimes forgotten how much electronic music — and the whole electronic musical culture we now live in — owes to a bunch of young "outside the establishment" composers, greatly inspired by Cowell, banging on brake drums and flower pots. Within a matter of a few years, cheap scavenged electronic devices such as transistor radios and stereo cartridges would also become a part of this do-it and make-it-yourself orchestra, an ensemble the likes of which had never before existed (except perhaps in the dreams of the Italian Futurists).

Of course, the evolution of electronic technologies in the twentieth century contributed to this revolution in our musical language in a parallel way. The career of Edgard Varèse epitomizes this, and Cowell was right there at the beginnings too, in his work with the Russian inventor Leo Theremin. But it is an interesting fact — and one I'm sure others have pointed out — that Cowell never ventured further down the path of electronically or mechanically generated sounds. In New Musical Resources he suggests a kind of music and rhythm/tempo investigation specifically realizable on player piano which, as Kyle Gann has pointed out, inspired the musical career of Conlon Nancarrow. Why Cowell Harrison) never went down this road is anyone's guess. Most it was simply a matter of temperament (as it is in my case). Until the 1960's (by which point Cowell's health had begun to deteriorate) there were few accessible electronic music studios (I have read

somewhere that the one at Columbia, or at least its early mega-computer, were closely and jealously guarded by Milton Babbitt, so access was perhaps not so easy; though Cowell was around there in the 1950's, at the time when Ussachevsky's and Luening's rather timid early experiments were happening. Dick Higgins reports first seeing Cowell at a lecture by Ussachevsky on tape recorder music at the New School) But I think ultimately in both Cowell's and Harrison's cases, their interests were drawn more to the idea of people making music rather than machines; and that the musical worlds that Cowell's research had opened up contained such an infinite number of possibilities, that this became for both the source and inexhaustible fount for the rest of their lives' work. Again I emphasize, it was not a question of exotic materials, or new "sounds" that could be appropriated. Rather it was an investigation of new ways of hearing and understanding music: its structure, tonal and rhythmic systems, concepts of ensemble and musical texture, new concepts of musical grammar and syntax, new musical languages — a vast realm of musical knowledge, of which Euro-American art music up to that point hadn't even scratched the surface. By opening up this Pandora's box of musical wonders, Cowell, Cage and Harrison gave us yet further permission to move into new areas of musical understanding.

Let me sidetrack here, and make one other comment about the idea of Henry Cowell's musical "humanism." Much has been made of the traumatic experience of the San Quentin imprisonment, even to the point of suggesting that it maybe "knocked the radical out of" Cowell. I'm sure it was indeed traumatic, but when one examines the record of Cowell's time there one is surprised by the level of Cowell's musical activities (this is no doubt what kept him alive emotionally and psychologically there, and kept him from sinking into depression and despair). In an essay, "Worlds of Ideas': The Music of Henry Cowell" (also in *The Whole World of Music*), Steven Johnson writes:

During the four years he spent imprisoned at San Quentin Cowell managed to keep surprisingly busy, writing some percussion pieces, a few choruses, several pieces for solo voice and piano or chamber accompaniment, and a number of works for piano solo, assorted chamber ensembles, band and orchestra ...

... In 1938 Cowell also wrote some movements for violin and piano for a fellow inmate ... who played the violin, and he produced numerous pieces for band and orchestra that were intended, as Cowell noted, "For use of the Education Department Ensemble at San Quentin." Indeed, his prison experience seems to have stimulated the production of large quantities of *Gebrauchsmusik*, a habit that the composer continued for the remainder of his life. (PP. 57-58)

What this hints at is that maybe the San Quentin experience was a real musical eye (ear) opener for Cowell. Prior to that he had lived almost solely in the rarified, isolated and exclusive world of the "avant-garde." As we know, to this day the "avant-garde" continues to exist as an exotic, not very hardy, species, that is only capable of survival in the greenhouse environments of academia and the so-called "art world" and its ghettos. Once outside of these environments it tends to shrivel up and die due to sheer irrelevance. Or let's say that's the case of the avant-garde "posture," because fine, strong music does survive, indeed thrives, in the wide open spaces of the real world (one has to only think of Coltrane, Varèse, Dolphy, Parker, Ives, Partch, Harrison and Nancarrow, to cite a few examples). Perhaps — and I only suggest, rather than assert — this San Quentin

experience served to democratize and humanize Cowell's sense of music, beyond the narrow confines of the avant-garde. And perhaps this suffering he experienced served to sensitize him as a person (as suffering tends to do).

Also let us recall that Cowell's wife Sidney, whom he married after his release from prison, did not come from the world of concert music, but rather from ethnomusicology. Sidney was a vibrant and lively woman, someone who could talk your ear off on the telephone. She often asked me if I knew such and such a musician, from one or the other of the Indian pueblos in New Mexico, that she had worked with in the 1930's or 40's. Sidney had a real down-to-earth sense of music, and of things in general, and was no doubt a wonderful influence on, and companion to, Henry. At Christmas, who of her friends cannot recall with affection those long chatty Christmas letters she would send out. If I regret never completing the Cowell Selected Songs, it is because of Sidney's sake, as much as anything musical.

\_\_\_\_\_

I might add to this my own experience, and how I shifted away from the art world/academic avant-gardism; not to any sort of neo- conservatism (as I feel I've been occasionally misjudged), but to what I understand as a deeper, more culturally rooted sense of music — in my own life and in the times and society I live in. I feel a total kinship with Cowell in this regard. It came to me during my stays in Mexico, in the 1970's. I have often claimed that, instead of graduate school, I spent two years living in Indian villages, first in Oaxaca (Zapotec) and subsequently in Michoacan (Purepecha). I came to Mexico originally to meet Nancarrow and research Revueltas, in addition to research on my shadow puppet theater piece, The Conquest of Mexico. Almost by accident I found myself in these villages in the midst of a rich and vital musical and ritual/festive culture. I had been aware of that culture through books and recordings, but I was amazed by its depth and sheer energy. In fact, I would devote the next thirty years of my life to studying it from an ethno-musicological viewpoint, something that has become a major portion of my life's work. All this seriously challenged my previous sense of music and avant-gardism, and, indeed, of myself. Here I was, among a people for whom music meant everything, and was a daily part of their social and ritual lives. To these same people, the concepts of avantgarde that I had been educated into seemed rather silly and precious, and elitist; divorced from real life and culture (what little culture apart from commercialism is left in the United States...). It appeared not only academic (that "old-fashioned modernism," as I refer to it), but also as a product of a capitalist, consumer culture, where "art" is merely sold and appreciated in museums and culture palaces and elitist art galleries and universities — places I began to feel less and less comfortable (and welcome) in. Why limit oneself to that when, here in Mexico, music was to be found in the streets, and in life itself? My Mixe Indian friends (a race famed for their music and composers) summed it up perfectly: "A pueblo without music is a dead pueblo;" and "We are born, we live and we die with music." That gave me a new vision, not only of music, but of my life as a musician too.

I think it may also be argued that Euro-American art music has reached a saturation point on many levels. First of all, how the architecture of our music has become overly complex, to the point where structure has taken over/usurped the function of content – so it has become an imperative to seek out newer (or older), simpler and more efficient structures. To keep the architectural analogy, why must we always feel compelled to build skyscrapers, when simple adobe will do? Viewed in this way, I see Harrison's use of medieval or

gamelan forms, or Cowell's embrace of the "hymn and fuguing tune," or a return to the simplicity of song forms, to be very progressive. Secondly, our harmonic and melodic languages have been extended, in terms of chromatic complexity, almost to the breaking point. In fact that point has already been breached, and we have musical languages based on noise, or non-referential continuity, or randomness. Where does one attempt to start over, in the face of this? One suggestion: at the beginning. Finally, the ensemble textures of our music (i.e. the orchestra, opera; and in popular music questions of amplification and spectacle) have reached a saturation level too. Where does one go after something like Mahler's "Symphony of a Thousand" — a "Symphony of Five Thousand"? Or the phenomenon, with its fascist implications, of the "stadium concert;" or the simple, unavoidable fact that highly amplified music damages one's ears? Not only have we reached this point on aesthetic terms, but also on economic terms. It is becomingly increasingly difficult to maintain these institutions. And the social conditions and contexts that saw their rise are increasingly revealing cracks in their seams and glaring contradictions. Not to mention the fact that academic music politics have kept many younger composers excluded from this world, to a point where it may now be too late. In the unlikely chance that the palace doors are finally opened to us, maybe we won't want to come in. So, how do we create and construct a music that is reflective of and answerable to these new social contexts and conditions? The socalled "civilization" of the ancient Maya, with its pyramids, monumental architecture, kings, priests and social hierarchies collapsed and was reclaimed by the jungles from which it sprang. The <u>culture</u> of the Maya survived, thrived, and resists to this day. If "classical music" is dead, killed by antiquarianism on the one hand and academicism on the other, let us celebrate and sing its demise, and continue on. Long live music!

\_\_\_\_\_

Getting back to Cowell, let's start with the early piano pieces, the so-called cluster pieces plus The Aeolian Harp and The Banshee. I think their simplicity is their strength, and the reason for their continued freshness. In this regard they share something with modern-day pop songs, in that relatively little information is conveyed, so that communication is immediate and right there on the surface. Many of the pieces have very simple, modal melodies, so the harmonic language is likewise very basic. I don't really take Cowell's justification of the tone cluster as the incorporation of the major and minor seconds into our harmonic/ melodic language along some sort of musical evolutionary line too seriously. Okay — sure, fine. What blows me away about these pieces is that by compressing the interval relationships so tightly, they virtually cease to exist as such. So you are sidestepping the harmonic implications of the concept of interval, and what you are left with is: pure RESONANCE. That is the glory, the originality, the freshness of these pieces. By reducing melody and harmony to a background function, that of the simplest framework possible, one is affirming music not so much as a question of relationships, but rather of pure sounding and resonance. That is very radical, to me. One does not need to use tone clusters necessarily to achieve this effect. By severely limiting melodic and harmonic movement and by emphasis on repetition, the same effect can be achieved. I would point to some of my own piano music (sections of Jornada del Muerto, for instance), or many of the ecstatic pieces of Michael Byron, with their combination of constant reiteration pushing against stasis, as clear examples of this affirmation of resonance as materia prima, and of the influence of Cowell. I would suggest too that this quality is present and implicit in Nancarrow's music, which explains the relatively limited function of harmony in his work. This effect of resounding works most effectively with pianos, of course, with their combination of percussive striking and rich harmonic ringing. It is a little more difficult to achieve perhaps with bowed and blown instruments, but resonance can also be emphasized with those also.

That interest in resonance is at the heart of how I think of "dissonant counterpoint," as an examination of Ruggles' or Rudhyar's music will reveal. That the real magic lies not so much in the pitch relationships as seen on the page; though they are so skillfully written that a great deal of tension is created, tension and release being part of the "drama" of this kind of music. But parallel with these pitch relationships, there are overtone relationships occurring as pure resonance, that constitute the real magic of this music. Rudhyar's building up of superimposed fifths and major ninths (a major second with the octave displacement) creates a rich sense of musical space combined with tension (not the shallow, transparent, pseudo-Americana "open spaces" of Copland's use of fifths, which lack this tensile strength, except in perhaps his Piano Variations). In Ruggles' case the build-up of intervals (especially minor seconds and ninths, and tritones) creates complex and dynamic clouds of overtones; as I said, a parallel universe to the sounding tones themselves. In the piano music, he achieves this effect by carefully notating pedaling and the holding down of notes without sounding or after sounding — what a marvelous attention to sound, transcending superficially analyzable notes on the page or "pitch relationships!" A friend and I once went to hear the L.A. Philharmonic perform the orchestral version of his piano piece Evocations (which I learned as a pianist under Tenney's tutelage). At the-very end, a dense cloud of overtones had formed over the orchestra. We were in awe just with that — but then our jaws dropped (quite literally!) as this cloud then MOVED, to the right (I guess as a result of some interference phenomenon)! But it seemed like we were the only people hearing this, all the rest of the gray-haired Philharmonic crowd were just stuck, earth-bound, with this "dissonant" music, eager to get this over with so they could get on with a baby-faced pianist playing a Brahms Concerto (at which point we left, because the Ruggles had been just too beautiful, and we had just had our minds blown with an incredible musical lesson about resonance). So what I mean to say is that resonance, as an acoustic phenomenon, as pure sounding, is also at the heart of the system of dissonant counterpoint. To reduce the latter to mere pitch relationships and systems is a fundamental error. This understanding of resonance we owe to Cowell and his contemporaries, beginning with those earliest, supposedly "simple" tone-cluster pieces. And is that not the secret of The Banshee and The Aeolian Harp? I think of the title of another of these pieces: Sinister Resonance. Yeah! I think resonance is also at the heart of the enchantment of the prepared piano, and is what links that, more than the simplistic notion of "extended techniques," to the early Cowell pieces.

These pieces also, of course, display the influence of Irish folksong. This is a linkage that we can trace throughout Cowell's musical career, and is one of the threads that unite his life's work. Besides the influence of John Varian and his own Irish background through his father, perhaps the semi-rural conditions of his early childhood contributed to this aspect of his personality. Why, for instance, did the Cowells (Sidney and Henry) choose to live in Shady, New York rather than New York City? Perhaps a certain love of the "American vernacular" united him especially with Ives (who seems to have had a unique place in Cowell's esteem, given that the Cowells wrote an entire book on him), and also led him to the musics of William Billings and William Walker. Sidney Cowell and her investigations of American folk musics also seem to have played a decisive influence. She claims to have introduced Henry to Walker's collection of hymns, Southern Harmony, and to the traditions of shape-note singing. This was also something "in the air" during the decade of the 1940's, as evidenced by the work and lives of Cowell's friends, Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford. There were other investigators quite active too, like the Lomaxes (father and son). This awareness of folk traditions was strong among intellectuals, a kind of evolution from and beyond the leftist political aesthetic agenda of the 1930's. So Cowell's interest seems entirely logical and natural, with no implications of

any kind of aesthetic retrenchment or neo-conservatism — this is all well within the "progressive" milieu of those years.

\_\_\_\_\_

Okay. I want to continue talking about Cowell's music and how I see it as potentially revolutionizing our musical language. In talking about "language," I am going to refer to something that is almost never brought up in any formal discussion of music: poetry. People have talked about music in terms of mathematical and scientific languages, and even as a visual "language" analogous to that of contemporary painting (Feldman and John Luther Adams come to mind); but rarely has anyone talked about musical language as a form of speech or discourse. Since poets are maybe the artists with the most agile and skillful use of language, perhaps it is useful to refer to poets and poetry by way of analogy. This is true in my case, because poetry, more than the physical sciences or any other art form, has influenced my sense of musical language, and hence form. Over the years many of my best friends have been poets, and we've had something of a mutually symbiotic relationship, as I have always been trying to understand the language of (my) music; while poets are constantly searching for the music of language. (We musicians seem to have a sort of mystique for poets They sometimes hold us slightly in awe, as if we know something that they don't — due to the abstractness of music and the concreteness of language, I think. But they're wrong: most of us don't have a clue! But at least we're fun to hang out with.) The viewpoints I express here and the conclusions I draw are not meant to have any sort of universal applicability or represent a manifesto. This is merely the way I see (hear) things, and what works for me. There is no one correct way in music anymore: the tyrants are dead (Bach and Beethoven are two of the culprits, along with maybe Schoenberg and a host of others). We are free, in the words of a Rolling Stones song, to choose whom we please and please whom we choose.

In a way — if this is not stretching the poetry analogy too far — Cowell is both our Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. Despite his intellectual arrogance and tragic anti-Semitism, Pound remains a central figure and a starting point in 20th century poetry. With his work, modernism begins; and like Cowell, he was an enthusiastic promoter — Joyce and Eliot immediately come to mind (not to mention George Antheil!). Just as importantly, as a translator he opened the doors for Western readers to the poetics and poetries of Asia, especially Japan and China; and also to ancient and historical poetries of Europe. With Pound the study and knowledge of world poetries became an integral part of modern poetics. The same can be said of Cowell, with his promotion of the musics of the world's peoples. A present-day composer can no longer let himself be limited, if only in terms of knowledge, to a single musical tradition. We owe that directly to Cowell.

The William Carlos Williams analogy is even more intriguing to me, and ties in with what I have said above about a music imbedded in an American vernacular voice. Now, there is no particular nationalist or aesthetic imperative that music has to have this characteristic. When these imperatives impose themselves, what results is the shallow transparent "Americana" of a Chávez Sinfonia India (an "Indian" symphony by a composer who would never willingly set foot in an Indian pueblo), or a Copland Rodeo (a "western" piece by a Brooklyn kid who never got closer to a horse than a movie theater) or the flag-waving patriotism of A Lincoln Portrait. The biggest cultural fraud in this sense, of course, is Appalachian Spring — the piece originally with the bland title, Ballet for Martha, which had this extra-musical overlay glommed onto it, and suddenly Aaron Copland was the "great American" composer Imagine a Japanese composer writing some piece with a typically neutered modernist title like Forms III or Extensions IV, and having a choreographer take such a piece, retitle it Spring

Cherry Blossoms at Mt. Yoshino, stick in a boy-meets-girl story-line, and ... well, you get the picture. None of this kind of music represents for me an authentic "American vernacular" voice. By contrast, listen to Revueltas' Homenaje a Federico Garcia Lorca or Cowell's Hymn and Fuguing Tune No.5. I'm venturing into slippery terrain here, that of subjective opinion and judgment of quality. But — can't you hear? This music has more pith, more soul — that is the American voice, its essence; not some tuneful melodies lifted from books in a library (as in the cases of Chávez and Copland). But why should we care about an "American voice" at all? On one level, it really isn't important, and in fact can represent a real danger, one that has long plagued our society, culture and body politic — namely a stodgy and dangerous provincialism. In this day and age of international travel and communication, that is utterly useless. Nor does it serve any honest purpose to market it as another "flavor" in the global cultural supermarket. All that is phony and dishonest. The reasons for an authentic "American vernacular" voice are much simpler — this is merely who and where we are — how we speak, think, act. Harry Partch's settings of Greek drama or African folktales sound as "American" to me as his earlier hobo settings with explicitly "American" texts. Why? Partch himself states the issue clearly: originality cannot or should not be a goal in itself. Be yourself and that will be original enough. That is another lesson we learn from Henry Cowell, throughout his musical career.

Cowell from the 1940's on becomes like the William Carlos Williams of a new American musical voice, grounded in the here and now of our own history and real experience. He turns away from the rhetoric and complex architecture of high European modernism (perhaps Cowell's greatest work of that early period is his Synchrony from 1930, also written for Martha Graham which, alas for her, she never choreographed...). Even when working with the ultimate of European institutions, the symphony orchestra, his music speaks in the formal language of song form, hymn and fuguing tunes, jigs etc. Perhaps the music is not totally successful all the time in this regard, because the symphony orchestra imposes such a formidable set of pre-fabricated conditions. The same is true of opera, which accounts for the scarcity of anything resembling a progressive, or great "American" opera ("Is there such a thing as a 'progressive' opera?" Conlon Nancarrow once asked me with a bemused smile, and he had a point. In almost all cases the terms "opera" and "progressive" are mutually contradictory right from the start, due to many factors, both musical and extra-musical). But in this sense, for me Cowell yet again represents a new beginning, and a potential revolution, the implications of which have hardly been recognized, except by very few. Why? Because this revolution doesn't point forward in a classic modernist, linear-historical sense: i.e. more complex, ever newer technologies, the future always superseding the past. And it is not a revolution of style or any kind of "ism." The composer Kyle Gann pinpointed this correctly when he wrote: "Cowell simply realized...that to go back to the basics can be as radical as anything else."

Which brings us closer to the present. I want to stay with poetry and talk of a revolution of poetic language that occurred in the 1950's and which owed a great deal to the influence of Williams (while at the same time acknowledging Pound). I will mention three poets, though they are not the only ones (and they're not all males, either): Lew Welch, Philip Whalen and Gary Snyder (who all went to school together at Reed College in the late 1940's). Welch stated the issue most succinctly, when he said "Language is speech," the title of one of his most important essays on poetics. And further on he adds, "Language is speech, but speech is not dialect," an important clarification.

Accuracy.

Exactness.

We have to be exactly accurate to what we have in Mind. That is all we have. If we are to make of that Mind in words, then we have to be absolutely accurate in the way we use our native speech, since that, too, is all we have. It is our only language.

The shape of our Mind is the shape of our native speech, since our native speech helped to shape our Mind.

"Mind is shapely." Mind speaks in many ways. (Lew Welch, How I Work as a Poet & Other Essays, p. 46)

This brought about a revolution in poetry. It finally and once and for all rescued American poetry from English (British) speech and rhetoric, rescued poetry from the academic classroom and all its "rules" and rarified preciousness (does anyone notice how poets, when reading, so often adopt another kind of voice, a selfconsciously artificial one, with a false sense of "musicality?" Rare is the poet who reads a poem the same way he talks.) They brought poetry down off its lofty pedestal of aestheticism and returned it to the streets, and a concrete here-and-now sense of Nature and of spirituality (as opposed to the idealism of the English Romantics, or the "Orientalism" of an Arthur Waley). They had an ear for jazz and bop rhythms, and could embody that without having to literally imitate it in their poems (the weakness of rap poetry, or "jazz" poetry, or "cowboy" poetry — all forms of speech based on dialect, not language). It is totally modern, without being "modernist." And as in the case of almost any good idea, it is timeless. In classic (Sung Dynasty) Chinese poetry there was a type of poet referred to as "colloquial ... because the diction of his most characteristic poems has a natural flow resembling that of everyday spoken language, although kept within the strict confines of Chinese verse forms." So — our modern American poetry revolution has roots going back a thousand years! Maybe we musicians have to go that far back too — back as far as the troubadours and trouvères. Alas, "classical" music has seen itself imprisoned in a context of social elitism, and one of our tasks should be to break out of that prison once and for all. The university perhaps offered a more democratic context, but one that has displayed its own elitist pitfalls too. Of course, as some of us have found out, it's pretty tough trying to make a living out on the street.

So we have Cowell with his American voice — as straightforward as a Shaker chair — and a global vision that embraces the equal legitimacy and beauty of other musical cultures and historical periods. This inspires Lou Harrison into a lifelong love affair with the musics of Asia — and earlier forms of European music before Bach. So with Lou, we have a Suite for Violin And American Gamelan with movements entitled Estampie, Air, Jhala (a form based on the music of India) and Chaconne! His Varied Trio has a Gending (Java) and a Rondeau! With Lou we have this revolution of Cowell's extended, similar to what the poets I mentioned did in relation to Williams' work. Like the poets, and true to their lives on the West coast looking West to Asia, Harrison invokes that sense of Asia (and Buddhism) in his life and work. After all, as both Cowell and Harrison said, in the San Francisco of their youth it was easier to encounter Chinese than European opera!

As I already mentioned, my life and cultural investigations took me to Mexico rather than Asia, and Cowell and Harrison provided me with an inspiration on how to understand and absorb the myriad cultural and musical influences I encountered there. Before and after that was the indigenous United States (both Indian and pre-Anglo Hispanic), first the deserts and forests of California and later the US Southwest; and they likewise gave me a "handle," so to speak, on how to approach all this (do you think Schoenberg, or Boulez and Babbitt, or Messiaen, prepared me for Hopi or Zuni, or Jemez Pueblo, or Chimayo, New Mexico? That's laughable!). It's a cliché, and at the same time obvious, that the life one lives deter- mines the creative direction one's work takes. And though I have lived in fairly isolated (in terms of the so-called "music world") and beautiful places almost all my life, neither of those factors was really a reason I did so. I have lived in New Mexico (in the era before computers and airport commuting made the "have your cake and eat it too" lifestyle possible), Oaxaca, Veracruz and now Maine for cultural reasons. You see, I don't confuse "culture" with a concert hall." Culture is above all for me a question of place, in a geographical sense, and the cultural and historical relationships of people living there to those places: land and life, like the title of a very influential book by geographer Carl Sauer. The two years I did live in an "art capital," i.e. Berlin, in the early 90's were exciting: I attended an average of 2-3 concerts a week. Like Cowell sixty-two years before, my time in Berlin was largely a study of world musics. In fact there was an entire museum with an active concert series devoted to just that: The House of the World's Cultures. I have written about all that in my GONE WALKABOUT book. But gradually I grew tired of seeing all these different cultural presentations as if in a museum or zoo. What was completely missing was the context: the place and the people, the landscape, food, climate etc. For me music is inseparable from all these other factors. And unfortunately I didn't much relate to the <u>lumpenproletariat</u> Berlin culture I was living in, though things markedly improved when I moved to the Turkish section of the city, where the weekly Middle Eastern food market became one of the cultural highlights of my stay in Germany: I never missed it. I began to dream of going back to somewhere where there wasn't this artificial separation of art and life, and I recalled with nostalgia the high desert of New Mexico and the ceremonies and dances at the Indian pueblos and Hispanic villages. I had grown tired of concerts and concert halls. So I ended up, for a year and a half at least, in my "ragweed ranch" in the dusty ex-mining town of Madrid, New Mexico, right on the Turquoise Trail, so named because of the turquoise mined nearby which in ancient times had found its way as far south as the Aztec court in Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City). Culturally I was home again, and renewed my ties with the land, its original cultures and a history that stretched back over a millenium. I spent the summer hanging out at Indian dances, and writing one of my strongest pieces (Another Sunrise).

I have spent a lifetime studying Native American musics, and my trips in the Southwest encompassed the New Mexico Pueblos, the Zunis, Hopis, Navajos, Utes, Apaches and Yaquis. Ethnomusicology has always had a tinge of the "exotic" to it, people going off to faraway places to "study" foreign musical traditions. For me, ethnomusicology always began in my own backyard, at home — because frankly I don't think there is any culture more "exotic" or foreign to our own sensibilities than the Native American. When you are at a Kachina dance at Hopi or Zuni, you could just as well be in Tibet or Bali, as far as "otherness" goes. As a composer, I quickly realized that this was a music that one could never "appropriate." The heart and soul of this music are distinct from ours (my own) and inviolable. Historically my generation has already moved beyond the melodic borrowings of a Carlos Chavez or Arthur Farwell — that clearly no longer worked. I attempted it in one early piece, the 2nd movement of my 1977 *Dreaming of Immortality in a Thatched Cottage*, where I "set" a Pomo melody transcribed from the poet-ethnologist Jaime de Angulo, whose research on

northern California Indian musics I was then investigating. When it came time to perform and record the piece, I opted to withdraw the second movement for the time being. Not for any particular ethical reason (I didn't think I was violating anything on that count), but simply because Indian songs sung by trained operalieder singers just sounded ludicrous to me. Kind of like enchiladas in a hollandaise sauce — it just doesn't work. Even though the main musical content of the movement was in the freely composed percussion, and the singing only functioned as a kind of cantus firmus.

I ultimately came to the conclusion, one I still hold, that as much as I love and am moved by this music, that the most respectful thing I could do was to leave it alone. Oh yes, there were things one could "use," and respectfully, without trespassing on the magic or uniqueness of this music. These were principally specific sounds, in the realm of percussion — because I likewise come from a rich tradition of percussion, the one inherited from Cowell, Harrison and Cage. I admired the booming resonance of pow-wow drumming — just the resonance as such, without making any attempt at borrowing from the unique vocal styles or melodic characteristics. That kind of abstracted resonance appears in my *Three Songs of Mad Coyote* — four drummers and eight sticks playing tom-toms in unison. Much as they would in pow-wow drumming; but a single unison line comprising an entire piece was unheard-of — forbidden, even! — in that era of everything-but-the-kitchensink percussion ensembles and hyper-complexity. The key was resonance — something I had learned from Cowell. In another movement I doubled the drumming with massive entire-keyboard clusters played with a 2x4 board — the "mother of all tone clusters," whose ancestry also obviously goes back to Cowell. All of this is modern, and timeless, at the same time. I recall a single drummer I saw at the Santo Domingo Pueblo Corn Dance once. He was thin and ancient, accompanying a chorus of over a hundred singers; and yet he was striking that drum with a BOOM! that could be heard almost all the way to Albuquerque.

Rasps and rattles are another marvel of Native American musics. To hear the sound of 100 or 300 dancers, each with a gourd rattle shaken in unison, is a glorious and moving sonic experience. And in Mexico and the US, there are almost an infinite variety of rattles, of all shapes, sizes, materials and sounds. Our use and idea of the "maraca" (rattle) in our own tradition is impoverished in comparison. The same with rasps — nothing frustrates me more than when people play a rasp in one of my pieces, in that anemic "scritchy scritchy" manner that passes for guiro playing. I am thinking specifically of the *Hummingbird Songs*, notation-wise one of my simplest pieces, which has consistently received the most excruciatingly awful performances. Because in this piece the music is just as much about the SOUND as it is about the notes; and if one gets the notes right but the sound wrong, the piece is a total failure; indeed it's laughable (to my own embarrassment). I tell percussionists: check out the loud, vigorous, muscular rasping of the Yaqui Deer Dances (with three musicians playing wooden rasps over upturned hollow gourd resonators/amplifiers) or of the Ute Bear Dance (where rasping is done over corrugated metal!). Scritchy scritchy, indeed! — get out of here!

There is a plethora of Native American instruments, and to this day it surprises me that American musicians are so unaware of American percussive traditions and their sonic wealth. From water drums to peyote rattles, to Pueblo drums that are as finely made (and richly tonal) as Chinese ones; or the bullroarer, used by Cowell in his 1920's piece Ensemble (where in a wonderful performance anecdote, one of the "thunder sticks" came loose while being swung and headed in a heroic, sacrificial trajectory straight at a music critic in the audience! That must have been one "powerful" bullroarer! Maybe it didn't appreciate being culturally appropriated...). Talk to a musician about Asian, Indonesian or African percussion traditions, and many can wax enthusiastic

and go into detail. Talk to them about American percussion traditions, and they draw a near total blank. Whereas Cowell was writing *Trickster Coyote* (for Erick Hawkins) using rattle, tom-tom, drum and bullroarer back in 1941. One of the most flattering comments I've ever received about a piece of mine came once when my Santa Fe ensemble was rehearsing the percussion quartet movement from *The Conquest of Mexico* at Cal Arts in 1985. The instruments consisted of two large Pueblo drums (conceptually derived from the Aztec huehuetl, still used in present day chirimía groups in Puebla), a two pitched wooden log drum (based on the Aztec teponaztle, still played by the Maya of the Yucatan peninsula, where it is known as a tunkul), a rasp (the Aztec omichicahuaztli), and a wooden slap stick (which in my conception was meant to emulate a gunshot; in a recent performance without my supervision, claves were substituted — totally wrong!). A Ghanaian percussion ensemble instructor was watching/listening to us, and sent a student over to ask us ... what country this music was from! We paused, at a loss for words, until our slap stick player said, "Tell him, umh ... New Mexico!" and we all nodded and smiled in agreement. Henry Cowell would have been proud.

Living and traveling in Mexico opened my eyes and ears to a whole other t~pe of American indigenous music, and provided a key to much of my own work from the 1980's on. As I said, I had come to feel that it was impossible to "appropriate" Native American music in any effective or ethical way, aside from the fact of a shared percussion tradition. Once I became immersed in Mexican Indian musics, I discovered to my surprise and delight that just the reverse had happened — that "they" had appropriated "our" music (of course the cost that they had to pay was the near-complete annihilation of their own cultural traditions at the hands of the Spanish conquistadores and priests; but that's another story). What had occurred was that the Mexican Indians had adopted the tools (instruments) and much of the language (starting from the 16th century onwards) of European music. And then a marvelous process of deconstruction followed by reconstruction took place, and what resulted was a unique and wonderful musical hybrid. Lou has spoken of Cowell and his advocacy of the then (1961) virtually untalked-about idea of the "musical hybrid:"

It was also during this conference (of ethnomusicologists in Tokyo in 1961, to which Lou and Cowell were invited — PG) that Henry made an eloquent plea on behalf of musical hybrids. Ethnomusicologists present tended to feel that there ought to be no inter-relationship between the "studier" and the "studied." Henry got up and explained that, as in much else in life, hybrids were often stronger and more productive ... music not excepted. ("Learning from Henry," in *The Whole World of Music*, p. 164)

In Mexico the Indian population quickly adapted to the European musical training offered by the friars, and to instruction as to how to construct and play European musical instruments (this "innate" ability and enthusiasm for music was frequently noted by chroniclers in the first hundred years after the Conquest). We can still see today this musical legacy painted on the walls and ceilings of many colonial era churches in Indian villages, and often surprisingly remote ones; paintings of angels playing Baroque instruments such as viols, violas da gamba, or shawms, instruments that went out of common European usage more than 250 years ago. In Oaxaca, for instance, by the year 1700 there was already a local tradition of organ building. In the past fifteen years there has been a revival of interest in documenting and reviving/restoring this tradition — so now, with luck and good timing, one can hear the sounds of that era (in terms of instruments and original acoustical spaces, i.e. the churches) much as one can still ~ the art. The Baroque valveless trumpet can still be

heard in a few Zapotec villages in the northern Sierra of Oaxaca, and the Renaissance shawm, known in Mexico as a chirimía, is still a common instrument in religious ritual and festivities in Indian Mexico, often accompanied by the Aztec <u>huehuetl</u> drum (now, inexplicably, referred to as a <u>teponaztle</u>, though that was originally the Aztec log drum) or by 19th century military band style drums. As in Spain, there are musicians who playa small flute and drum simultaneously, holding both instruments with the left hand while striking the drum with the right. This is so frequent that it leads me to suspect ancient pre-Spanish roots, or at least affinities. There are also musical styles that display little or no European influence, though these instances are less common. The Deer Dance of the Yaqui and Mayo Indians, that I've already cited, with rasps, water drum and singers. Some of the drum ensembles of southeastern Mexico — I'm thinking specifically of the Zoques in Chiapas and the Chontales of Tabasco — are so unique and conceptually elaborate that it is hard for me to imagine a European precedent, though there may be one. The songs and chants accompanied only by rattles of some of the northwest Indian groups (the Seris and Huicholes for instance) clearly seem archaic. In addition to European influences, there is also the possibility of African influences due to the slave trade perhaps in these drumming ensembles I've previously mentioned. Rhythmic dancing on a wooden tarima is one such example, prominent in the Mexican son tradition and in geographical regions (the Gulf and southern Pacific coasts) where black populations have left their mark. For that matter, I've encountered the water drum (an inverted gourd floating in a tub of water) in the music of Togo as well as in Sonora — so either it is a "universal" invention, or one brought over from Africa (or re-introduced there later). The large box-size marimbula is a classic case, whose African or Afro-Caribbean origins are still disputed, and which is present in Mexico too, precisely in those regions with close contact with the Caribbean. In fact Mexico, the most indigenous (Indian) country in all of Latin America, is undoubtedly one of the richest musical melting pots and hybrids in the entire world. It is our next-door neighbor and yet all this remains virtually unknown to US musicians, whose image of Mexico conforms to only a handful of worn-out stereotypes. I had gone to Mexico originally in search of Revueltas and Nancarrow, but for me this was the most astonishing discovery of all.

Nowhere is this hybrid quality of Mexican Indian music more evident and remarkable than in the ongoing vibrant tradition of brass bands (a legacy of 19th century European political intervention) and in the diversity of string instruments, especially violins, guitars and harps. Mexico is an organologist's dream in this regard. String instruments come in all sizes and shapes. Some of the most wonderful for me are the miniature violins and guitars of the Huichol peyote music (a music that sounds like paradise to me), or the miniature violin, guitar and harp used for some dances in the northern Huasteca region. The violin music of the Nahuas in the Sierra Madre Oriental, and especially their anthemic Xochipitsauac ("Little Flower") is as tuneful as any melody dreamed up by Lou Harrison, another master of violin lyricism. And 10 and behold, the repetition aesthetic of so-called Minimalism is present too, such as in the Bolom Chon melody of the Tzotzil Indians of highland Chiapas or the trance-like music played literally for days on end by the harp ensembles in the Sierra of Zongolica in Veracruz. They were playing half-hour two-chord-change pieces in Indian Mexico long before it became a fashion in southern California or downtown New York (again reinforcing my thesis that every good modern idea is actually timeless). Virtuoso US country fiddling has its counterpart in the sones <u>huastecos</u>. And what about eight over-size homemade Tarahumara violins, sawing away in a rather rough unison, while Matachin dancers dance and twirl, punctuating this music with their rattles. It was entirely logical, coming back to the US after Mexico, that I would turn to violins for much of my ensemble and chamber music. This also reflected a musical-political reality, that composers like myself have had such infrequent access to larger ensembles, and so often have had to create our own. One or two violins can create a

cohesive musical texture (my *Matachin Dances*), or a violin, piano, percussion trio is very flexible in terms of timbre and ensemble textures (*Sones de Flor, Love Songs and Coyote's Bones (Last Piece*), all written for the Abel, Steinberg, Winant Trio, known also for their performances of Cowell and Harrison). While larger pieces of mine sit on the shelf for years, if not decades, these smaller scale pieces have a life of their own. It is obvious that aesthetic choices are often at the same time practical ones.

There are other aesthetic choices that have to be made when dealing with influences from traditional music. Like with the problem of opera singers tackling Indian songs, it is hard or nearly impossible to "imitate" Indian musical styles — the stark simplicity and repetition, the often wobbley intonation. These are subtleties that can't be equaled by conservatory-trained violinists. To attempt to do so would be to turn something that is natural and spontaneous into something self-conscious and artificial. One, I think, has to accept this and deal with that contradiction. Again, Cowell's music, especially the later work and pieces like the Hymn and Fuguing Tunes, points away to express these influences while retaining one's own authenticity, modern voice and technical formation. This is not a case of whole-scale appropriating, of sticking "Indian music" into a Western piece, or attempting to transcribe or "adapt" it. The reverse needs to occur — the Western music, attitudes towards form and style, have to change in order to adapt to the influence. But one of the lessons one learns from living in a foreign culture is that "multi-culturalism" only goes so far. Too many composers use this concept and musical influences from other cultures in as casual and superficial way as if they were choosing which ethnic restaurant to eat in. This is not multiculturalism so much as global consumerism. I am very leery of "fusion" — in cooking and especially music (when I hear the terms "flamenco" or "celtic," I just run for it!). I think the challenge is to invent (yes, that word again: invent) our own creative voices, rather than borrow someone else's. Following Cowell's lead, Lou Harrison has probably achieved the most complete synthesis in this regard, from the most diverse sources (whereas mine are a lot closer to home). Partch too, though his musical world is so individualistic, it excludes a lot more than Harrison's. Perhaps this is why Lou's music has been so disdained by academic Euro-centric composers, and why his work (unlike that of Cage and his "school") is so little understood in Europe. Because in developing his own personal voice, Harrison, like myself two generations later, has stepped outside the linear-historical loop.

A comment by Harold Budd years ago (though he may have a different opinion now) about Cage and Harrison surprised and illuminated me:

Your take on Cage and Harrison, in particular, was really interesting to read because I've only analyzed my youthful attraction to the same in the most shallow way. But basically — when I was introduced to it ... 2 things struck me immediately (well, way more than just 2 things): it was a kind of folk music (!), seriously, but it had the one ingredient all the other stuff lacked, namely art. And the ramifications of that epiphany were humbling, stunning. (letter to the author, 28 Nov. 1989)

This gave me an insight into what I was trying to do: to invent, in a sense, a new kind of folk music. One that has nothing to do with the worn-out formulas of commercial music: i.e. the obligatory guitars and songs about this and that. No, not that at all (some of us who grew up in the 60's are likewise weary of the "white boys with

electric guitars" syndrome — now, after forty years, can't they come up with something else to do? I guess they are with the whole dj phenomenon. But I still get a sense of déjà-vu there too). I get equally weary when I read that young composers are still creating "rock-influenced" music. Isn't that a dead horse, just like imitating "70's Minimalism?"

So this confrontation with Mexican Indian musics, and the way they appropriated European music to their own cultural needs and reality, pointed a way for me to re-invent my own musical language. To call it a new self-invented "folk" music is erroneous, because such labels imply dialect rather than language as Lew Welch defined it. Once more I'm brought back to this poetry of the 1950's and 60's, and its mix of influences, directness and simplicity of speech, and here-and-now qualities. This is totally modern in a non-selfconscious way, but also once and for all off the aesthetic and academic pedestals, down to earth. This is not "jazz," "bop," or "beat" poetry — the labels vanish. This is just poetry, of a "fine, serious ... style," to borrow Cowell's phrase in regards to his Hymn and Fuguing Tunes. This is what I have tried (am trying) to do: not to create "avant-garde" music, "modernist" music, "classical" music, or "folk" music. Or if it is a new "folk" music, it is that only in the sense of what Louie Armstrong said: it's all "folk" music (however fucked, even Boulez is a "folk!"). Let's face it: now that we have passed through the revolution of everything is permitted, we have moved beyond the modernist, "experimental" period. Though we will continue to be modern, and will continue to experiment (but the latter word will no longer be limited to merely a "technical" definition). And now, nothing is ~ priori prohibited. The prison doors of the imagination (held under aesthetic and academic lock and key) are once and for all open. Be yourself, and that will be original enough, Partch said. What we strive for is music, music without any "isms," but in a "fine, serious style" (Cowell), "exactly accurate to what we have in Mind. That is all we have" (Welch).

\_\_\_\_\_

I will add one final (I promise!) thought, to bring this back to Cowell's vision of a humanist music, or as Lou Harrison wrote, "He knew a new world of human music." The phrase reminds me of the title of a seminal essay by the poet Charles Olson, "Human Universe," and I think there is a similar thrust, though Cowell's vision is simpler and more down home. I have always been touched by a story Dick Higgins wrote, of Cowell listening to his Shady, New York neighbors attempting to playa piece of his: "The resulting dissonance was quite amazing ++. " (Higgins had just described his first impression, from a distance, as "a perfectly dreadful caterwauling as if a herd of pigs were being slaughtered"...!)... "but the expression on HC's face was angelic and radiant." Whether Higgins was aware of this or not, this echoes a story about Charles 1ves' bandmaster father — which, though I don't have it at hand, must be from the Cowells' book on rves; where else? Significantly Lew Welch mentions this story in his essay, "Language is Speech," which I have previously quoted from.

Ives' father was the choirmaster of a small church and led the congregation in the hymns. One of the members was a huge Swede who just loved to sing, who sang very loud, and who never hit one note "right." Other members complained to Mr. Ives, couldn't he somehow make the man be quiet because he was throwing everybody else off? Ives said, "Have you ever looked at that man's eyes when he's singing? Have you ever listened to what he does? That man knows more about music than any of you." (p. 33)

This takes me back, 36 years ago, to my first composition lesson with Harold Budd, and Zen in the Art of Archery, and a story that John Cage quotes in his lecture Indeterminacy: the fact that in Japan there is a revered master of archery ... who NEVER hits the bull's-eye! I think this musical koan was finally answered for me, in Mexico, in my encounters with the brass band tradition. Many of my composer friends dismiss this music, because of its obvious European derivation, or because for them it is not "primitive" or "Indian" enough. I to some extent shared these thoughts when I moved back to Oaxaca in 2001. I figured I probably wouldn't be studying this music, but once I immersed myself in the Sierra Norte and began going to fiestas in various Zapotec and Mixe villages where sometimes as many as four bands would be playing (separately or simultaneously — it was here I was once and for all baptized into the "Ives effect" of musical simultaneity, both in acoustical and spatial terms), I just fell in love with this music and its implications. It dawned on me, that above and beyond any stylistic questions, these bands were just like the old-time village gamelans of Bali (before mass tourism transformed much of it into mere "spectacle"); that these people, like the Balinese, "are born, live and die with music." And in the exclusive, specialized, compartmentalized sense of our capitalist society, these people "aren't artists; they just try to do the best they can." (the often quoted phrase about the Balinese). This is something fundamental, a state of grace, something that we have lost in our lives and society once and for all. And we'll never get it back. Watching the Mixes dancing 'til the wee hours of the morning to their own music (quite literally their own compositions) played by their own musicians (of at least three generations together), and seeing how music united and bound together these communities, I had that same epiphany, one that I'm sure Silvestre Revueltas must have also had: that despite "wrong" notes and flaws in tuning, or one musician who's had too much to drink, these people knew more about the magic and essence of music than any of us. More than any of our professors, avant-gardists, pop musicians, rock musicians, classical musicians etc. Music is life, and place, and community; the cycles and rituals of the seasons and of one's self. Any other attitude is mere artifice or "product." So: let's get on with it, and "try to do the best we can." In the end, that is the heart and soul of the permission that Henry Cowell has given us.

Peter Garland Winnegance, Maine March-April 2006

\* Slonimsky was fired from his post as conductor by the LA Philharmonic in the mid-Thirties for insisting on playing music by composers in Henry Cowell's circle. Nancarrow was first published by Cowell in 1938 when Slonimsky sent his former student's music to Cowell's New Music Quarterly. (At the time Nancarrow was fighting for the Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.) Garland patterned his periodical Soundings Magazine after Cowell's NMQ by publishing scores (rather than articles) of lesser-known but very significant composers, including the complete *Studies for Player Piano* by Nancarrow. Amirkhanian's work on KPFA Radio and with Other Minds has had at its core the music of Cage, Harrison, Cowell, Hovhaness, Antheil, Rudhyar, Nancarrow, Varese, Crawford and others from the maverick wing of American music.