

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FSS 37450

HENRY COWELL

Complete Works for Violin & Piano
Suite Hymn & Fuguing Tune No. 16 | Sonata
David Sackson, violin | Dwight Peltzer, piano



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Dwight Peltzer
photo - Marla Waterman



David Sackson
photo - Peter Simon

For the first time the complete recording of Henry Cowell's violin and piano music. These important and exciting works of sheer lyric beauty will be of particular interest to all music lovers. The dedicated artists, David Sackson, violinist and Dwight Peltzer, pianist have infused these compositions with a vitality that reflects the protean stature of the composer.

SIDE ONE

SUITE

- Band 1. Largo
- Band 2. Allegretto
- Band 3. Adante tranquillo
- Band 4. Allegro marcato
- Band 5. Andante calmato
- Band 6. Presto

SIDE TWO

SONATA

- Band 1. Hymn - Largo
- Band 2. In Fuguing Style -
Allegro maestoso
- Band 3. Ballad - Lento cantabile
- Band 4. Jig - vivace
- Band 5. Finale - vivace

**HYMN AND FUGUING TUNE
NO. 16**

- Band 7. Hymn - Moderato
- Band 8. Fuguing Tune - Allegro

HENRY COWELL 1897-1965

Henry Cowell, one of America's first avant-garde composers, led a singularly bold and creative life that, over a period of half a century, encompassed a vast exploration of every means of producing and organizing musical sound, ranging from the early piano "tone-cluster" pieces through nineteen symphonies and more than a dozen "Hymn and Fuguing Tunes" for various combinations. Add to this Cowell's work as teacher, pioneer, ethnomusicologist, writer, tireless promoter of the fresh and new in music, and a truly protean figure emerges.

As Richard Franko Goldman noted in a memorial tribute to Henry Cowell published in the Spring-Summer 1966 issue of *Perspectives of New Music*:

Recorded at CUE RECORDINGS, N.Y.C. 1980
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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The Man 1897-1965

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As Richard Franko Goldman noted in a memorial tribute to Henry Cowell published in the Spring-Summer 1966 issue of Perspectives of New Music:

"Henry Cowell was a mover and one of the enliveners of music in our time. All of us, whatever our musical tastes and practices, owe him a great deal. He helped two generations to see and think and hear, and he helped to create and build a foundation for modern music in America. This is not a small achievement; it is a gigantic one and should not be forgotten."

Born in 1897 in Menlo Park, California, of an Irish father and a mother born in Iowa, Cowell started his musical life on the violin, and already before the age of eight was recognized as a musical prodigy. Shortly after, however, young Henry's love for the violin was replaced by his newly-discovered love for the piano, which remained the major instrument throughout his life and launched his career as a composer.

At sixteen, Cowell started his formal studies in composition with Charles

Seeger at the University of California, Berkeley. It should be noted that Cowell had already written more than one hundred pieces by this time. Seeger recognized a musical spirit that was already determined and developed. Since Cowell had produced works combining elements of polytonality, dissonant counterpoint, harmony and atonality, Seeger knew that Cowell could not benefit and grow through orthodox musical discipline; that if it were to be disciplined at all, it must be derived solely from its own unorthodox creation. This mental discipline was reflected in Cowell's highly original book, New Musical Resources, published in 1919 when Cowell was twenty-two years old.

In addition to his work with Seeger in California, Cowell also studied with Goetschius in New York and with Schoenberg in Berlin. It is interesting to note that many of Cowell's theories were already developed and published before Schoenberg's new techniques were known in this country.

Throughout his life one of Cowell's abiding interests was ethnic music, not only the Celtic tradition which was transmitted through the songs and tales his Irish father sang and told (interestingly, almost every Scherzo Cowell wrote embodied the spirit of Jigs and Reels), but the music of Asia and the Orient as well. Cowell's genius enabled him to capture the essence of ethnic music, be it a Raga from India or the quarter-tone music from Japan, and translate these indigenous sounds into Western notation.

Cowell is most readily known for his invention of new and unusual sounds which he called "tone-clusters", achieved through the employment of the whole hand, fist or forearm on the keyboard. It is fascinating to note

that Bela Bartok heard Cowell play during one of Cowell's concert tours of Europe, and after hearing the American's revolutionary "tone-cluster" technique, the Hungarian composer asked Cowell's permission to use this technique in one of his own compositions.

From 1949 on Cowell explored the possibilities inherent in early American musical culture which resulted in a neo-Baroque form called by Cowell "Hymn and Fuguing Tune". The slow, stately modal style of folk ballads from the mountains of the Southeastern United States, themselves dating from Elizabethan times, was admirably juxtaposed to fast, gay, polyphonic tunes employed by Colonial American composers. He did not use exact quotations from these American sources, but the spirit of both is unmistakably there in numerous works for many combinations of instruments and is especially prevalent in the Violin Sonata.

One of Cowell's important pioneering endeavors and one with perhaps the most far-reaching effect on later generations of young musicians was in composing original works for Band, thus opening up a new field for other contemporary composers. Today in America there is hardly a High School or College Band Director interested in contemporary music who does not have in his library a large catalogue of original works for Band to enhance his programs by such composers, in addition to Cowell, as Milhaud, William Schuman, Grainger, Creston, Tansman, Tcherpnin, and many others.

Cowell's continuing championship of new music by other composers was a fact of his life which cannot be overemphasized. In addition to his own vast body of work (well over a thousand compositions), he was a constant promoter of performances of contemporary music as well as lecturer, teacher, musicologist, editor and author. His activities on behalf of contemporary music took Cowell to all corners of the world. He was, in

fact, one of the first, if not indeed the first, American composer to represent the United States on tours overseas through the performance of his own works, both for piano solo as well as soloist with orchestra. These tours, sponsored by the State Department commencing in 1956, made of Cowell for some years by far the most widely-known American composer in Europe and Asia and he was the first American composer to be published in the Soviet Union,

Among his tireless activities was the founding and fostering in 1929 of the publication New Music Quarterly, dedicated to the publication and recording of new works by North and South American composers. This magazine flourished through the Forties and the works of such composers as Antheil, Chavez, Copland, Richard Franko Goldman, Ives, Ornstein, Piston, Rigger and Slonimsky were given performances through the League of Composers and the Pan-American Association. In addition Cowell served as president of the American Composers Alliance for four years. He was among the first to recognize the unusual genius of Charles Ives, whom he championed in his book on Ives which he co-authored with his wife, Sidney Robertson Cowell. This work was not published until 1955, although much of this material on Ives was published in 1933 in Cowell's American Composers on American Music.

Cowell was the recipient of numerous awards, among which were his Guggenheim Fellowships for the years 1930-31, his election to the National Academy of Arts and Letters in 1959, plus two Honorary Doctorates. In 1962 on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday, Cowell was showered with congratulatory telegrams from around the world, including one from President John F. Kennedy which read:

"You hold a place of high honor in American arts, and you have been a source of stimulus to many students and performers of music. I join with your many friends and admirers in paying my respects and congratulations."

Cowell, the dedicated proselytizer, is best characterized by the astute and witty words of Nicolas Slonimsky, the noted musicologist and composer, written during Cowell's active years:

"It is rare to find a crusader in a big cause whose intellect is as strong as his battle-ax. Not all crusaders are more interested in their cause than in themselves....In managing various non-lucrative enterprises (for the benefit of musicians other than himself) he is as much of an innovator as he is in composing his own and administering other contemporaries' music...He works with determination unlesened by the realization that the world, even that part of the world known by the name of musical, is little flexible. But Henry Cowell would not be himself if he did not follow the path of most resistance."

Henry Cowell's thoughts about his art are perhaps best expressed by himself:

"I believe in music, in its spirituality, its exaltation, its ecstatic nobility, its humor, its power to penetrate to the basic fineness of every human being. As a creator of music, I contribute my religious, philosophical and ethical beliefs in terms of the world of creative sound - that sound which flows through the mind of the composer with a concentrated intensity that baffles description, the sound which is the very life of the composer, and which is the sum and substance of his faith and feeling."

Cowell once said, "I like to think that Charles Ives was right when he declared, 'There is always something more to be said'. For myself, I have more ideas than I can ever use. This is a happy state and I wish the same to all of you."

The Music

These works for violin and piano, written over a period of a quarter of a century from 1924 through 1958, show Cowell as a "classic" composer, writing "pure" music, rather than the "revolutionary" effects for which he is famous. Here Cowell reaches back to early American and Irish influences of his childhood, now enriched by the life experience of a mature composer.

SUITE FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Published in 1926 by Breitkopf & Haertl

I Largo

This movement, which suggests the Neo-Classic style, is built on broad and bold lines. The sweeping lyricism of the violin melody is enriched by the chord-block structure in the piano.

II Allegretto

Here the composer has written one of his most intriguing movements. He interweaves an unusual pattern of triple meter in the violin against duple meter in the piano, thus creating an original and startling effect.

III Andante tranquillo

Cowell, as though in a reverent bow to Handel, has produced a work which, in its serenity and nobility, equals the loftiest moments of the great German-born master himself.

IV Allegro marcato

Although the violin evokes the Baroque in spirit, the keyboard recalls the tumultuous and joyous ringing of church bells.

V Andante calmato

Cowell has captured the poignant and noble spirit of some of the great slow movements of Johann Sebastian Bach.

VI Presto

This exuberant finale is a fitting conclusion to a singularly original treatment of the classical suite.

HYMN AND FUGING TUNE NO. 16

Published by C. F. Peters 1968

I Hymn - Moderato

The stark, modal harmonies capture the spirit of early American church music.

II Fuging Tune - Allegro

This rollicking, boisterous tune is tossed back and forth between the two instruments with masterly contrapuntal dexterity, ending in a bold and brilliant coda.

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Published by Associated Music Publishers 1947

In the early 1940's the Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti heard from Bela Bartok about Cowell's new musical techniques. Szigeti wrote to Cowell to ask for a work for violin and piano for his approaching Carnegie Hall concert. Cowell's schedule was too heavy for him to undertake a new project at that moment, so he took the melody written for a poem by his father, called "How Old is Song", and simply copied it out, minus its text, for Szigeti.

There was some correspondence between the two men about folk fiddling styles, Szigeti having once undertaken to learn the gypsy style of fiddling, and he asked whether Cowell would write for him a larger

work which would reflect American folk style and would include some of the American folk fiddling idiom which Szigeti had heard about. The result was this Sonata for Violin and Piano, sketched during 1944 and completed in 1945.

I Hymn - Largo

The use of rural American hymnody together with the sweep of the melodic arch create a mood of unbounded exaltation.

II In Fuging Style - Allegro maestoso

This highly polyphonic movement, utilizing the skillful blending of various contrapuntal devices, results in a movement filled with vigor and thrust.

III Ballad - Lento cantabile

This exquisite melody in its simple beauty and eloquence, capturing as it does the essence of the true Celtic spirit, could easily become a rival to the famous "Londonderry Air".

IV Jig - Vivace

Here is a fiddler's delight which evokes the true Irish spirit of Cowell's forbears. This down-to-earth expression of country dance literally lifts the listener out of his seat.

V Finale - Vivace

In this movement, a masterpiece of musical construction, Cowell must have taken keen delight in bringing together in a final synthesis all the musical elements presented in the previous movements. At the very end, in a moment of reflection, the composer restates the opening melody of the work, as though taking leave of his creation with a feeling of bittersweet nostalgia.

Notes prepared by David Sackson

About The Artists

DAVID SACKSON



David Sackson graduated with highest honors from the Institute of Musical Art, New York City, where he studied with William Kroll. At graduation he received the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Award in Composition for a String Quartet. He played with the Kroll Sextet as violist and then joined the Gordon String Quartet as second violinist. He resigned in 1940 to accept the conductorship of the Charleston (S. C.) String Symphony, a group which he developed into the Charleston Symphony Orchestra.

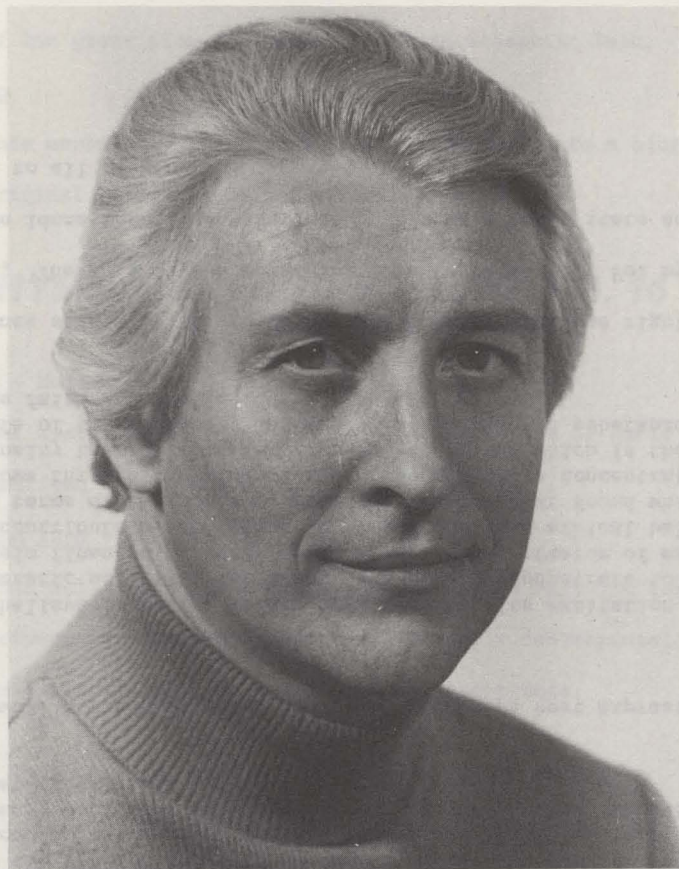
During World War II he was assigned to the Air Force under Glenn Miller, serving as composer and arranger as well as instrumentalist. Upon leaving the Service, he conducted such musicals as Carousel, Paint Your Wagon and South Pacific. He studied orchestra repertoire with Rudolph Gans and composition with Vittorio Rieti. In recent years he has appeared as associate conductor of the Chilean Ballet and has been musical director of the Phoenix Chamber Orchestra and the Hudson Valley Symphony Orchestra.

The Phoenix String Quartet which Mr. Sackson founded has not only recorded the complete chamber music works of Arriaga, but has recently recorded the three string quartets of the Swedish composer, Franz Berwald (1796-1868), and was engaged by Serenus Records to record works of outstanding contemporary American composers.

In addition to his Quartet activities and teaching, Mr. Sackson makes frequent appearances as soloist. The New York Times characterized his playing at a concert at Carnegie Recital Hall as "music making of a very high order indeed."

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DWIGHT PELTZER



Dwight Peltzer, acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic, appears regularly with major symphony orchestras in the United States, Canada, and Europe. During the 1979-80 season he made a triumphant debut with Seiji Ozawa and the Boston Symphony. Mr. Peltzer has appeared at the Edinburgh Festival, the Cheltenham Festival, London's Wigmore and Queen Elizabeth Halls and New York's Lincoln Center. He is shortly scheduled to record several programs of American music for the B.B.C., including one in honor of Samuel Barber's 70th birthday.

Mr. Peltzer has linked his performing career with a variety of teaching posts and residencies, including among others, the San Francisco Conservatory, the Victoria School of Music, the Philadelphia Music Academy and the Universities of Illinois and Southern Illinois. As recipient of two consecutive Fulbright Fellowships, he worked with Edwin Fischer in Switzerland and with Karl Richter in Germany.

With both the Alabama State Council on the Arts and Humanities and the Rhode Island Council on the Arts Mr. Peltzer has been affiliated as performing artist under grants from Sears Roebuck and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund, respectively. He was recently featured soloist at Alice Tully Hall during the Composers' Theater's sixth annual May Festival. He has recorded contemporary piano and chamber works for Serenus and Vox Records and has been cited by one critic for his "dazzling technique and profound insight" as a pianist.