Delusion of the Fury
A Ritual of Dream and Delusion

Composer Harry Partch
Director Heiner Goebbels
Music Theater with Ensemble Musikfabrik

Set and Lighting Designer Klaus Grünberg
Costume Designer Florence von Gerkan
Sound Designer Paul Jeukendrup
Dramaturg Matthias Mohr
Musical Rehearsal Leader Arnold Marinissen
Choreographic Collaboration Florian Bilbao
Dramaturgical Project Development Ensemble Musikfabrik Beate Schüler
Instrument Maker Thomas Meixner

Approximate performance time: 1 hour 15 minutes, with no intermission

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Produced by Ruhrtriennale – Festival of the Arts. In co-production with Lincoln Center Festival, Ensemble Musikfabrik, and the Holland Festival.
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Presented in association with New York City Center.

For program information on the July 23 performance/reading of Harry Partch’s Bitter Music, turn to page 25.
Cast

Act I
Chorus Ensemble Musikfabrik
Pilgrim (the Slayer) Alban Wesly
Ghost (the Slain) Bruce Collings
Son of the Slain Carl Rosman

Act II
Deaf Hobo Marco Blaauw
Old Goat Woman Christine Chapman
Justice of the Peace Axel Porath
Musician Melvyn Poore
Voice Bruce Collings
Kid Rie Watanabe
Villagers/Chorus Ensemble Musikfabrik

Ensemble Musikfabrik
Marco Blaauw, Helen Bledsoe, Christine Chapman, Bruce Collings, Johannes Fischer, Richard Haynes, Norbert Krämer, Ulrich Löffler, Thomas Meixner, Boris Müller, Gerrit Nulens, Melvyn Poore, Axel Porath, Carl Rosman, Dirk Rothbrust, Viacheslav Stakhov, Peter Veale, Rie Watanabe, Hannah Weirich, Alban Wesly, Dirk Wieheger
Synopsis

**Exordium** The Beginning of a Web

**Act I** On a Japanese Theme
- Chorus of Shadows
- The Pilgrimage
- Emergence of the Spirit
- A Son in Search of His Father’s Face
- Cry from Another Darkness
- Pray for Me

**Sanctus** An Entr’acte

**Act II** On an African Theme
- The Quiet Hobo Meal
- The Lost Kid
- Time of Fun Together
- The Misunderstanding
- Arrest, Trial, and Judgment
- Pray for Me Again

It is an olden time, but neither a precise time nor a precise place. The *Exordium* is an overture, and invocation, the beginning of a ritualistic web.

Act I, on the recurrent theme of Noh plays, is a music-theater portrayal of release from the wheel of life and death. It opens with a pilgrim in search of a particular shrine, where he may do penance for murder. The murdered man appears as a ghost where he first sees an assassin, as well as his young son looking for a vision of his father’s face. Spurred to resentment by his son’s presence, he lives again through the ordeal of death, but at the end—with the supplication “Pray for me!”—he finds reconciliation.

Act II involves a reconciliation with life. A young vagabond is cooking a meal over a fire in rocks when an old woman approaches, searching for a lost goat. She finds the goat, but—due to a misunderstanding caused by the hobo’s deafness—a dispute ensues. Villagers gather and, during a violent dance, force the quarreling couple to appear before the justice of the peace, who is both deaf and nearsighted.

Following the judge’s sentence, the Chorus sings in unison, “Oh, how did we ever get by without justice?” and a voice offstage reverts to the supplication at the end of Act I.

*From Harry Partch’s Notes to the score, September 11, 1966*
Note from the Director

Since the early 1980s I’ve owned two records with music by Harry Partch. I don’t remember how I got them, but I still remember well the immediate and lasting impression they triggered in me: an awestruck amazement at the work of an artist of whom I was previously unaware. In a very unique way, he was able to open a space between classical music and pop that I had been unable to imagine until then. I grew up with both: with Bach, Beethoven, and Schubert on the one hand and the Beatles, Beach Boys, and Jimi Hendrix on the other. It was only with Partch that a music began to take shape that could do equal justice to the physical desire for rhythmic pulse and a curiosity for new, unheard sounds; a music that enthralls us despite, or rather, precisely because of, its unfamiliarity. A music for which we have no category and which has no location, and yet in a strange way is grounded. We were very lucky to have been able to develop this project together with Ensemble Musikfabrik and to have found someone able to reconstruct Harry Partch’s amazing instruments, the percussionist and instrument maker Thomas Meixner. Above all, the project has offered a great chance to make the music of Harry Partch performable once again, and thereby introduce him to a larger audience.

It was only by working on Delusion of the Fury that I became truly aware of how comprehensive Partch’s artistic approach actually was: not only did he invent a varied set of instruments and a highly complex tonal system, he also reflected on the theater space, lighting, staging, the movements of the body, and uncompromisingly redefined the relationship of musicians and actors. It’s no wonder that during his time he was incompatible with the established institutions of the music world.

—Heiner Goebbels

America’s Outsider
Composer: Harry Partch

An outsider all his life, Harry Partch (1901–74) creatively questioned the system of tempered intonation in music. In order to make his works resound in the tone system he had developed, he was compelled to build his own instruments. Harry Partch was a rebel. Not unlike many others who were unable to find a job during America’s Great Depression of the early 20th century, he was homeless for many years and traveled all around the U.S. hitchhiking or hopping onto the trains that slowly crossed the vast continent. During his travels, he drew landscapes and kept a diary now known as Bitter Music, which is being given a rare lecture-performance as part of this summer’s Lincoln Center Festival.

He was a seeker who wanted to understand things down to their very foundations—and who opposed musical tradition, especially European classical music. Partch was born in 1901, 11 years ahead of composers John Cage and Conlon Nancarrow, who brought fundamental renewal to the world of music. Partch did the same, but never received the recognition of the other two. The extraordinary thing about Partch is the instrument pool he developed and built throughout his life. It consists of many diverse percussion instruments, but also string instruments, including a harmonium which used an expanded scale he invented based on pure intonation.

As a young man Partch questioned everything: his music teachers, concert rituals, and the Western, tempered tonal system. He visited libraries and came across Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen (1862), Hermann von Helmholtz’s influential book on acoustics and the perception of sound. This prompted him to write a string quartet in pure intonation in 1925, but the work
has since been lost. It went up in flames with a number of the composer’s earlier works around 1929 in what Partch termed an “adolescent auto-da-fé.”

This highly emotional period of youthful exuberance was followed by his first homemade instruments: guitars with special fretboards or a viola with inlaid dots indicating the micro-intervals Partch was seeking. With these instruments, he accompanied himself in songs setting texts by the Chinese poet Li Po, and in the course of these explorations he developed a kind of sprechgesang, his “intoning voice.” His intention was to make “corporeal” music which would be optimally able to unfold its emotionality. On this viola he first tried out a new system of intervals in pure intonation, dividing the octave into 29 irregular steps.

The stirring composition *U.S. Highball*, one of Partch’s most important works of the 1940s, written with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, describes an autobiographical journey from the West to Chicago, told by an anarchic intoning voice. It comprises almost half an hour of music, a rhythmic explosion with constantly sliding pitches, a work that almost anticipates the psychedelic ’60s. The *Wayward* cycle includes not only *U.S. Highball*, but also *San Francisco*, *The Letter*, and *Barstow*. In one piece, Partch incorporated the cries of newspaper boys, in another he transcribed the letter of a hobo companion who wrote, among other things, that he would be glad to return to the warm jail before winter, while in *Barstow* the first *Hitchhiker Graffiti* were turned into songs. Constant movement was a never-ending source of inspiration for him.

Partch was also a theorist. In his book *Genesis of a Music*, first published in 1949, he explains his understanding of the world of harmony. He speculates on the tension relations between intervals, which are represented by tables and graphic curves. When Partch is mentioned by name, what springs to mind for those who know his music is his 43-note system. This scale is not constructed on a regular pattern like the Western chromatic scale of semi-tones; it is derived from the overtone row up to the 11th partial and produces a scale of 29 intervals within the octave. Using multiplications of primary numbers (“primary ratios”), Partch arrived at a somewhat more regular scale; he called these intervals “secondary ratios.” Thus, Partch’s 43-tone-system is a mixed one, derived arithmetically from the natural overtone spectrum.

The instruments—aesthetically and musically unique—which Harry Partch developed for his music are even more fascinating. The names alone are a delight for the ears. Among them are: *Zymo-Xyl*, *Crychord*, *Surrogate Kithara*, *Blue Rainbow*, *Ptolemy*, *Chromelodeon* I and II, *Bloboy*, and *Spoils of War*. At the heart of this pool of instruments is the Chromelodeon, a harmonium whose name merges the terms “chroma” (color) and “melos” (melody). The continuous vibration of the metal reeds makes the possible harmonies of the 43 pitches within the octave seem especially diverse and iridescent when resounding at the same time.

Partch’s music is astonishingly well documented, but he has stalwartly remained on the fringes. This is largely due to the unavailability of his special instruments for performances, the originals of which are now kept under lock and key, and concerts were only mounted with difficulty.

Unlike his better-known contemporary, John Cage, Partch never entirely abandoned tonality. A rebel all his life, Harry Partch produced a wide spectrum of work,
and his ideas and interests have radically reshaped the music of our times.

—Edu Haubensak

Edited from an article by composer Edu Haubensak who lives in Zurich. English translation by Alexa Nieschlag.

About the Instruments
By the time he recorded Delusion of the Fury in 1969, Harry Partch had designed 27 new instruments, all to be played on stage at the same time in a spatial ritual theater. These instruments were made to be beautiful in sound, vision, and magical purpose. He made particular instruments for specific needs in his compositions, not the other way around. But, more than this, he designed the instruments to involve the whole body, the whole person, in the art.

Commissioned by Ensemble Musikfabrik and Ruhrtiennale, Cologne-based drummer and instrument maker Thomas Meixner produced a complete reconstruction of Harry Partch’s instruments. The reconstruction of the microtonal instrumentation is based on the only fully preserved collection of original instruments found at the University of Washington’s School of Music in Seattle.

About the Creative Team
Heiner Goebbels (Director) is a German composer and director and has brought a number of productions to Lincoln Center audiences over the years. His first New York production was in 1989, The Man in the Elevator, at the Next Wave Festival, which was followed by several productions at Lincoln Center Festival: Black on White in 2001, Eislermaterial in 2003, and Eraritjaritjaka in 2006. His I went to the house but did not enter was performed by the Hilliard Ensemble as a part of the 2012 White Light Festival. Songs of Wars I Have Seen had its New York premiere performed by the London Sinfonietta and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at 2011’s Tully Scope Festival. Stifters Ding was featured during Lincoln Center’s 2009 Great Performers season at the Park Avenue Armory. In 1976 he was one of the founders of the Sogenanntes Linksradikales Blasorchester (“So-called Left Radical Brass Band”). He composed experimental music for film and theater, and as a member of the Duo Goebbels/Harth (1975–88) and the art rock trio Cassiber (1982–92), which had concerts at The Kitchen in NY in 1988. Since the 1980s he composed radio works, compositions for ensemble and big orchestra, and developed the genre of “staged concerts” with works including The Man in the Elevator (1987) and The Liberation of Prometheus (1993). In the 1990s he started creating works for music-theater, including Ou bien le débarquement désastreux, The Repetition, Max Black, Hashirigaki (presented at BAM in 2003), Landscape with Distant Relatives, and When the Mountain Changed its Clothing. Goebbels’ works have been performed by many ensembles and orchestras, including the Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Asko Ensemble, Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, Berlin Philharmonics, and Brooklyn Philharmonic. He has created sound and video installations for Paris’ Pompidou Center, among other museums. He has been awarded numerous international prizes, including the Prix Italia, the European Theatre Prize, and the International Ibsen Award (2012). His music theater work Eraritjaritjaka (2004, based on a text by Elias Canetti), earned him six theater awards. He was resident composer for the Luzern Festival in 2003, at the Bochum Symphonic (2003–04) and artist in residence at the Cornell University 2010. From 2012–14 he was artistic director of the Ruhrtiennale – International Festival of the Arts, and he directed John Cage’s Europeras 1&2, and De Materie by Louis Andriessen. Goebbels
is professor at the Institute for applied Theatre Studies at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen (Germany) and lives in Frankfurt. His book *Aesthetics of Absence—Texts on Theatre* was published last spring.

**Klaus Grünberg** (Set and Lighting Designer) was born in Hamburg, studied set design in Vienna with Erich Wonder, and has worked as a set and lighting designer at theaters and opera houses throughout Europe as well as in Buenos Aires and Kuwait. He has worked with directors including Tatjana Gürbaca, Barrie Kosky, Sebastian Baumgarten, André Wilms, and Christof Nel. With Gürbaca he worked on Stravinsky’s *Mavra* for Berlin’s Deutsche Staatsoper, *Mazeppa* and *The Enchantress* at Antwerp’s Vlaamse Opera, *Le Grand Macabre* at Theater Bremen, *Salome* at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein, and *Rigoletto* for the Zurich Opera. For Kosky he designed *Kiss me, Kate* for Berlin’s Komische Oper, *Tristan und Isolde* in Essen, and *The Merchant of Venice* in Frankfurt. He works regularly with Heiner Goebbels on theater works including *Max Black, Hashirigaki, Landscape with Distant Relatives, Stifters Ding*, and *I went to the house but did not enter* and John Cage’s *Europera 1 & 2*. In 1999 he opened the MOMOLMA (Museum of More or Less Modern Art) in Hamburg. His set and light design for *Rusalka* at the Komische Oper was nominated for Germany’s Der Faust theater prize in 2011.

**Florence von Gerkan** (Costume Designer) was born in Hamburg and studied costume design at the Berlin University of the Arts. She works internationally at theaters and opera houses including the Thalia Theater, Schaubühne Berlin, Theater Basel, Théâtre Vidy, Zurich Opera, Stuttgart State Theater, Milan’s La Scala, London’s Covent Garden, Vienna State Opera, Bayreuth Festival, Baden-Baden Festival, and the Metropolitan Opera. She has worked with directors including Jürgen Flimm, Wilfried Minks, Erich Wonder, Andrea Breth, Cesare Lievi, Peter Mussbach, Tatjana Gürbaca, Thomas Langhoff, and Daniel Schmid. She has also worked for many years with Heiner Goebbels on productions including *Erarbeitjarticjaka* (2004), *I went to the house but did not enter* (2008), *Europera 1 & 2*, and *When the Mountain Changed its Clothing* (2012). She lives in Berlin and is head of the costume design department at the Berlin University of Fine Arts.

**Matthias Mohr** (Dramaturg) studied from 2003–09 at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies at Giessen’s Justus Liebig University. His work moves between the realms of music, sound art, installation, and performance. He has created several audiovisual installations, including *Esquisse Retouché*, a staged concert with Uwe Dierksen at the Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music (2006), and *Der Brand* with Ensemble Modern and the composer Jens Joneleit (Stuttgart’s Eclat Festival, 2007). Music theater productions followed, including *nm* with Julien Bilodeau and Ensemble Modern Academy (2008). He has also composed stage music and sound designs for numerous theater productions and spatial installations. His work with Heiner Goebbels since 2007 includes *Stifters Ding*, *Industry and Idleness* en Genko-An 64287, *Europera 1 & 2*, and *When the Mountain Changed Its Clothing*. He has been the dramaturg and assistant to the artistic directors of the Ruhrtriennale since 2011.

**Florian Bilbao** (Choreographic Collaboration) was born in Libourne, France, and studied contemporary dance in Montpellier and Angers (Centre National de Danse Contemporaine). He has been based in Berlin since 2002 and has worked with Xavier Le Roy, Christoph Winkler, Felix Ruckert, Nir de Volff/Total Brutal, Dieter Heitkamp, Rubato, Tino Sehgal, and Sommer Ulrickson.
He and Mercedes Appugliese are co-founders of the dance company A + B TANZBAU. He works as an assistant choreographer for Xavier Le Roy and Mathilde Monnier as part of the Berlin Philharmonic’s educational program, and has restaged works including Surrogate Cities (music by Heiner Goebbels and choreography by Mathilde Monnier), which has been seen in various European cities. Together with dancer Livia Patrizi, he founded the TanzZeit Youth Company.

Arnold Marinissen (Musical Rehearsal Leader) is active as a conductor of music of the 20th and 21st centuries. In Amsterdam he recently conducted Asko|Schönberg for Luciano Berio’s Laborintus 11 (Bimhuis) and Steve Reich’s Electric Counterpoint (Music Building on the IJ and Paradiso). He has composed works for Asko|Schönberg, Vocaallab, Calefax Rietkwintet, Lunapark, Ives Ensemble, Prisma String Trio, Asko Kamerkoor, Orgelpark and Ensemble S, among others; and has written numerous pieces for choreographer Ederson Rodrigues Xavier. As a solo percussionist he performs throughout the world, from chamber music at festivals throughout Europe, and in Russia, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and Uzbekistan; and with ensembles including the Amsterdam Sinfonietta, Holland Symphonia, Nieuw Ensemble, Cologne’s WDR Orchestra, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. He programmed the 2012–13 season of Amsterdam’s Music Building on the IJ together with Anthony Fiumara, and is the director of the Dutch ensemble Lunapark.

Paul Jeukendrup (Sound Designer) studied recording and electronic composition at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. He is a specialist in new music and has designed and directed sound for the Holland Festival, Wiener Festwochen, Berlin Festival, and Lincoln Center’s Sonic Evolutions Festival. He has worked in the Netherlands and abroad for composers including Karlheinz Stockhausen (Michael Reise um die Erde, seen at Lincoln Center Festival 2013, and the premiere of Helikopter Streichquartett at the Holland Festival in 1995), Louis Andriessen, Heiner Goebbels, and Peter Eötvös; and with ensembles including the Arditti String Quartet, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Hilliard Ensemble, Asko|Schönberg, and London Sinfonietta. He has also worked with conductors including Simon Rattle, Peter Rundel, Stefan Asbury, and David Robertson; and orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. His operatic work included sound design for the Dutch National Opera, Opéra National de Belgique and Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse. He has been coordinator of the art of sound department at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague since 2009.

Beate Schüler (Dramaturgical Project Development, Ensemble Musikfabrik) is a curator, dramaturg, and producer for music, music theater, and audiovisual installations. Her work as project developer and dramaturg for Ensemble Musikfabrik started in 2011 and includes Delusion of the Fury, the composers project Pitch43_tuning the cosmos, and The Krazy Kat Projekt (2014) with director and animator Paul Barratt (Theater group 1927) with new works by David Lang and Oscar Bettison. With the Norwegian trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer, she has created the audiovisual installation Lucid Dream (2014). In 2010 she developed the international Song-Project, Von fremden Ländern und Menschen, with the Goethe-Institut Munich, with performances in South Korea, Taiwan, Estonia, Norway, the UK, Argentina, and Portugal.

Thomas Meixner (Instrument Maker) has been a member of the Schlagquartett Köln since the company’s founding in 1989, the Thürmchen-Ensemble for New Music and Music Theater since its founding in 1991, and
was a percussionist for the Ensemble Cologne through 1999. Since 1989 he has regularly performed with Ensemble Musikfabrik, of which he is a founding member. He also participates regularly in projects with other leading European ensembles and radio orchestras specialized in new music. He has collaborated on more than 350 premieres of ensemble and solo works and some 70 recordings. From 2000–07 he held a chair for percussion and chamber music at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Cologne. Since then, he has taught at Austria’s University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, among other places. In addition to performing, he also devotes himself to making unconventional music instruments. During the 2012–13 season he was commissioned by the Ensemble Musikfabrik and the Ruhrtriennale to work on the reconstruction of all of Harry Partch’s string and percussion instruments that are seen and heard in today’s performance.

Staff for Delusion of the Fury
Assistant Directors Aliénor Dauchez, Lisa Charlotte Friederich
Assistant Costum e Designer Sayyora Muinova
Assistant Set Designer Anne Kuhn
Tour Manager Monique Stolz
Costume Tour Maintenance Julia Rautenhaus
Technical Production Manager Benjamin zur Heide
Sound Technician Thomas Wegner
Chief Electrician John Brown
Lighting Technician Marcus Stütz
Master Carpenter Harald Adams
Stage Technician Andreas Semmler
Props Manager Imed Ben Abdallah
Inflatables Fabricator Frank Fierke

Ruhrtriennale – Festival of the Arts
Music, dance, theater, performance, and fine arts in the former industrial buildings of Germany’s Ruhr area define the Ruhrtriennale. The venues include some of the region’s outstanding industrial monuments, transformed each year into unusual sites for music and arts productions. At the center of it all are contemporary artists seeking a dialogue with industrial spaces and between the disciplines. For the first Ruhrtriennale (2005–07), founding director Gerard Mortier placed the artistic creations at the heart of the festival. Former machine halls and coking plants witnessed drama and opera entering into combination with innovative developments from the worlds of fine art, pop, jazz, and classical music. The Ruhrtriennales that have followed have been led by some of the world’s best known directors: Jürgen Flimm (whose production of Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s opera Die Soldaten was seen at Lincoln Center Festival 2008), Willy Decker, and Heiner Goebbels. Dutch director Johan Simons heads the 2015–17 Ruhrtriennale, and the theme of his program is “Seid umschlungen” (“Be Embraced”)—a gesture of social, political, and geographical embracement. The performance venues include the Jahrhunderthalle Bochum, the Zollverein World Heritage Site Essen, the Duisburg-Nord Landscape Park, and for the first time in 2015, the mixing hall of the Lohberg Colliery in Dinslaken.

Ensemble Musikfabrik is regarded as one of today’s leading ensembles for contemporary music and this marks their second appearance at Lincoln Center Festival—in 2013 the Ensemble performed Stockhausen’s Michaels Reise um die Erde at Avery Fisher Hall. Based in Cologne, the ensemble was founded in 1990 and made its debut in 1991. A special feature of the ensemble is that since 1997 it has had no leader, operating on the basis of the principles of grassroots democracy. Ensemble Musikfabrik’s mission is to play relatively
unknown and new compositions, often commissioned by the ensemble itself. Rather than given a straight interpretation, these works are further developed and adapted by the ensemble’s musicians, in close collaboration with the director and especially the composer. Ensemble Musikfabrik has built solid collaborations with leading figures in contemporary music, including Mark Andre, Louis Andriessen, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Unsuk Chin, Péter Eötvös, Brian Ferneyhough, Heiner Goebbels, Toshio Hosokawa, Michael Jarrell, Mauricio Kagel, Helmut Lachenmann, David Lang, Liza Lim, Benedict Mason, Mouse on Mars, Carlus Padrissa and La Fura dels Baus, Emilio Pomàrico, Enno Poppe, Wolfgang Rihm, Peter Rundel, Rebecca Saunders, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Ilan Volkov, and Sasha Waltz. The ensemble performs between 80 and 90 concerts each year, both in Germany and abroad; they have their own “Musikfabrik in WDR” series of world premières. By means of interdisciplinary projects incorporating live electronics, dance, theater, film, literature, and visual arts, the ensemble widens the usual scope of the conducted ensemble concert, as well as through chamber music and improvisations.

**Staff For Ensemble Musikfabrik**

Acting Executive Director  
**Thomas Oesterdiekhoff**

Production Manager **Michael Bölter**

Assistant Production Manager **Vera Hefele**

Stage Management **Bernd Layendecker**

Stage Managers **Christoph Berger, Lukas Becker**

**Lincoln Center Festival**

Now in its 20th season, Lincoln Center Festival has received worldwide attention for presenting some of the broadest and most original performing arts programs in Lincoln Center’s history. The Festival has presented more than 1,300 performances of opera, music, dance, theater, and interdisciplinary forms by internationally acclaimed artists from more than 50 countries. To date, the Festival has commissioned more than 42 new works and offered some 142 world, U.S., and New York premieres. It places particular emphasis on showcasing contemporary artistic viewpoints and multidisciplinary works that challenge the boundaries of traditional performance.

**Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts**

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LCPA) serves three primary roles: presenter of artistic programming, national leader in arts and education and community relations, and manager of the Lincoln Center campus. A presenter of more than 3,000 free and ticketed events, performances, tours, and educational activities annually, LCPA offers 15 series, festivals, and programs including American Songbook, Avery Fisher Career Grants, Free Thursdays at the David Rubenstein Atrium, Great Performers, Lincoln Center Festival, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Lincoln Center Vera List Art Project, Martin E. Segal Awards, Meet the Artist, Midsummer Night Swing, Mostly Mozart Festival, White Light Festival, and the Emmy Award–winning Live From Lincoln Center, which airs nationally on PBS. As manager of the Lincoln Center campus, LCPA provides support and services for the Lincoln Center complex and the 11 resident organizations. In addition, LCPA led a $1.2 billion campus renovation, completed in October 2012.

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Harry Partch: Bitter Music

Performance/Reading by David Moss (Voice and Electronics)

Approximate performance time: 1 hour, with no intermission

Produced by Ruhrtriennale – Festival of the Arts.

About Bitter Music

Like other composers of his generation in America, Partch suffered from two compounded prejudices: one against contemporary, experimental music; and a second in favor of European musicians, repertoire, and traditions. The latter became even more pronounced from the 1940s onward as the work of those American composers who sought to develop a native idiom was eclipsed by the international modernism of Stravinsky or Schoenberg and his disciples. And Partch, of course, increasingly suffered an additional disadvantage: his compositions could only be performed on his own unique instruments.

Faced with indifference, incomprehension, or hostility toward his work from most musical institutions, Partch spent great time and intense energy at the typewriter conducting polemics against the Western music tradition, writing about his own music, and fighting to gain hearings for it. Despite his large body of writing, full appreciation and understanding of Partch’s life, music, artistic ideas, and creative accomplishment have been hindered: in part because, with the exception of his book, Genesis of a Music, his published writings are difficult to obtain, scattered as they are among obscure small magazines and newspapers. Because of the odyssey of his life—in which he lost even instruments and musical scores—and the scarcity of documentation, little will ever be known of the first 40 years of Partch’s life. We are fortunate that Bitter Music has been recovered. This journal documents two formative experiences of Partch’s early years: his research trip to England and meeting with W. B. Yeats in 1934–35 (recalled as a flashback), and the eight months Partch spent in California, Oregon, and Washington as a transient between June 1935 and February 1936.

Bitter Music records Partch’s disillusion at the collapse of his hopes to further his musical ideas after returning from Europe. His reaction arose from the irony that, having finally won institutional support and recognition for
his work, he was beginning what would be eight years of a nomadic, hand-to-mouth existence on the margins of society. For like ten million men, Partch could find no employment, and like hundreds of thousands of them, with no home and savings exhausted, he was forced to go on the road as a transient seeking work in federal camps. But from these experiences as one of the “wayward,” Partch drew texts and ideas that became the material for his later Americana compositions.

Beyond its great importance as a biographical document, Bitter Music is Partch’s contribution to American Depression literature of the 1930s and early 1940s. Closest in tone and content to Bitter Music and the related Americana compositions (U.S. Highball, The Letter, Barstow, and San Francisco) are other autobiographical accounts of transient or hobo life, such as Tom Kromer’s Waiting for Nothing (1935), Edward Newhouse’s You Can’t Sleep Here (1934), or Nelson Algren’s novel Somebody in Boots (1935). Partch’s Bitter Music and especially U.S. Highball share with these works strikingly similar themes: the constant hunger, filth, loneliness, and despair of the transient or hobo; the brutality of railroad police; the dangers of hopping and riding freight trains; the shame of begging and the hypocrisy of accepting relief at Salvation Army missions; the suicides and homosexuality among transients and hobos; and the failure to achieve any real human intimacy.

But unlike other Depression literature, Bitter Music and Partch’s other Americana works do not indict capitalism or the American political system, or urge the correction of social and economic inequities through organized political action. It remains an intensely personal document of Partch’s experiences. Partch’s bitterness results not from a realization of a failed American Dream or what the Depression might foretell about the survival of American values, but rather from the acutely felt despair of an artist unable to further his creative work. While Bitter Music avoids the unmistakable socialist, communist, or even anarchist sympathies of much Depression literature, it does share its naturalism and experimentalism. The basic structure of the work is conventional and realistic enough: a first-person narrative in the form of a diary that includes fragments of external dialogue and interior monologue. But distinctive is Partch’s use of music to heighten the realism of dialogue and events.

Partch occasionally listed Bitter Music among his musical compositions because of the music he incorporated into it—musicalized fragments of the hobo speech he had heard daily around him. Partch intended the work to be read and played at the piano, and he uses musical settings in several ways to heighten the experiences he presents. Primarily, Partch represents speech by notating its melodic inflections without fixed rhythm. Occasionally he introduces folk or popular songs in full piano settings, and less frequently he provides a piano accompaniment to enhance the dramatic mood of a situation. His most virtuoso achievement is in the November 15 episode driving south from Santa Barbara: here the Filipino driver’s singing of Rock of Ages is presented in counterpoint to the notation of Partch’s interior thoughts.

Many episodes of Bitter Music reveal Partch’s exhilaration at being amid the vast, natural out-of-doors, a feeling that no doubt evoked his childhood growing up in the Southwest or the long, rugged coastline north of San Francisco that had long fascinated him. —Thomas McGeary

About this Performance

So, why am I reading Bitter Music tonight? What’s the connection? Well… in the summer of 1966, I walked into Lepak’s Percussion Center in Hartford, Connecticut, for my weekly drum lesson with Richie Lepore. Richie said, “David, I have to cancel our lessons ‘cause I’ll be in New York rehearsing and recording a new LP for Harry Partch.” “Harry Partch?,” I asked. And Richie told me about the eccentric composer, his personal music and one-of-a-kind handmade percussion instruments. I was curious and interested, but was only 17 and unable to appreciate my drum teacher’s new adventure: working directly with a unique composer on his first (and only) Columbia Records LP, The World of Harry Partch.

I forgot about this moment until one day a year later. While browsing the bins at a record shop I saw it: The World of Harry Partch, with pictures of strange musical instruments! I bought it, was entranced by the voices of “Barstow” and the unexpected timbres of “Daphne of the Dunes.” But most of all, I was awestruck by the instruments Partch had built and the sound of the voices—this influenced my music for the next 20 years. I still have this LP, and others by Partch, and later I read Genesis of a Music, and then Bitter Music.

In 1972 I began to sing and to build percussion instruments—from junkyard wood, glass, and metal. And in my head, always, were the voices and objects of Partch’s music—a kind of audio-visual map opening the way for the future. I never met Harry Partch, but I’ve always felt a connection across time and continents to his vocal, corporeal, magical work. When I told this story to Heiner Goebbels, he invited me to create a Bitter Music performance/reading for the 2013 Ruhrtiennale, as a creative/informative link to the premiere of his staging of Delusions of the Fury.

I’m very happy to have the chance to honor Harry Partch, first at the Ruhrtiennale and now at Lincoln Center Festival, and to connect our histories after so many years! —David Moss

A Mini-Lexicon for Bitter Music

(In order of “appearance” in the reading)

Hobo an itinerant worker. Hobos, unlike bums or tramps, were willing to work for a short duration, but their main impetus was travel.

Bindlestiff A hobo, especially one who carries a bedroll/sleeping bag.

Camp Federal government work camp in the countryside.

Carnegie Corporation of N.Y. Founded in 1911 by Andrew Carnegie, “to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.”

Potato Patch Small garden or potato field.


Okie Originally a resident of Oklahoma; in 1930s California it referred negatively to very poor immigrant Oklahomans looking for work.

Tin Pan Alley Name given to the collection of New York City music publishers and songwriters who dominated the popular music of the U.S. from 1890–1940.

Ward A child or young person under the care and control of a guardian appointed by their parents or a court.

Delousing Ridding a person or an animal of lice by physical or chemical means.

Handout Food, clothing, or money given to the needy.

Bread Lines A line of people waiting to receive food given by a charitable organization or public agency.

Short-Arm Inspection The medical inspection of the penises of male soldiers (euphemistically referred to as “the short arm”) for signs of sexually-transmitted diseases and other medical problems.
New Deal A series of domestic economic programs enacted in the U.S. between 1933 and 1936.

Roadhouse An inn that served meals and drinks, and featured music, dancing, and gambling.

Panhandle To approach strangers and beg for money or food.

A Flop A room for the night; a cheap hotel or boarding house where many men share large rooms.

Trench Mouth A bacterial infection of the gums, developed by many soldiers in the trenches during World War I.

About David Moss

When my father, Roy Moss, put his arms around me in 1959 and played the drums, I was touched by the power and mystery that music contains. Drumming and singing, two ur-passions, have shaped my life ever since. As my percussionist life evolved creatively into a singer’s life, I explored the power of the voice through its multitudinous utterances, sounds, and languages; and came into contact with powerful singers like Diamanda Galas, Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, and Demetrio Stratos.

At crucial times in my development I’ve received the recognition and help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a DAAD Artist-in-Berlin grant, and a fellowship at the Interweaving Performance Cultures Center (Free University, Berlin).

Today I can create complex projects uniting the strands of my life as percussionist, vocalist, performer, composer, theater-maker, curator, and teacher.

As director of the Institute for Living Voice (Berlin), an international center for singing, I can embody voice and presence in a dramatic way—enabling people and ideas to commingle, and offering hints of the structures and joys that lie ahead. I may be the only vocalist who has sung the music of Luciano Berio, Carla Bley, Uri Caine, Heiner Goebbels, Olga Neuwirth, Helmut Oehring, Frank Zappa, J.S. Bach, and John Coltrane. And now I simply want (utopian fallacy, I know!) to make each new performance a surprising necessity.

Acknowledgements for Bitter Music

All spoken excerpts are from Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos, by Harry Partch; edited by Thomas McGeary; University of Illinois Press.

Sampled musical interludes are from “Barstow” and “Castor & Pollux”; voice and drumming is by Harry Partch in the BBC documentary The Outsider. The Story of Harry Partch (2002).

Additional music: “For HP” #1, #2, #3, #4 by David Moss
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1923
The Ancient Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine builds Mecca Temple as a meeting and banquet hall with offices and a large theater.

1943
Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia and City Council President Newbold Morris establish the New York City Center for Music and Drama, Manhattan’s first performing arts center. The goal was to bring the performing arts to all New Yorkers—at a fraction of Broadway ticket prices. On December 11, City Center officially opens its doors with a special concert by the New York Philharmonic. LaGuardia himself takes the baton to conduct the national anthem.

1944
Laszlo Halasz, student of Béla Bartók and former director of the St. Louis Opera, founds the New York City Center Opera Company, later known as the New York City Opera.

1945
Paul Robeson, the first African American to play Othello in more than 100 years, brings his performance to City Center. Leonard Bernstein becomes the conductor and music director of the New York City Symphony.

1948
Choreographer George Balanchine and general director Lincoln Kirstein accept the offer to establish the New York City Ballet at City Center.

1954
George Balanchine’s The Nutcracker has its world premiere at City Center on February 2. The ballet proves an instant classic. William Hammerstein (son of Oscar Hammerstein II) establishes the New York City Center Light Opera Company, which presents revivals of such musicals as Brigadoon, Carousel and Kiss Me, Kate. Hammerstein is later succeeded by Jean Dalrymple, a longtime City Center board member, producer, director and press agent.

1955
A 26-year-old Beverly Sills makes her debut with City Opera in the role of Rosalinda in Die Fledermaus. Other stars who have made their New York stage debut at City Center include Carol Channing, Anne Jackson, Bernadette Peters and Anne Hathaway.

1956
Orson Welles mounts an extravagant production of King Lear at City Center; after spraining both ankles, he is forced to perform the title role in a wheelchair. The show is a financial disaster, and Welles never appears on the New York stage again.

1966
The newly formed Joffrey Ballet becomes a resident company and performs as City Center Joffrey Ballet. The company continues to perform for nearly 30 years with Robert Joffrey as artistic director and Gerald Arpino as chief choreographer.
A HISTORY OF CITY CENTER

1971
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater performs at New York City Center for the first time, and Ailey's Cry, choreographed for Judith Jamison, is an instant hit. The following year, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater becomes City Center's first resident modern dance company. The company continues to perform here today, as City Center's principal resident dance company.

1975
After struggling from the departure of the New York City Opera and New York City Ballet in the 1960s, City Center is saved from demolition by lawyer Howard M. Squadron.

1983
City Center is declared a landmark by the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission.

1994
City Center establishes the Encores! musical theater series, presenting rarely produced musicals with original orchestrations. Each year, three works celebrate lyricists and composers such as Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, George and Ira Gershwin, Kander and Ebb, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Kurt Weill, Jule Styne, Burt Bacharach, Johnny Mercer and Stephen Sondheim.

1996
The Encores! production of Chicago opens on Broadway, where it becomes the longest-running revival in history. Several subsequent Encores! productions follow Chicago to Broadway, including Wonderful Town (2003), The Apple Tree (2006), Gypsy (2008), Finian's Rainbow (2009) and the Encores! special event After Midnight (2013), originally titled Cotton Club Parade.

2004
The first Fall for Dance Festival celebrates dance in all its forms and features both emerging and well-known companies and choreographers. Its modest ticket price and thrilling performances draw sell-out crowds.

2011
City Center completes a two-phase, $56 million renovation project to restore and modernize its historic theater, the most extensive project of its kind in the building's history. On October 25, City Center reopens with a star-studded gala celebration, in which Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg takes the stage to conduct the Encores! Orchestra.

2013
City Center launches Encores! Off-Center, a musical theater series that revives groundbreaking Off-Broadway musicals. The series is a hit with critics and audiences, and one of its productions—Jeanine Tesori and Brian Crawley's Violet—moves to Broadway the following spring.
NEW YORK CITY CENTER

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Rob Berman ............. Music Director, Encores!
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CREDITS
Yamaha Piano ........ Official Piano of City Center
D&B Auditechnik .......... Loudspeaker Systems
Source 4 Multipar Striplights .......... Electronic Theatre Controls

DIRECTION OF THEATER SERVICES
OFFICES: 212-247-0430. 10am–6pm M–F
Membership Desk, Lost & Found.
CITYTIX: 212-581-1212. Tickets by phone & performance info 11am–8pm 7 days a week.
Subscriptions & group sales info 11am–6pm M–F.
WEBSITE: www.NYCityCenter.org

MAINSTAGE SERVICES
BAR: Orch., Grand Tier levels
CHECK ROOM, BOUTIQUE: Orch., Grand Tier level
REST ROOMS: every level
ELEVATOR: east and west sides of building

New York City Center is accessible to people with disabilities and has a hearing augmentation system. Please advise of needs at time of purchase.

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We are proud members of The League of Historic American Theatres.