

PROGRAM NOTES - THOMAS SIWE

Ionisation (1931)

Edgard Varèse

Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation* was completed in Paris, France on November 13, 1931. This landmark composition, written for 13 players utilizing 40 percussion instruments is one of only 12 complete concert works left by this influential American composer. It was "the work that he was most satisfied with and proud of," according to his wife Louise. Varèse boasted to his friend Carlos Salzedo: "Ionisation, the title of my piece for percussion, has turned out well - cryptic, synthesized, powerful and terse." Varèse described music as "organized sound." He perceived musical organization (form) as the "result of a process" similar to the formation of crystals in science. He looked at rhythm as "the generator of form" not to be confused with metrics or a regular succession of beats, but as "a succession of alternate and opposite or correlative states."

In *Ionisation*, Varèse groups the percussion instruments to create different structures, each with a recognizable musical texture. In the beginning, sustained sounds of ringing metals, "lion's roar," drum rolls and "growling" sirens serve as a canvas Varèse dots with rhythmic fragments played on drums, maracas, triangle and tambourine. A polyphonic section follows, dominated by a military drum cadence that later develops and is incorporated into other textures. Suddenly, massed drums playing fragmented groups of five sixteenth notes accented with "rim shots" and cowbells provide a powerful, percussive surprise. Varèse saves the piano, tamtam, glockenspiel and chimes for a final sonic explosion. These ending sounds slowly fade into a residue of ringing metals and a final, muffled drum roll.

Varèse was concerned with science and its application to music and studied the work of acoustician Hermann Helmholtz. He wrote: "I studied Helmholtz, and was fascinated by his experiments with sirens described in his *Physiology of Sound*. I have always felt the need of a kind of continuous flowing curve that instruments could not give me. That is why I used sirens in several of my works." In *Ionisation*, the percussion instruments were selected for their unique acoustical properties. The tambourine did not evoke images of gypsy dancers nor the castanets the flavor of Spain. Instead, all 40 instruments combine to create a sonic world filled with myriad musical colors. *Ionisation* is considered a classic work for percussion ensemble. However today, it still sounds new, challenging both listeners and players.

EQUILIBRIUM

Historic Works for Percussion Ensemble (1931-1942)

Thomas Siwe, conductor

Edgard Varèse • Johanna Beyer • Henry Cowell
Carlos Chávez • Alan Hovahness • Lou Harrison

IV (1935)

Johanna Beyer

The life of Johanna Magdalena Beyer is somewhat of a mystery. She was born July 11, 1888 in Leipzig, Germany, studied music and at the age of 35 immigrated to the U. S., making her home in New York's lower Manhattan area. She continued her studies with Dane Rudhyar, Ruth Crawford and Henry Cowell. We know she was enrolled in Cowell's percussion class at the New School in 1935 when she composed "IV", the only work published during her lifetime. To help support herself, she worked as Cowell's assistant at his publishing firm, New Music, doing office work and translations of German texts. Described as very shy, Beyer, it appears, was reluctant to promote her own works. However, Cowell's wife, Sidney Robertson revealed in a phone interview that Beyer would sometimes include her manuscripts with New Music scores sent to prominent conductors. Beyer died January 9, 1944 after a long illness from ALA - Lou Gehrig's Disease. Her music (over 50 songs, symphonies and chamber works) has languished, largely ignored, in the American Music Center library. A group of New York composers recently established a project to make Beyer's music available with the hope that soon we will be able to hear the music of this talented and innovative composer.

"IV" is composed of nine rhythmic lines. As with John Cage's 1935 quartet, no instrumentation is indicated. The conductor must select percussion instruments that blend well, yet insure that each voice can be recognized. Four of the lines enter as in a fugue, creating inverted pyramids across the manuscript. Their accents are reinforced by the other voices with a bottom note ostinato marking the start of each 7/8 measure. A sense of movement is created as the tempo and intensity levels constantly shift. The work ends in a great crescendo with seven final beats heard by a single voice.

Ostinato Pianissimo (1934)

Henry Cowell

Henry Cowell was born in Menlo Park, California on March 1, 1897. The son of wealthy, eccentric parents, he was by every definition a child prodigy with his official public schooling ending by the third grade. Continuing his education on his own, Cowell studied piano with local teachers while absorbing the musical cultures of nearby San Francisco's Chinese and Japanese populations. As a boy of 15, he devised and developed the technique of "tone clusters" first used in his piano work *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1912). By age seventeen, he had composed over 100 pieces. He was in his early twenties when he completed his theoretical book, *New Musical Resources*, later revised and published in 1930. At age thirty, he was hired to teach music appreciation, composition and "world music" at the New School for Social Research in New York. He began studies of Hindustani classical music with Sarat Lahiri, a Bengali musician living in the city. In 1931 with a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation, he traveled to Berlin to study comparative musicology. While there, Cowell worked with Javanese teachers learning the music of both Java and Bali and the art of the gamelan. Upon his return from Europe, Cowell took to writing music that reflected his passion for and his new knowledge of non-Western music.

The small percussion ensemble, *Ostinato Pianissimo*, is an example of Cowell evoking the sounds of the Indonesian gamelan without truly imitating its formal structures or utilizing its normal orchestration. Upon close examination, elements of both Indian and Indonesian classical music can be found within its pages. The work was composed in 1934 and is dedicated to Nicholas Slonimsky. It is scored for 3 gongs, 3 drums, bongos, tambourine sans jingles, guiro, 2 woodblocks, xylophone, 8 rice bowls and 2 string pianos. Cowell's sonic exploration of the piano was not limited to the keyboard. He wrote works that asked the pianist to pluck, scrape, mute, or strike the strings inside with fingers and various objects. He called it his string piano. His student, composer John Cage, took the idea even further with the "prepared piano." By muting selected piano strings at various points, Cowell altered the sound making it reminiscent of gamelan metallophones. The rice bowls, to be arranged in an ascending scale, shocked early audiences. (Similar sets of bowls called *jala tarang* have origins in Indian folk music). The bowls, along with the xylophone and string pianos, perform repeating ostinatos of varying lengths creating a complex heterophonic texture. The woodblocks, tambourine, guiro and drums act as another unit whose rhythmic pattern slowly repeats itself every ten measures. The final group, three gongs, performs a cycle five measures in length marked by striking one of the gongs with a wooden stick. The work is to be played very softly (pianissimo) throughout, ending in a suddenly loud, but brief, coda. Cowell's organization of resources in *Ostinato Pianissimo* borrows from musical structures found in Asian music yet he transforms them into something original. It may remind the listener of a distant gamelan, but it is uniquely Henry Cowell.

Toccata for Percussion Instruments (1942)

Carlos Chávez

Carlos Chávez completed the *Toccata for Percussion Instruments* in 1942. It is suggested that the sextet was written at the request of John Cage, but Cage's group was unable to perform the work. The *Toccata* required traditional orchestral percussion techniques (specifically the snare drum roll) putting it out of reach for Cage's ensemble which was comprised primarily of dancers and composers. The work was premiered in Mexico City by the percussion section of the Orquesta Sinfonia de Mexico and proved a success even before its publication in 1954. That year, Chicago Daily News music critic Roger Dettmer noted the popularity of the *Toccata*: "Not one, or two, but three new recordings suddenly of this fascinating, sophisticated-primitive piece for tom-toms, gourds, rattles and a dozen other percussive oddments." The *Toccata* popularity continued for decades, topping the Percussive Arts Society's list of most often performed percussion ensembles.

Chávez was born (1899) and died (1978) in Mexico City, a locale that benefited greatly from his artistic endeavors. He began his career at an early age, studying piano first with his elder brother and later with Parra, Ponce and Ogazón. His training as a composer came through the study and analysis of the classic and romantic literature. Early on Chávez began adding elements of ethnic Mexican music into his compositions. His ballet, *El Fuego Nuevo* (1921), included a large percussion section (13 players). At the age of 29, Chávez was named director of Mexico's National Conservatory and, in the same year, was asked to become musical director of the newly formed *Orquesta Sinfonia de Mexico*. Under his leadership, both organizations prospered; they continue today. Chávez not only composed music, but also authored the 1937 book, *Toward a New Music*, in which he anticipated the advent of electronic music. Throughout his career, he contributed articles on music and art to Mexico City's newspaper, *El universal*. In 1958 he was appointed to the Charles Eliot Norton Chair of Poetics at Harvard University.

The *Toccata for Percussion Instruments* was preceded by another chamber work, *Xochipilli* (1940) for winds and percussion. Written at the request of Nelson Rockefeller, *Xochipilli* was premiered at New York City's Museum of Modern Art as part of "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art." Its style and unique instrumentation were conscious efforts on the part of Chávez to evoke the lost music of native Mexicans. The work included indigenous percussion instruments, e.g., a teponatzle (log drum)

and huehuetl (tom-tom), plus winds, two flutes and a conch shell (often played on the trombone). Similarly, two years later in the *Toccata*, Chávez calls for native percussion instruments (Indian drums, claves, maracas and bombo (bass drum), but its musical language was completely different than *Xochipilli* with a structure classic in design and an instrumentation dominated by orchestral timpani, snare drums and mallet-keyboard instruments.

The overall form of the *Toccata* is in three movements: fast - slow - fast. Chávez uses standard compositional devices of imitation and repetition. Small rhythmic themes are presented and passed between the membranophones creating recognizable melodic contours. These themes are elaborated by the timpani and tom-toms. In the first movement, Chávez writes a sudden fortissimo roll (tremolo) for the military drum diminishing quickly to pianissimo. The other five drums enter sequentially, rolling at the same dynamic level. A great crescendo follows and the drums then fade away leading to a soft roll on the suspended cymbal that begins the second movement. This simple, yet attractive, compositional device has been imitated by composers of percussion music ever since.

The second movement provides great contrast to the first. Scored primarily for metal instruments and a xylophone, it proceeds at a hypnotic, clock-like pace. Orchestra bells, tubular chimes and xylophone offer melodic potential, but Chávez uses them primarily for their timbre (color). A blend of all the metallophones ends the movement without relieving the sense of tension that permeates the entire segment.

A solo timpani passage begins the final allegro with a march-like melody. A short intermezzo brings back a fragment from the second movement played on the orchestra bells. This changes quickly to an exciting vivo section led by the Indian drum and a final climax. The work ends with a reprise of the opening timpani march that slowly fades away.

October Mountain (1942)

Alan Hovahness

Alan Hovahness was born Alan Vaness Chakmakjian in Somerville, Mass., on March 8, 1911. A prolific composer, Hovahness began writing music at age 4 and by the time he was a teenager had completed two operas. His formal music training was at the New England Conservatory of Music where he studied composition with Frederic Converse in the mid-1930's. He later taught at the Boston Conservatory. As he became more successful, commissions, publications and recordings made it possible for him to devote his efforts to composing. A youthful interest in meditation and mysticism continued to influence Hovahness' music throughout his life. As he traveled studying various cultures, especially those of the Far East, he incorporated aspects of their music into his own. He borrowed freely from sacred Hindu and Buddhist texts, ancient Greek dances and from Armenian, Japanese, Indian and Korean folk music. John Cage described Hovahness as "a music tree, who, as an orange or lemon tree produces fruit, produces music." In his youth, Hovahness wrote music late at night due to his father's disapproval of his musical interests. In later life, he enjoyed working from dusk until dawn at his home near Seattle. He died in Seattle on June 21, 2000.

Mountains were an inspiration for Hovahness. His *Symphony No. 50*, written in 1983, was subtitled, *Mount St. Helens*, (whose violent eruption three years later resonated through his mountain retreat). His piano sonatas and symphonies often carried subtitles such as *Mount Chocorua*, *Mount Ossipee*, *To the Holy Mountain* and *To the Green Mountains*. His most successful *Second Symphony* (1955) was subtitled *Mysterious Mountain*.

October Mountain (1942) for percussion sextet was written during a period when Hovahness was influenced by Renaissance and ancient music. In *October Mountain*, he combines archaic and modern styles to create a work of five short movements featuring pitched percussion (marimba, glockenspiel and timpani) with percussion accompaniment (tenor drum, bass drum and tam tam). The opening "senza misura" section is followed by a brief, stately march featuring the drums and tam tam. Multiple repetitions of short, rhythmic patterns imitate the isorhythmic patterns found in motets of the 14th and 15th centuries. Hovahness uses this as a compositional device to control the drum parts throughout the entire work. Mvt. II features the marimba playing a modal melody. Its repetitions and elaborations build to a climax and then recede. Mvt. III is a duet for two mallet-keyboard instruments. Here Hovahness borrows from music of the Middle Ages ornamenting three notes in a melismatic manner. Mvt. IV centers around the timpani. A short rhythmic passage builds to a fortissimo capped by 12-tone statements on the bells and marimba, then slowly diminuendos to a closing pianissimo. The final movement is dance-like featuring two players on the marimba. Hovahness wrote: "I believe melody is the spring of music. The human voice was the first instrument, and I believe that all the different instruments are voices as well. So I want to give them melodies to sing."

Canticle No. 3 (1941-42)

Lou Harrison

Born in Portland, Oregon on May 14, 1917, Lou Silver Harrison had been involved with the arts since the age of two-and-a half when he appeared as the orphan boy "Buster" in a stage production of *Daddy Long Legs*. Raised and schooled mostly in Oregon and California, Harrison studied piano as a child and began writing music by the time he was ten years old. In 1935, he met the composer, Henry Cowell, who became a central figure in his musical development. Harrison enrolled in Cowell's course, *Music of the Peoples of the World* at San Francisco State University and commenced a life long exploration of world musics and cultures. Through Cowell, Harrison met composer/percussionist John Cage. The two young men joined forces presenting a series of concerts for percussion ensemble and dance in the San Francisco area. Within the short span of three years, Harrison completed ten percussion ensembles, including *Double Music* that he co-wrote with Cage. *Canticle No. 3* was premiered on the final concert of the series, May 7, 1942 at the Fairmont Hotel's Holloway Playhouse. It has become one of Harrison's most popular works, played by percussion ensembles throughout the world. Harrison died in Lafayette, Indiana on February 2, 2003.

Critics often characterize *Canticle No. 3* as "Eastern" or "Oriental" in atmosphere, although Harrison states: "...it was written at a time I was most interested in Indian and Mexican music." The work begins with the ocarina playing a winsome, rhythmically vigorous tune in a pentatonic mode. This theme serves as a source of both rhythmic and melodic material Harrison develops throughout the canticle, using standard compositional techniques, e.g., augmentation, diminution and inversion. He groups many of the so-called "non-pitched" percussion instruments into sets, with relative pitches - high to low - using them to imitate the ocarina lead. Later, a second tune is heard which is much more lyric in nature and ideally suited to the hollow, forlorn ocarina sound. This theme is accompanied by the "tinkle" of high, medium and low elephant bells, plus a set of three suspended auto brake drums. Harrison develops the two contrasting melodies giving both ocarina and percussion equal attention. As the work concludes, the lyric tune is heard again accompanied by three guitar chords over a "heartbeat like" bass drum ostinato.



Dawn Kulak, *ocarina*

Originally from Connecticut, Dawn Kulak received her Bachelors and Masters degrees from the University of Michigan. She was principal flute with the Toledo Opera Orchestra from 1996-2000, as well as acting principal with the Toledo Symphony from 1997-1998 and 2001-2002. Ms. Kulak currently resides in Maryland where she is a flutist with the United States President's Own Marine Band. Her teachers include Jeffrey Zook, Leone Buyse, and John Wion.

Ocarina provided by Clayzeness Whistleworks
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The University of Michigan Percussion Ensemble, Michael Udow-director

Selected Performances: 1998 *The Shattered Mirror* percussion opera by Michael Udow, premiere Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Orlando, Fl * 1997 *Drumming I, II, III, IV*, Reich * 1996 *Pleadies*, Xenakis 1994 *Meditations and Transmutations* - Dary John Mizelle Merkin Hall, World Music Institute, Interpretations Series New York*. 1993 Toyama Festival, Japan with the Toho Gakuen Marimba and Percussion Ensembles* Taipei International Percussion Convention * 1992 *Serious Fun Series - Ballet Mechanique, Antheil & Ludwig Van, Kagel* with films * 1988 Japan Tour with marimba virtuoso, Keiko Abe * Lincoln Center * Tokyo's Seimei Hall NHK Broadcast with Pro Musica Nipponia - premiere: Kaoru Wada's *Rakuichi-Nanaza* * four Percussive Arts Society International Conventions, * American Orff Schulwerk International Convention

Selected Recordings:

The University of Michigan Percussion Ensemble, Michael Udow-director; *Prism* - Keiko Abe, on Marimba Spiritual, Keiko Abe, marimba (Xebec) ♦ *The Shattered Mirror* - five works by Michael Udow, (EQ1) ♦ *Border Crossing*, (EQ2) ♦ *Imaginary Landscape*, (EQ3). ♦ *Coyote Dreams* (EQ25) ♦ *Marimba Spiritual*-Minoru Miki and *Coyote Dreams*-Michael Udow on *Soundscapes*, Mayumi Hama, marimba (EQ33) ♦ *Tracks and Vapor Trails* - Michael Kowalski *Gringo Blaster* (Einstein) soundtrack *Dancing Hands: The Art of Rita Blitt*.

Ionisation (1931)**Edgard Varèse**Isaac Rains: *crash cymbal, bass drum (very deep), cencerro (muffled)*Daniel Piccolo: *gong, tam-tam (high), tam-tam (low), cencerro (muffled)*Ako Toma-Bennett: *2 bongos, side-drum, 2 bass drums (medium size & large) laid flat*Daniel DeSena: *tambour militaire, side-drum*Christian Howes: *siren (high), string-drum*Jay Bordeleau: *siren (low), slapstick, güiro*Andre Dowell: *Chinese blocks (high, middle register, & low), claves, triangle*Larry Ferguson: *snare-drum (with snares relaxed), maracas, (high and low)*Mark Berry: *tarole, snare-drum, suspended cymbal*David Endahl: *cymbals, sleigh-bells, tubular chimes*Tomoko Azuma: *güiro, castagnettes, glockenspiel á clavier (with resonators)*Jason Markzon: *tambourine, anvils (high and low), grand tam-tam (very deep)*Amanda Thompson: *slapstick, triangle, sleigh-bells, piano***IV (1935)****Johanna Beyer**Issac Rains: *muted iron pipe* • Carrie Magin: *frying pan*Daniel Piccolo: *piccolo woodblock* • Sarah Hughes: *small drum*Jay Bordelau: *large woodblock* • Rosie Richards: *large drum*Renee Keller: *medium drum* • Andre Dowell: *large Thai gong*Eric Klines: *tam tam* • Amanda Thompson: *bass drum***Ostinato Pianissimo (1934)****Henry Cowell**Ya-Chi Cheng, *xylophone*Kenneth Craig & Nicole Turney, *string piano* (Michael Eisenberg, *assisting*)Olman Piedra, *rice bowls*Renee Keller, *2 woodblocks, tambourine (no rattles), guiro taped with stick*Jay Bordelau, *2 bongos* • Dan Fineberg *3 drums* • Jeffrey Barudin, *3 gongs*

Toccata (1942)**Carlos Chávez**Olman Piedra, *Indian drum, glockenspiel, small Indian drum*Jay Bordeleau, *side drum I, xylophone, Indian drum, tenor drum*Jeffrey Barudin, *side drum II, suspended cymbal*Kenneth Craig, *tenor drum, chimes, claves, one maraca, suspended cymbal*Ya-Chi Cheng, *timpani, small gong*Daniel Fineberg, *bass drum, large gong***October Mountain (1957)****Alan Hovhaness**Renee Keller, *marimba*Nicole Turney, *glockenspiel & marimba*Andre Dowell, *timpani*Daniel Karas, *tenor drum & timpano*Michael Eisenberg, *bass drum, gong & tenor drum*Michael Swain, *giant tam tam***Canticle No. 3 (1941-42)****Lou Harrison**Dawn Kulaka: *ocarina*Daniel Piccolo: *6 iron pipes (muted), 5 woodblocks*David Endahl: *5 brake drums (muted), 3 brake drums (suspended),
small xylophone*Carrie Magin: *guitar (tuned E B F# E B E)*Andre Dowell: *6 water buffalo bells, wooden box, 2 sistrums,
medium elephant bell*Brian Zator: *5 tongued teponazli, large tam-tam, 5 cowbells (muted)*Jason Markzon: *snare drum, bass drum, 5 tom-toms, large elephant bell***Initial rehearsal preparation of Canticle No. 3 was coached by Mark Berry*



Professor Emeritus **Thomas Siwe** earned both his B.M. and M.M. degrees at the University of Illinois. Upon graduation, he performed extensively as a soloist and recorded both solo and ensemble music, playing with such diverse groups as the Chicago Symphony, Boston Pops Orchestra, University of Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players and the Harry Partch Ensemble. He is a former member of the Chicago Lyric Opera, Sinfonia da Camera, and the U.S. Marine Band at Camp Pendleton.

Professor Siwe began his teaching career at Northwestern University. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and Northern Illinois University before returning to his alma mater, the University of Illinois, to direct its percussion program from 1969 to 1998. His students may be found teaching in

many well-known collegiate music schools and departments and are members of some of the most prestigious performing organizations throughout the United States.

As a past president of the Percussive Arts Society, Professor Siwe served on the Society's Board of Directors and contributed articles to both *Percussive Notes* and the *Research Edition*. His catalogs of percussion ensemble and solo music are found in libraries throughout the world. They are currently available on-line at the PAS web-site, www.pas.org. His most recent publication, *Percussion: A Course of Study for the Future Band and Orchestra Director*, is available from Media Press.

Historic Works for Percussion Ensemble - Thomas Siwe, conductor

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|--|----------------|-------|
| 1. IONISATION (1931) BMI | Edgard Varèse | 5:53 |
| 2. IV (1935) BMI | Johanna Beyer | 1:56 |
| 3. OSTINATO PIANISSIMO (1934) BMI | Henry Cowell | 3:04 |
| TOCCATA (1942) ASCAP | Carlos Chávez | 11:46 |
| 4. <i>Allegro, sempre giusto</i> | | 4:35 |
| 5. <i>Largo</i> | | 3:44 |
| 6. <i>Allegro un poco marziale, Vivo</i> | | 3:24 |
| OCTOBER MOUNTAIN (1942) BMI | Alan Hovhaness | 8:44 |
| 7. <i>I</i> | | 1:26 |
| 8. <i>II</i> | | 1:20 |
| 9. <i>III</i> | | 3:29 |
| 10. <i>IV</i> | | 1:27 |
| 11. <i>V</i> | | 0:54 |
| 12. CANTICLE NO. 3 (1941-42) BMI | Lou Harrison | 20:36 |
| Dawn Kulak, <i>ocarina</i> | | |

Total Time 51:59

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