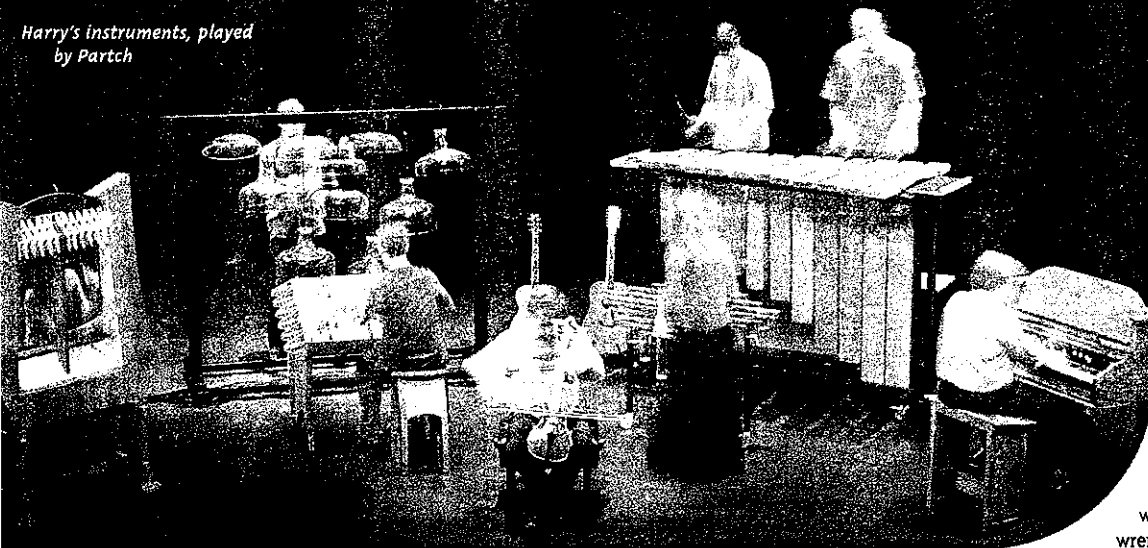


# The Experimentalists

Harry's instruments, played  
by Partch



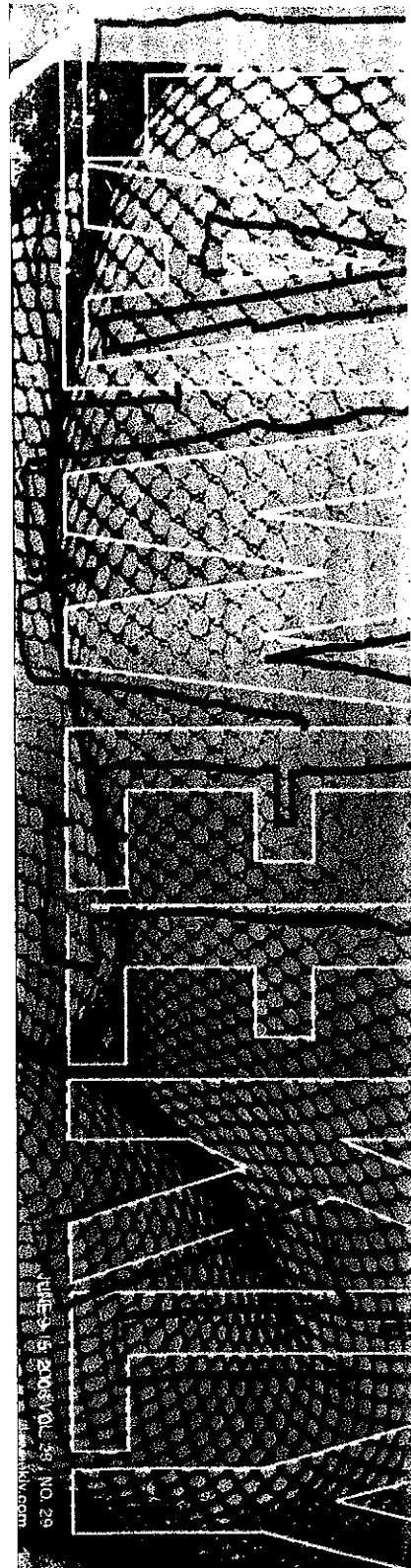
A NIGHT  
WITH  
MUSIC  
BY HARRY PARTCH

orders to entertain less caloric daydreams. Whatever the simile, the entire series — at one sitting or singly — constitutes an absorbing study of a musical mind in action: a problem conceived; a problem partitioned into six entirely separate modes of beginning and ending, traversing entirely different landscapes en route; a problem magically resolved with six different applications of creative genius.

Here is a composer at 35, still upwardly mobile in acquiring artistic command, at a time when composing for orchestras or solo instruments was still a new and untried art — and he flings forth these six killer essays in instrumental usage, which, for all he knew, were beyond the technical skill of any players of his time. Moreover, their artistic demands were rather heady stuff for the time as well. Try those wrenching dissonances in the slow movement of No. 1, for example; people weren't whistling that kind of thing on the streets back in 1720. What other composer of the time would have dreamed of joining the soft politeness of flute, oboe and small violin to the boisterous assertiveness of a solo high trumpet — and turned the result into the irresistible proclamation of sheer exuberance that constitutes No. 2? Or conceived the dark-hued meditations of low-strings-only that cause No. 6 to stand apart?

Giovanni Antonini, whose ensemble Giardino Armonico has been the commendable background for Cecilia Bartoli's uncommonly adventurous recital programs in recent years, led the properly small group of Philharmonic players, and tootled along with Inga Funck as the two-recorder contingent in the Fourth Concerto. (Put two recorders together, by the way — any two recorders — and the harmony begins to verge on Harry Partch; ever notice?) The performances under Antonini were of the contemporary almost-authentic style that seems to have become the proper stylistic approach, at least when old music takes place in as contemporary a setting as Disney: no more than 18 string players in the supporting orchestra strings, playing with just enough vibrato to make them audible but no more, and with tempos decently crisp, but with a genial slowdown to round off the cadences.

Among the visiting soloists were David Washburn of the L.A. Chamber Orchestra, who stole the Second Brandenburg with his note-perfect high-trumpet acrobatics, and Lucinda Carver of the L.A. Mozart Orchestra of fond memory, whose support at the harpsichord was solid in all six works, and whose cadenzas in No. 5 bore witness that in this remarkable work the whole notion of the solo keyboard concerto was born. Without the Bach Five, in other words, we'd never have had a Rach Three. Forgiveness is in order. □



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID WASHBURN

## The Antic Romantic

Concerts of all six of Bach's "Brandenburg" Concertos drew capacity, turn-away crowds to Disney Hall last week. Music by Harry Partch, downstairs in the small theater known as REDCAT, likewise, had people begging tickets out on the sidewalk. REDCAT is only a tenth the size of Disney, but I found both events and the crowds they drew — mostly young and marvelously receptive — similarly exhilarating. Each program had to do with a composer, at a certain defiant moment in his career, trying things out.

Anyone who believed, as many did, that Harry Partch's hypnotic but daffy music would fade from the scene after his death in 1974, and after the weird but fragile instruments he had fashioned for realizing his stratospheric creative visions had gone under lock and key, had reckoned without the innate magic of his work, and the zeal of his believers. John Schneider — musician, KPFF program host and prime mover — has seen to the duplication of the prototype instruments, with the blessing of the Partch trustees. Nine of these replications, whose originals Partch built from 1930 to 1950, now form the ensemble that calls itself, simply, Partch; its weird and wonderful sonorities, truly unlike anything else on Earth or any neighboring celestial body, filled the air at REDCAT most enchantingly. Marvelous to watch and to hear, the physical beauty of their structure and the haunting resonance of their sounds, as they wandered among the labyrinthine designs of Partch's 43-note octaves and the vagaries of their percussive adventures, re-created the living experience as it was when Partch and his gang were

among us. Last week's players, including such CalArts stalwarts as David Johnson and Vicki Ray, plus of course Schneider himself, helped reinforce the links with the past. A group of latter-day CalArts dancers, alas, merely contributed clutter.

I don't know whether any of Partch's music counts as "great" as we music critics like to define it. Nowadays we have learned to live comfortably in the spaces between the notes of the C-major scale; we know the sounds of gamelan, of medieval chant in authentic tunings, of synthesizers large and small. The shock value that I remember from my early Partch encounters has diminished; the beauty remains, but sometimes wears thin. The best of Partch lies in its power to evoke visual counterparts, and a DVD just out on Innova includes the dance-drama *Delusion of the Fury*, as staged at UCLA in 1969, which really does match sight to sound. The fearless arts patron Betty Freeman financed that production, and she also produced a film on Partch, at work on his *The Dreamer that Remains*, that never once attempts to state a case for his possible sanity. That cherishable half-hour's worth of free fall is also on the DVD.

There were small pieces on the Partch program, too, and they revealed a gentler side not often found in his rowdier music. Several were songs, nicely sung by Schneider, to poetry by Ella Young, a dear lady who deserves to be remembered. Celtic by birth, she settled up near Big Sur and was widely known for her ability to talk with trees. I read her children's books when young, and read them still.

## That's Entertainment

A night with all six "Brandenburgs," I once wrote, is like having a whole box of Godiva chocolates to yourself. Now I am under doctor's