

the life's blood of Cuban music, and so it is for Roldán: the orchestra sways and bobs through four movements as toes tap in the audience.

Of all the early twentieth century American musical revolutionaries, perhaps composer Henry Cowell wielded the most vivid and far-reaching influence. Born in 1897 to a rural California family, Cowell began to study the violin at age five, though his parents' hopes of creating a prodigy on the instrument remained unfulfilled when the lessons had to be stopped on account of the boy's poor health. After his parents' divorce in 1903, Cowell spent several years traveling around the country visiting relatives with his mother. It was during one such journey in 1908 that he began to write his own music, his first known effort at composition being an unfinished setting of Longfellow's Golden Legend.

Until he began musical studies with Charles Seeger at the University of California at Berkeley in 1914, Cowell remained a basically self-taught musician, as well as a young man who had never spent so much as a day in school in his life. Seeger was impressed by the young Cowell's output -- over 100 compositions of varying quality by 1914 -- but was much more interested in the young composer's hyper-creative, open-minded musical personality. Free of the often confining attitudes which govern formal musical education, Cowell had come to view any sound as musical substance with which he could work, and his early music owes more to the influence of birdsong, machine noises and folk music than it does to any knowledge of earlier masterworks. In *The Tides of Manaunaun*, Cowell asks the pianist to use his or her fist, palm, and forearm on the keys of the instrument's bass register to evoke massive tidal waves, an early example of what he called the tone cluster. Cowell used this and similar techniques in many later works, which proved to be highly influential for many of the "sound mass" composers of later decades, including Penderecki, Ligeti, and numerous electronic composers.

However, Seeger felt that without structure and guidelines Cowell would remain an unskilled, if impressively inventive, musician, and he encouraged the young composer to make a rigorous study of traditional harmony and counterpoint. In 1919, at Seeger's suggestion, Cowell finished a systematic treatise on his own music entitled *New Musical Resources*, in which he discusses new musical techniques, aesthetic directions, and possible alterations to the accepted system of musical notation. Concert appearances throughout North America and Europe during the 1920s earned Cowell countless friends and enemies throughout the musical establishment. Although he had earned the respect of such luminaries as Bartók and Schoenberg, his concerts frequently caused audience riots and invoked the wrath of critics who wondered if Cowell's headstrong independence disguised a lack of true musical craftsmanship. In the *Aeolian Harp* (1923), for piano, Cowell instructs the pianist to play "inside" the piano by sweeping, scraping, strumming, and muting the strings. The *Banshee* (1925) applies indeterminacy and graphic notation with instructions for the pianist to play exclusively inside the piano while an assistant holds down the damper pedal. Playing techniques include scraping the strings with a fingernail, and pizzicato effects, all performed in the lowest registers of the instrument, yielding resonant and primarily non-pitched waves of sound.

Later music, such as the *Amerind Suite* for piano (1939) and the *26 Simultaneous Mosaics* (1964) incorporate generous helpings of indeterminacy, though from the 1930s onward, Cowell's compositional language grew increasingly tonal and rhythmically simplified. Cowell died after several years of serious illness.

CONCERT PERCUSSION

FOR ORCHESTRA

MUSIC OF
JOHN CAGE

HENRY COWELL

LOU HARRISON

AMADEO ROLDÁN

WILLIAM RUSSELL

CONDUCTED BY

JOHN CAGE
AND
PAUL PRICE

The
Manhattan
Percussion
Ensemble

Even after his death, John Cage remains a controversial figure. Famously challenging the very notion of what music is, Cage remained on the leading edge of both playful and profound experimentalism for the greater part of his career, collaborating with and influencing generations of composers, writers, dancers, and visual artists. One of his best-known and most sonically intriguing innovations, the prepared piano, had become an almost commonplace compositional resource by the end of the twentieth century. Years before the invention of the synthesizer, he was in the forefront in the exploration of electric and electronic sound sources, using oscillators, turntables, and amplification to musical ends. He pioneered the use of graphic notation and, in employing chance operations to determine musical parameters, was the leading light for one cadre of the avant-garde that included Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, and Pauline Oliveros. Cage produced works of "performance art" years before the term was coined, and his 4'33" (1952) -- in which the performers are instructed to remain silent for four minutes and thirty-three seconds -- takes a place among the most notorious touchstones of twentieth century music.

Cage was born on September 5, 1912, in Los Angeles, California. After boyhood piano lessons, he pursued both formal and informal musical studies that ranged from classes at Pomona College to cultural excursions throughout Europe to lessons with American composer Adolph Weiss.

Cage's true mentors were Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg, two very different musical personalities. Cage's music from the 1930s and 1940s demonstrates the direct influence of both Schoenberg and Cowell, and is marked especially by the use of percussion instruments and the prepared piano. While Cage's early music was based, like Schoenberg's, primarily on the organization of pitch, rhythmic structures became increasingly important, no doubt due in part to the composer's associations with the world of dance. He had worked as a dance accompanist at UCLA and then took a similar position at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle, Washington, in 1938. Here he met, and developed a working relationship, with choreographer/dancer Merce Cunningham.

The most important aesthetic development in Cage's career came as a result of his studies of Eastern philosophies, especially Zen Buddhism, in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The result was music derived, at least in part, from quasi-random decisions determined by the I Ching (the Chinese Book of Changes). Instead of imposing an inviolable order upon the conventional elements of Western music, Cage endeavored "to make a musical composition the continuity of which is free of individual taste and memory (psychology) and also of the literature and 'traditions' of the art." The embodiment of this philosophy is well illustrated by Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951). The score calls for the prescribed manipulations of knobs on twelve radios; the aural result is dependent on what happens to be on the airwaves at the instant of performance. In "composing" works in such a fashion, Cage ensured that each realization of the score would provide a unique sonic experience.

Cage's ecumenically experimental spirit continued to thrive into the 1960s and beyond. The "environmental extravaganza" *Musicircus* (1967) incorporates everything from rock music to pantomime to film; *HPSCHD* (1967) mixes computer technology with the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin. *Child of Tree* (1975) calls for the amplification of a potted plant, *Inlets* (1977) for four conch shells and the sound of fire, and *Il Treno* (1978) for "prepared trains."

Though his career unfolded largely without the confines of the musical establishment in America, Cage became something of a beloved elder statesman of music in his later years, honored with formal distinctions and concerts marking his major birthdays. He died in New York City on August 12, 1992.

Born in the small Missouri city of Canton, Bill Russell was a leading figure in percussion music composition, influenced by his acquaintances John Cage and Henry Cowell. In turn, Russell also influenced Cage, in his emphasis of percussion.[citation needed] During the 1930s, predating Cage's main work, Russell's percussion works called for vernacular textures such as Jack Daniels bottles, suitcases, and Haitian drums, as well as "prepared pianos", although it is not clear how specifically he wanted the piano to be prepared.

One notable performance of his "Fugue for eight percussion instruments" took place in 1933, with the ubiquitous and influential critic-writer-performer Nicholas Slonimsky conducting. The fugue was performed at Carnegie Hall on a program that included Varèse's iconic percussion composition "Ionisation." These performances took place under the auspices of the Pan-American Association of Composers, an organization that was composed of Cowell, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Edgard Varèse, Slonimsky, and other luminaries of American ultramodernism. Russell, on occasion, performed other Pan-Am composers' chamber works on violin. In 1990, Russell's oeuvre was performed integrally, assisted by Cage, in New York, leading to a recording of Russell's extant works by Essential Music.

Cuban composers of concert music are not plentiful today, and during the 1920s and 30s they were scarcer still. But the European-trained Cuban composer Amadeo Roldán managed such success during that time that today, nearly a century later, his name is still prominent in his native country: both a school for performing arts and a major concert hall in Havana bear his name. While performances of his work abroad have never been common, Roldán's highly charged blend of classical European style and energetic Caribbean folk rhythms is finding its way onto an increasing number of recordings in the twenty-first century.

Roldán was born on July 12, 1900, while his Cuban parents were staying in Paris; years later, he returned to Europe to seek out serious musical training -- mostly for violin, an instrument that he mastered well enough to win the prestigious Sarasate Prize -- at the Madrid Conservatory. Graduating from the Conservatory in 1916, he stayed on in Spain for a few years to privately study composition; in 1921 he returned to Havana. In 1924, he joined up with the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra, working first as concertmaster (1924), then as assistant conductor (1925), and finally as the principal conductor (1932). In 1935, he joined the faculty of the Havana Conservatory. His tenure there would be a short one, though, for Amadeo Roldán was destined to join those composers -- and there are many -- who never made it to their 40th birthday: he died two days into March 1939.

As a young man, Roldán spent much of his time playing the violin, and as he grew older, conducting and teaching consumed his time. He was, as a result, never a particularly prolific composer. There are only a dozen or so works to his credit, but they include orchestral, chamber, vocal and solo piano pieces. Roldán also composed a series of short pieces called *Ritmícas*; the fifth and sixth of these are scored for percussion alone, and may well be the first such compositions in the literature.

The orchestral suite drawn up from his 1928 ballet *La Rebambaramba* has proven to be Roldán's best-loved piece of music, and in some ways can be taken as a sample of his whole catalog. The orchestra used for it is standard, save for the inclusion of then-exotic Cuban percussion instruments like maracas and guiro. Rhythm is

CONCERT PERCUSSION

FOR ORCHESTRA

John Cage & Paul Price conducting the Manhattan Percussion Ensemble

- 1 Amadeo Roldán No. 6 Tiempo De Rhumba 1:47
- 2 Amadeo Roldán No. 5 Tiempo De Son 2:26
- 3 Lou Harrison Canticle No. 1 4:06
- 4 William Russell Waltz 1:40
- 5 William Russell March 1:41
- 6 William Russell Fox Trot 1:10
- 7 Henry Cowell Ostinado Pianissimo 3:25
- 8 William Russell Havannera 0:54
- 9 William Russell Rhumba 0:45
- 10 William Russell Tiempo De Son 0:45
- 11 John Cage, Lou Harrison Double Music 5:44
- 12 John Cage Amores 10:05

Recorded by Time Records 1961 Engineer - Bob Arnold

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