

**HENRY COWELL (1897-1965)**  
**AND THE IMPACT OF HIS FIRST EUROPEAN**  
**TOUR (1923)**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements**  
**for the degree of Master of Music, Australian Catholic**  
**University**

**22 July 2005**

I, Victor Emanuel Rischitelli, declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any academic award at this or any other tertiary educational institution.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **Acknowledgments.**

Several persons have assisted me in this thesis and I wish to extend my thanks to them.

Ms Kristie French, from the Special Collections/University Archives at the California State University, Long Beach, sent me copies of letters and documents from the Wesley Kuhnle Collection.

My supervisor, Ms Patricia Shaw from the Australian Catholic University provided English translations of various German texts.

My friend, Mr Christophe Tissier, in Paris provided English translations of various French texts and sent me copies of the 1923 issues of the French music journal *Le Guide du Concert*.

## **ABSTRACT:**

In 1923, American composer and pianist, Henry Cowell (1897-1965) gave his first highly successful concert tour of Europe, playing his own unique compositions. This thesis details this tour and discusses its impact. Considering the enormous impact of Cowell's tour, it has only been discussed briefly. Cowell performed in many European cities, especially in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London, achieving positive reviews and some notoriety. I discuss how and why he created such an impact, not only during the tour but also immediately following it, in relation to musical life in Europe and the differences between his piano music and the piano music that was being heard at the time.

On his tour, Cowell showcased many new piano techniques he had invented, some of which he had discussed in his treatise *New Musical Resources* (1919). His clusters, string-piano technique and to some degree, his experiments with time and metre, were very new and influenced later generations of composers. His music created such passionate responses from the Europeans that when he returned to America, attitudes towards him and his music had changed for the better.

In Europe, Cowell was also impressed by the various societies and publications devoted to new music and as a result he founded, in America, the New Music Society and the publication *New Musical Quarterly*. These promoted mostly American composers devoted to avant-garde developments in music, providing the foundation for the development of American music.

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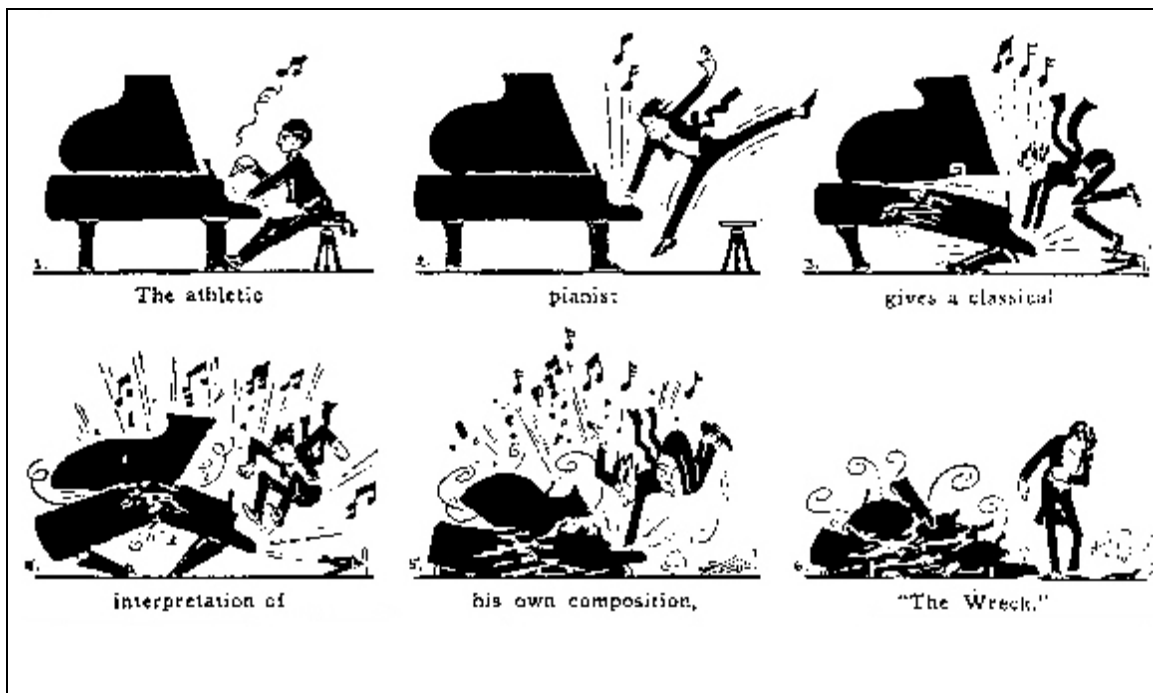
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Cartoon by Nate Collier in *Judge* (New York City), 18 July 1924, p. 18.

Cited in Martha L. Manion, *Writings About Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography* (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1982): 151.



## Introduction

In 1923 American composer and pianist Henry Cowell made his first European tour, performing his own piano compositions. While his primary intention was to promote himself, he also went to Europe to gain some perspective on the European contemporary music scene, to make links between American and European music, and to make contacts with prominent European musical identities. He traveled there with his former piano teacher, Richard Buhlig, and Buhlig's student, Wesley Kuhnle. The confident twenty-six-year-old Cowell did not go there to study or to search for an identity; he already had a musical education and identity that had developed from his unconventional upbringing. Cowell had gone there to show European musical culture his unconventional and unique style. Roughly ten years earlier, Cowell had begun experimenting with what he called clusters, which were chords made up of major/minor seconds. In 1923, while on tour, Cowell also experimented with playing inside the piano, a method he called stringed-piano. This thesis discusses this tour because it is an important period in Cowell's life which has not been discussed before in much detail or examined for its impact on his career. The tour was responsible for his success both in Europe and America, shaping the future of his career and indirectly affecting the development of American music, making him one of the most important American composers of the twentieth century. Therefore the research questions I pose are: - what did Cowell do on the 1923 European Tour? How successful was the tour? How did it affect his own career? How did Cowell become an important figure in American music history after this tour?

The first chapter discusses the various sources available by and about Cowell. While some of these have provided information on his 1923 tour, the literature review also reveals that this part of his career has been overshadowed by his earlier experimentation with his clusters and his later advocacy of American music through his New Music Society and *New Musical Quarterly*. Therefore much of my research included the consultation of sources which did not directly refer to Cowell, but did assist in an evaluation of his tour.

The second chapter contains a detailed biography of the composer, in particular his life up until his trip to Europe. These years from his childhood to the European tour prove important as they reveal how Cowell became a confident and independent person, musician and composer. An extremely creative child prodigy, Cowell was educated by his unconventional mother Clara Dixon and musically educated by an unconventional teacher Charles Seeger, both of whom encouraged his ideas. This chapter also provides a brief outline of the tour, the immediate years following the tour and Cowell's later years.

The third chapter examines musical life in Europe in the early 1920s, concentrating on Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London. This discussion summarises the latest developments in avant-garde European music and the types of concerts that were popular with audiences. It also outlines contemporary developments in European piano music and piano concert life there in 1923.

The fourth chapter contains a detailed account of Cowell's tour, noting also how he was received, whom he met, his experiences, his activities there, and how his reception in Europe changed how he was viewed in his own country.

The fifth chapter examines Cowell's repertoire for this concert tour, which contained some of the techniques that are discussed in the first version of his treatise on modern compositional ideas and techniques, *New Musical Resources* (1919). The technique most prominent in Cowell's piano music performed in 1923 was the cluster, which existed in a variety of forms. Other techniques from *NMR* explored in the piano works include dissonant counterpoint and polyrhythms. Discussing Cowell's works in some detail shows why his performances received the enormous amount of attention they did in Europe.

The final chapter will look at the impact of European musical life on Cowell and how his tour influenced the promotion of mainly American avant-garde music via Cowell's New Music Society, and its activities in organising concerts, publishing and recording. This chapter also discusses Cowell's career after his tour of Europe, much of which was shaped by it. The chapter concludes with how his piano compositions would later influence younger composers, contributing towards the focus of avant-garde music being shifted from Europe to America.

Cowell was undoubtedly a key figure in promoting avant-garde American music, but most importantly he helped changed the view that musical life and important developments in new music emanated from Europe. If Cowell had not been

successful in Europe, his innovative compositional ideas may have had much more limited influence on musical language in the twentieth century. If he had not had the chance to be stimulated by musical life there, he may never have founded the New Musical Society and *New Musical Quarterly*, denying many of his American contemporaries a chance to be heard.

## Chapter 1. Literature Review

While much has been written about the developments in twentieth century American music, much of it centres on Charles Ives, Aaron Copland and John Cage. However, there are many other significant American composers such as Leo Ornstein, Dane Rudhyar, Carl Ruggles, Ruth Crawford, Charles Seeger and Lou Harrison, which are quite often left unnoticed. Hopefully this lack of interest in other twentieth century American composers is changing. Perhaps this change may begin with Henry Cowell, and the opening of his Collection at the New York Public Library (NYPL). After Cowell's death in 1965, his wife Sidney sent the beginnings of a Cowell collection to the NYPL, and continued to send material over time. However she made it clear in her 1975 letter to the Music Division at the New York Public Library that the collection was "restricted from public access until the completion of a book, or until 25 years from the date of this letter, whichever comes first."<sup>1</sup> When she died in 1995, her will was sent to the Library and as promised, the Henry Cowell Collection was finally opened to the public on 20 June 2000.<sup>2</sup> Since the opening of the Cowell Collection, much more has been written about Cowell, than about many of his contemporaries.

The Cowell Collection is extraordinarily large and opens the door to Cowell's legacy. The collection contains material including: correspondence from and to Henry Cowell; manuscripts of published and unpublished scores; childhood memorabilia; concert programs; oral transcripts; even old tax returns, bank statements, insurance policies and medical records. The collection is divided into sections and is stored in 159 boxes, with more boxes still in processing.

As exciting and valuable as the collection is, it can still be restricting for those unable to visit the library. Since I was not able to physically access the Collection, the NYPL suggested that it may be possible to have copies of relevant material sent to me. Copies of material are only available via permission from Mr. Richard Teitelbaum, for the Cowell Estate. While I have contacted Mr. Teitelbaum concerning my interest in the collection, I never received any reply, making it

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Cowell to Frank Campbell, 21 June 1975, Music Division office files. Cited in George Boziwick, "Henry Cowell at the New York Public Library: A Whole World of Music," *Notes* 57.1 (2000): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Boziwick, 56.

impossible to access the Collection. Fortunately there are other more readily available primary resources that offer information about and insight into Henry Cowell's 1923 tour of Europe. While I have referred to quite a wide range of sources, it will not be possible to discuss all of them in detail here. I intend to discuss those that contribute substantially to the life of Henry Cowell and the period of my investigation in particular.

### **PRIMARY SOURCES: MUSIC BY HENRY COWELL**

A complete and detailed list of Cowell's compositions is catalogued in *The Music of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Catalog*, published in 1986 by William Lichtenwanger, a publication from the Institute for Studies in American Music. The catalogue lists 966 complete and incomplete compositions, published and unpublished. Cowell composed for a variety of forces, including 23 Trios, 14 Quartets, 17 Symphonies, approximately 100 works for solo voice and hundreds of complete and incomplete piano works. Each entry provides, where possible, composition dates, publication dates (if applicable), detailed history including the origins of the work, first public performance and any texts that Cowell used. Unquestionably, this catalogue is essential in familiarising oneself with the musical work and life of Henry Cowell. It is disappointing to note that Lichtenwanger's catalogue reveals that only a small fraction of his works were published (especially his piano works), and even some of these are now out of print.

### **PRIMARY SOURCES: WRITINGS BY HENRY COWELL**

Cowell also wrote prolifically about music and other musicians or composers. *The Writings of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1977) by Bruce Saylor contains 237 items arranged in chronological order. These range from books, articles and reviews to prefaces to scores and notes to recordings. Each item is followed by a brief summary of its content. Cowell's first published literary piece was in 1921 and his last was published in 1964.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Cowell's writings did not specifically refer to or contain information on his 1923 European tour. However other subjects

covered include articles such as “Modernism Needs No Excuses, Says Cowell” (1925),<sup>4</sup> “Conservative Music in Radical Russia” (1929)<sup>5</sup> and “Serious Composers of Cuba” (1945),<sup>6</sup> alongside “Moravian Music” (1927),<sup>7</sup> “Irish Traditional Music” (1934),<sup>8</sup> “Yugoslav Folk-Music” (1936)<sup>9</sup> and “Music of the Orient” (1963).<sup>10</sup> Saylor’s publication is extremely useful in that it reveals Cowell’s interests in not only American and other contemporary art music but world music in general.

*Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music* (2001)<sup>11</sup> is an extension to Saylor’s publication. Cowell’s former student, Dick Higgins, compiled and edited forty-six articles by Cowell. The earliest published article in this compilation is Cowell’s “Tonal Therapy,” which first appeared in *The Temple Artisan* (May 1922), and the last is “Music of the Orient,” from *Music Journal* (September 1963). Cowell’s writing is informative and opinionated, providing clues to his personality. He considered Charles Ives “the father of indigenous American art-music and at the same time ... in the vanguard of the most forward-looking and experimental composers of today,”<sup>12</sup> an evaluation written in 1932 when Ives was not yet taken seriously. Cowell also had little regard for the traditional teaching of harmony. In “The Scientific Approach to Non-European Music” (1935) he wrote: “In the nineteenth century, musicians believed that the rules of harmony which were then (and unfortunately are still) studied in schoolbooks, constituted the foundation of music.”<sup>13</sup>

Cowell’s treatise on musical language and harmony, *New Musical Resources* (NMR), was completed in 1919, revised in 1929 and first published in 1930. As Cowell wrote: “The purpose of *New Musical Resources* is... to point out [that] the

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Cowell, “Harmonic Development in Music,” with Robert L. Duffus, *Freeman*, III/55 (1921): 63-65 & “International Music,” *World Union-Goodwill*, III/1 (1964): 23-25.

<sup>4</sup> *Musical America*, XLI/23 (23 March 1925): 9. Cited in Bruce Saylor, *The Writings of Henry Cowell: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1977): 2.

<sup>5</sup> *The New Republic*, LIX/767 (14 Aug. 1929): 7. Cited in Saylor, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *The New York Times* 29 Apr. 1945: 4. Cited in Saylor, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Pro-Musica Quarterly*, V/2 (June 1927): 25-59. Cited in Saylor, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Irish Review*, I/2 (May 1934): 21-30. Cited in Saylor, 12.

<sup>9</sup> *The Living Age*, CCCLI/4443 (Dec. 1936): 351-52. Cited in Saylor, 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Music Journal*, XXXI/6 (Sept. 1963): 24-26. Cited in Saylor, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Cowell, *Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music*, Edited with an Introduction by Dick Higgins, Preface by Kyle Gann (New York: McPherson & Company, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Cowell, “Charles Ives,” 1932; *Essential Cowell*, 51. Originally printed in Henry Cowell, ed. *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium*, Rev. ed. Stanford, 1933; (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962): 128-145.

<sup>13</sup> Cowell, “The Scientific Approach to Non-European Music,” 1935; *Essential Cowell*, 164. Originally printed in *Music Vanguard* I/2 (Summer 1935): 62-67.

influence the overtone series has exerted on music throughout its history is the greatest factor in musical relationship.”<sup>14</sup> He discussed and explained the “potential musical use and values” of the overtone series,<sup>15</sup> as well as aspects of ‘Tone Combinations’, ‘Rhythm’ and ‘Chord-Formation.’ These indicate a vast study of the science of music. For example, the first chapter, “The Influence of Overtones in Music,” is a twenty-page detailed discussion on the topic, ranging from showing how overtones and undertones are generated, to ratios and acoustics. (Refer to Appendix A and B). The new edition of *NMR* by David Nicholls includes full references for texts Cowell referred to in his treatise, such as Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* (1911). Nicholls also offers further explanatory and historical notes, details of the manuscripts held at the NYPL, as well as various versions and editing of *NMR*. Nicholls’s discussion concludes with the influence *NMR* has had on composers from La Monte Young, John Cage and Lou Harrison to Frederick Rzewski and Iannis Xenakis.

Cowell edited *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium*, first published in 1930. It comprises essays by a small selection of American musicians and composers and their views of “creative music in America.”<sup>16</sup> It begins with an introduction by Cowell, “Trends in American Music”, in which he discusses and places composers and their music systematically into eight groups that make up contemporary American music. Cowell’s book attempted to place contemporary American music on the world map. There are thirty one essays altogether: twenty, including nine by Cowell, on individual American composers and a further eleven dealing with issues involving music in contemporary America. These range from “Problems of American Composers” by Roy Harris and “An Afro-American Composer’s Point of View” by William Grant Still, to music from outside the Western ‘art music’ mainstream, such as “Oriental Influence in American Music” by Dane Rudhyar and “The Relation of Jazz to American Music” by George Gershwin.

*Charles Ives and His Music*, the biography by Henry Cowell and wife, Sidney, originally published in 1955, was the first book written on Ives. The biography is extremely informative, especially the discussions of Ives’s compositions. It also reveals Cowell’s close relationship with and respect for Ives. “Face to face with Ives it was impossible not to feel his great personal force and integrity, nor to doubt his

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, Ed. & introd. David Nicholls, 1930; (Cambridge: CUP, 1996): x-xi.

<sup>15</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, x-xi.

intelligence.”<sup>17</sup> Cowell’s opinion of Ives went beyond deep respect as a person and composer; he recognised in Ives a supreme American composer. He was a great advocate for Ives, and contributed to his being taken seriously.

Ives can, in fact, be shown to be one of the four great creative figures in music of the first half of the twentieth century. The others are Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartók. ... Bartók and Ives ... stand for something new whose power is only beginning to be felt, and which undoubtedly has many years to run. Both men went back deliberately into unsophisticated music to explore and then carry forward aspects of musical behavior that had gone unnoticed or had been abandoned by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers who established the symphonic music of the western world.<sup>18</sup>

The 1983 reprinted version also contains a new forward, which is a 1974 article by Sidney Cowell, “Ivesiana: ‘More than just something unusual.’”<sup>19</sup>

### **PRIMARY SOURCES BY PEOPLE WHO KNEW COWELL**

One of the earliest writings on Henry Cowell is a brief study by a Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman, in *The Intelligence of School Children* (1919). Terman interviewed hundreds of children, including the young Cowell, and a section of the book devoted to him reveals much of his abilities and character as a youngster. Terman’s research began in 1910 when he first met the twelve-year-old Cowell, chosen because of his unusual bohemian lifestyle (for example, his mother had a friend write up his astrological chart), upbringing,<sup>20</sup> and home education which included the study of “ancient history, astronomy, classical literature, geology, and botany.”<sup>21</sup> Further details of Cowell’s unusual upbringing are discussed in chapter 2. He was observed by Terman for two years, and at fourteen his IQ of 131 (though

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<sup>16</sup> Cowell, ed., *American Composers on American Music*, iii.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Cowell & Sidney Cowell. *Charles Ives and His Music*. Rev. ed. 1955; (New York: OUP, 1969): 104.

<sup>18</sup> Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Originally printed in *Musical America* (October 1974).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002): 16

<sup>21</sup> Hicks, *Bohemian*, 22.



average), plus his extensive knowledge of literature and vocabulary, resulted in Terman defining Cowell as having the mental age of nineteen.<sup>22</sup>

Another important source is the American pianist Wesley Kuhnle (1898-1962), who accompanied his friend Cowell and their former piano teacher Richard Buhlig to Europe in 1923. Letters between the three musicians and between Kuhnle and his parents contain detailed descriptions of their activities in Europe. These letters are held in the Kuhnle Collection at the California State University, Long Beach.<sup>23</sup> Ms Kristie French (Special Collections/University Archives of the University Library) has sent me copies of the letters along with other materials associated with the trip (e.g. hotel receipts and Cowell's concert program), which have been an invaluable source in tracing Cowell's activities in Europe, especially since I was unable to get access to the Cowell Collection at the NYPL.

*Charles Ives Remembered: An Oral History* by Vivian Perlis (1974) contains interviews between composers/musicians and Perlis. Regarding Cowell, Charles Seeger discusses Cowell's immediate interest in Ives when Seeger showed him Ives's *114 Songs*.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, composer Lou Harrison discusses a composition lesson with Cowell, where he told the student that he should compose using his own systems.<sup>25</sup>

Nicolas Slonimsky's 1988 autobiography, *Perfect Pitch: A Life Story*, pays tribute to Cowell and his efforts in supporting new American music. Snippets of information such as this are extremely useful as they are pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, making the picture evolve more as each one is added. Interestingly, Slonimsky's was the first book (still one of a few) in which there is any published material dealing with Cowell's imprisonment in the late 1930s: a chapter titled 'Jailed Friend'.<sup>26</sup>

Published in 1990, *Bartók Remembered* comprises various writings by people who knew Bartók, including Scottish pianist/composer Erik Chisholm, who recalls discussions with Bartók in 1933 and with Cowell in 1956 regarding Bartók's first and subsequent meetings with Cowell in London and his fascination with Cowell's clusters.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis M. Terman, *The Intelligence of School Children* (London: George G. Harrap, 1921): 246 & Hicks, *Bohemian*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed description of the Kuhnle Collection see Rayner, Clare G. "The Wesley Kuhnle Repository at California State University, Long Beach," *Notes* 33.1 (1976): 16-26.

<sup>24</sup> Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered: An Oral History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974): 146.

<sup>25</sup> Perlis, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, *Perfect Pitch: A Life Story* (Oxford: OUP, 1988): 161-67 & Michael Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44.1 (1991): 94.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm Gillies, *Bartók Remembered* (London: Faber, 1990): 118.

*The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium*, although consisting mainly of secondary sources, also contains personal stories recounted by composer Lou Harrison of his experiences with his teacher, Cowell.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

There are many secondary sources related to Cowell. There are books, theses, articles and other sources which can be found through Martha L. Manion's *Writings About Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography*. It lists 1,359 published writings about Cowell dating from 1914 until March 1974. Like Saylor, it is an invaluable resource as it summarises and quotes directly from some primary but mainly secondary sources. This is especially useful because many of the original articles are difficult to obtain today (eg. local San Francisco newspapers of the 1910s and 1920s). It is also valuable because, as Manion's introduction states, "Virtually all aspects of Cowell's professional life are represented in the bibliography,"<sup>28</sup> with each item contributing fascinating information on Cowell's career. However, Manion's collection of reviews is not comprehensive. European music journals such as the *Musical Times* (London), *Die Musik* (Berlin), *La Revue Musicale* (Paris) and *Le Guide du Concert* (Paris) contained reviews of Cowell's concerts there in 1923, and were mostly not included by Manion. These reviews contained information about Cowell's performances and they revealed how audiences and critics received him.

Joscelyn Godwin's 1969 PhD thesis, "The Music of Henry Cowell," was a significant contribution to Cowell studies. Sidney Cowell provided Godwin with assistance, including providing unpublished music.<sup>29</sup> However, she disapproved of Godwin including a large selection of Cowell's unpublished music in his thesis. She also disapproved of Godwin's treatment of Cowell, because she felt that Godwin was not qualified in American experimentalism.<sup>30</sup> She therefore made the thesis unavailable, which she was able to do as executor of Cowell's estate. However it is now available through UMI. Despite Sidney Cowell's misgivings, I found the thesis extremely valuable. The biography contains much information not found in other

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<sup>28</sup> Martha L. Manion, *Writings About Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography* (Brooklyn, New York: Institute for Studies of American Music, 1982): vii.

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," 92.

<sup>30</sup> A telephone conversation with Sidney Cowell and Steven Johnson, 15 February 1990. Cited in Hicks, *Bohemian*, 4, 171.

literature, making it extremely useful. It discusses and analyses much of Cowell's music throughout his career, including a chapter on Cowell's interests in Oriental music.

Secondary sources I found to be most useful and valuable to my studies were, apart from Godwin, sources that were published after Manion.

Nancy Wolbert's 1978 Masters thesis, "Richard Buhlig, a Concert Pianist: His Career and Influence in the Twentieth Century,"<sup>31</sup> contains specific information regarding Cowell's 1923 European tour. It also includes some of Buhlig, Kuhnle and Cowell's social activities such as their attendance at concerts. It is useful since some of the information has not appeared in other literature consulted. Most of the information was obtained from the Kuhnle Collection at the California State University, Long Beach. Other sources consulted included articles, newspaper reviews and transcripts of interviews about Buhlig.

Rita H. Mead's published PhD thesis, *Henry Cowell's New Music, 1925-1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings* (1981), is one of the most significant studies of Cowell's work that covers the life of his New Music Society, in particular its origins (1925-1926) and the first nine seasons (1927-1936). After Cowell's imprisonment in 1936, most of the activities of the Society came to a halt. Therefore the period after 1936 until NMS's demise in 1958 is dealt with separately by Mead. Consisting of only one chapter, it discusses how Cowell revived the Society after his release in 1940. However, since Ives was the main financial provider of the Society, it collapsed in 1958, four years after Ives's death. Much information on Cowell's life before and during his trip to Europe is discussed in the second chapter. Mead's articles, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music" (1980) and "The Amazing Mr. Cowell" (1983), are based on her Ph.D. thesis.<sup>32</sup> William Lichtenwanger acknowledged Rita H. Mead's immense contributions to the study of Cowell by dedicating his catalogue to her memory.

Lichtenwanger's catalogue also included a biographical essay, "Henry Cowell: Mind over Matter,"<sup>33</sup> which covers the composer's unusual childhood, including the interviews with Terman, and his early development and career as a musician, composer and spokesman on new American music. Lichtenwanger also applied more

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<sup>31</sup> Department of Music, California State University, Long Beach.

<sup>32</sup> Rita H. Mead, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music," *Musical Quarterly* 66.4 (1980): 538.

<sup>33</sup> xiii-xxii.

recent psychological theories from Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983).

The 1991 PhD thesis by Edward Carwithen, "Henry Cowell: Composer and Educator," is set out clearly, with an informative biography. It includes a discussion of Cowell's teaching career and a study of several of Cowell's *Hymns and Fuguing Tunes*. While the thesis is extremely informative, only the biography was useful regarding Cowell's activities in Europe.

*Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* by Ann Pescatello, published in 1992, includes discussions on Cowell's earlier life and studies with Seeger, his first composition teacher. It also explores Seeger's influence on Cowell, especially the need to create one's own compositional systems and styles, resulting in *New Musical Resources*.

The 1993 article by Michael Hicks, "Cowell's Clusters," is a detailed study of the origins and development of Cowell's piano clusters. This article examines some of Cowell's earlier cluster pieces and discusses his devotion to clusters and his performances of his cluster pieces throughout the 1920s.

The 1993 article by Steven Johnson, "Henry Cowell, John Varian, and Halcyon" is an interesting survey of Cowell's life with the theosophical community known as The Temple of the People at Halcyon, California. The article discusses his musical activities there, teaching music and being musical director of the group. It also discusses in great detail his collaboration with the poet John Varian and his influence on Cowell, providing a vivid commentary on the life at Halcyon from the mid-1910s to the late 1920s.

*The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium* (1997) is a collection of essays which, according to editor David Nicholls, "is the first book-length critical study of the life and work of Henry Cowell."<sup>34</sup> It begins with Nicholls' biography of the composer and also contains two lengthy and informative essays on Cowell's music by Steven Johnson and Wayne D. Shirley, a revised and extended version of William Lichtenwanger's biographical chapter from his 1986 catalogue, and an essay by Kyle Gann on Cowell's writings, "Subversive Prophet: Henry Cowell as Theorist and Critic," which considers his *NMR*, *American Composers on American Music* and

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<sup>34</sup> David Nicholls, ed., *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992): xi.

various other articles. The symposium ends with an excellent bibliography, which is much more up-to-date than Manion.

Biographies of Charles Ives (1874-1954) have also been useful regarding Cowell. *Charles Ives "My Father's Song": A Psychoanalytic Biography* by Stuart Feder (1992) and *Charles Ives: A Life with Music* by Jan Swafford (1998) offer insight into Cowell's position as an American and international composer and advocate of American and world music. They document the close personal and working friendship between Ives and Cowell and also their commitment to avant-garde American music, primarily through the New Music Society.

The 1998 article by Sabine Feisst, "Henry Cowell und Arnold Schönberg: Eine unbekannte Freundschaft [Henry Cowell and Arnold Schönberg: An Unknown Friendship]" in *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, contains important and detailed information regarding Cowell's early interest in the composer and their meeting in Berlin in 1931. It has been extremely useful since other resources consulted do not discuss the friendship between these two influential composers of the twentieth century.

Both Kyle Gann's Preface and Dick Higgins's Introduction to *Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music* (2001) are informative. Gann argues the importance of Cowell and how he has influenced new generations of composers. Higgins's Introduction is a biographical account of Cowell's life and career, and also provides a discography of Cowell's music.

The most recent study of Cowell is *Henry Cowell: Bohemian* (2002) by Michael Hicks. Although the author did his research before the Cowell Collection was opened, it is an excellent and detailed account of Cowell's life, especially his earlier years. It offers an extensive bibliography and other items that involve American music in general.

Joel Sachs was the last person Mrs Cowell had chosen to write a biography. The book is scheduled to be published by OUP with the title *Henry Cowell: A Biography*, on 30 July 2005.

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It was also necessary to consult other sources that do not refer solely to Cowell. These sources cover musical life in 1923 in Europe, putting into context Cowell's activities there and the attention he received. The European music journals, *Musical Times*, *Die Musik*, *La Revue Musicale* and *Le Guide du Concert* were especially useful. The first three journals in particular also included concert details and reviews from other European cities, revealing much about the musical culture in each city. *The Musical Times* devoted more space to Cowell's performance than to any other performance at Vienna's Modern Music Week, implying a significant interest in him.<sup>35</sup> In *Die Musik*, Adolf Weissmann wrote of the 1923 concert season that, other than Cowell's performance, musical life in Berlin had been unremarkable.<sup>36</sup> *La Revue Musicale's* review of Cowell's second performance in Paris praised his cluster and string-piano techniques.<sup>37</sup> *Le Guide*, a directory of daily concerts in Paris with comments on some performances, contained an explanation and example of Cowell's clusters in one issue, showing that not only were Parisians interested in hearing new music, they also were interested in learning about it.<sup>38</sup>

There are many publications that deal more broadly with musical life in Europe in the 1920s, enabling me to construct a general view of the musical culture Cowell encountered in the cities he visited. For example, these publications reveal that musical life in London was largely conservative, while Paris was much less so, being more open to new musical ideas. Germany, in general, was ostracised by other nations because of its role in the war, and therefore less aware of musical developments taking place elsewhere. Publications I consulted included George Wickes's *Americans in Paris*,<sup>39</sup> Elaine Brody's *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope 1870-1925*,<sup>40</sup> Lynn Garafola's *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*,<sup>41</sup> Norman Lebrecht's *Music in London: A History and Handbook*,<sup>42</sup> J. Bradford Robinson's "Jazz Reception

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Bechert, "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 1 Dec. 1923: 875.

<sup>36</sup> Adolf Weissmann, "Konzert." *Die Musik* XVI.4 (Jan. 1924): 294.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Petit, "Oeuvres pour Piano de M. Henry Cowell," *La Revue Musicale* 1 Dec. 1923: 176.

<sup>38</sup> *Le Guide du Concert* 10.6 (16 Nov. 1923): 90.

<sup>39</sup> George Wickes, *Americans in Paris* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

<sup>40</sup> Elaine Brody, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope 1870-1925* (New York: George Braziller, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: OUP, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Norman Lebrecht, *Music in London: A History and Handbook* (London: Aurum Press, 1992).

in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure,”<sup>43</sup> and Roger Nichols’s *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris 1917-1929*.<sup>44</sup>

Publications about composers who were connected with Cowell or prominent in 1923 also assisted in the construction of the overall musical scene in Europe. Edward J. Dent’s, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography*,<sup>45</sup> Antony Beaumont’s *Busoni the Composer*,<sup>46</sup> and Joan Allen Smith’s, *Schoenberg and His Circle: A Viennese Portrait*,<sup>47</sup> for example, provided useful background information. Smith discusses Schoenberg’s work on the twelve-tone system and his dislike of reading music journals,<sup>48</sup> which may explain why Schoenberg was unaware of Cowell in 1923.

Music encyclopaedias such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and *New Grove Online*,<sup>49</sup> the 1992 edition of *The Oxford Companion to Music* and internet sites such as Dick Higgins’s, “Life and Its Shadows: The Art/Life Dichotomy”<sup>50</sup> and Howard Doyle Jr’s *Soli*,<sup>51</sup> were additionally useful regarding Cowell’s 1923 tour, musical life and composers in Europe.

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It is clear that much of the literature on Cowell emphasises his early years, from his development of innovative piano techniques such as clusters to his founding of the New Music Society in 1925. His later life and career, from the time of his imprisonment in the mid-1930s onwards, are less well documented. Regarding my topic of Cowell’s tour in Europe, Manion and the various journals consulted were the only sources which contained relevant details. While many sources have mentioned the significance of Cowell’s 1923 European tour, no-one has yet explored or analysed the tour in any detail. Considering the lack of research on this tour, consultation of resources dealing with musical life in the 1920s was essential to get a clearer view of

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<sup>43</sup> J. Bradford Robinson, “Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany: In Search of a Shimmy Figure,” *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic*, Ed. Bryan Gilliam, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) 107-34.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Nichols, *The Harlequin Years: Music in Paris 1917-1929* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Edward J. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London: OUP, 1933).

<sup>46</sup> Antony Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1985).

<sup>47</sup> Joan Allen Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle: A Viennese Portrait* (New York: Schirmer, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> Smith, 194.

<sup>49</sup> L. Macy ed., *New Grove Online*, 2004, Available: <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

<sup>50</sup> Dick Higgins, *Life and Its Shadows: The Art/Life Dichotomy*, 1997, Available: <<http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag97/higgin/sm-higgn.htm>>.

<sup>51</sup> Howard Jr. Doyle, *Soli*, 2000, Concert Program, September 2000, Soli Chamber Ensemble, Available: <[http://www.solichamberensemble.com/sept\\_00.html](http://www.solichamberensemble.com/sept_00.html)>.

his activities in Europe in 1923. While much more would have been revealed if I had been able to access the Cowell Collection, it has still been possible to assemble considerable detail about Cowell's tour, its context and its impact.



## Chapter 2. Biography of Henry Cowell

Henry Dixon Cowell was born on 11 March 1897 in Menlo Park, California. His father Henry (Harry) Clayton Blackwood Cowell (1866-1954) had grown up in a village in County Carlow, Ireland. His father, George, was a man from a significant educational background, who eventually became the Bishop of Kildare. Harry, however, did not share the same faith as his family, preferring to emigrate via Canada to San Francisco, “the most modern city in the world” in the 1880s. Here he joined the bohemian lifestyle of artists, poets, musicians and other free living spirits, the perfect atmosphere in which to become a professional writer.<sup>1</sup>

Henry’s mother Clarissa Dixon (1851-1916) came from a logging town, Hennepin, Illinois. As a teenager she became increasingly independent and, like Harry, was against any religious activity. At twenty, Clarissa (or Clara, as she was known) moved to Iowa and worked as a school-teacher. She met and married a lawyer, George Davidson, and in 1872 she had a son, Clarence. After his birth, her desire to become a successful poet and author saw the publication of essays in journals. However, by the early 1890s, dissatisfied with her marriage, she left George and Clarence and headed for San Francisco “in search of fresh inspiration and like-minded thinkers”; here she eventually sold essays, short fiction and children’s stories.<sup>2</sup>

It is not known how Harry and Clara met, but in 1893 they married in Oakland, California. Clara was forty-two and Harry was twenty-seven. Soon after, Harry built a small cottage in Menlo Park, near Stanford University, where Henry was born in 1897. After his birth, Clara continued her writing while Harry worked as a writer and printer in San Francisco.<sup>3</sup>

Though not musically trained, Henry’s parents would often sing to him as a child and were happy that he showed interest in musical arts. When Henry was five, Clara bought him a violin and he had his first violin lesson with daughter and father, Sylvia and Henry Holmes.<sup>4</sup> Harry would have Henry play for many occasions, and soon his intentions were for him to become the travelling child prodigy.<sup>5</sup> However his lessons came to an abrupt end when Cowell complained he did not like Mr. Holmes

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hicks, *Bohemian*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Hicks, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Daniel, “American Composers Series: Henry Cowell,” *Stereo Review* 33.6 (1974): 73.

<sup>4</sup> Hicks, 18.

speaking while he was playing, so Holmes told him to leave and not return. Since a replacement teacher was not sought, his interest in playing the violin waned, and he gave it up.<sup>6</sup> Why his parents did not employ a new violin teacher is not known but perhaps the beginnings of the family breakdown contributed to it.

Not long after Henry's fifth birthday, Harry and Clara divorced. Due to Clara's health problems and Harry's philandering, she decided to divorce him but they remained friends.<sup>7</sup> While Harry's attention was now towards a local music teacher called Henrietta Grothwell (who eventually became his second wife), Clara and Henry moved to a house near Chinatown in San Francisco. Henry was exposed to the music of the Orient, which began his life long interest in non-western music.<sup>8</sup> The following year Clara sent Henry to Las Lomas public school, enabling her to devote time to her writing. However, his time there was brief since the children were brutal towards him. Clara believed it was because she was a single mother, so she removed him from school and taught him at home.<sup>9</sup>

After the devastation of the 1906 San Francisco earthquakes, Clara and Henry went to his Aunt Jennie's farm in Kansas, where he attended a public school for four months. Bouts of illnesses ranging from scarlet fever to Sydenham's Chorea (a condition that caused rapid, persistent involuntary movements)<sup>10</sup> forced him once again to leave formal education, never to return. In 1907, at nine or ten, Cowell's first dabbling in musical composition began with an unfinished song called *The Waves*.<sup>11</sup>

In 1908, when Henry was eleven, he and his mother moved to New York City.<sup>12</sup> As with San Francisco, Clara was attracted to Greenwich Village because of its reputation as a bohemian area where the fine arts were appreciated. Clara would often take Henry to free concerts such as symphony concerts in Central Park and chamber music concerts in Cooper Union. Occasionally, Harry would send money for him to go to the children's operas. Cowell's first piano composition, now lost, was a

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Hicks, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Hicks, 22 & Daniel, 73.

<sup>9</sup> Hicks, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Ralph Carwithen, "Henry Cowell: Composer and Educator," PhD diss., University of Florida, 1991, 200.

<sup>11</sup> William Lichtenwanger, *The Music of Henry Cowell* (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1986): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hicks, 23-24.

setting of Longfellow's *Golden Legend* (1908-09)<sup>13</sup> part of which survived in his later piano work, *Antinomy* (1917).<sup>14</sup> From here on Cowell composed prolifically. In New York, Henry and Clara were impoverished since she was unsuccessful in earning an income as a writer. They were given food and train tickets back to Kansas by the Society for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor. Not long afterwards, they returned to their cottage in Menlo Park, California.<sup>15</sup> Here, Cowell took on several jobs to support himself and his mother. He herded animals, grew and sold large ferns and cleaned chicken pens. He also worked as the caretaker at Las Lomas High School.<sup>16</sup>

In 1910 Dr Lewis Terman, a Stanford psychologist, began a study on the intelligence of a hundred children, which entailed a series of interviews with each. When Terman spoke to colleagues of suitable children, education professor Percy Davidson recommended a boy in his neighbourhood as a participant because of his unusual upbringing and home education. Coincidentally, this boy, Henry was also the same boy that was herding pigs near Terman's home. Terman interviewed the fifteen-year-old Cowell numerous times and determined that intellectually he was nineteen. Terman's book, *Intelligence of School Children*, dedicated a section to Cowell, including remarks on his musical genius, which Terman felt overshadowed his scientific ability.<sup>17</sup>

In 1912, Clara met Ellen Veblen (wife of well-known economist Thorstein Veblen) at a friend's home. Shortly after, Ellen was introduced to Henry when she went to the family's home. She was so impressed by his philosophical nature that he became a 'surrogate son' to her. At times she would leave money where she knew he would find it.<sup>18</sup> The Veblens divorced and Ellen moved to Menlo Park. Her divorce settlement left her very wealthy and she was often extremely generous, both personally and financially. She was herself a talented scholar and writer, and had published a children's book, *The Goosenbury Pilgrims*, in 1902.<sup>19</sup>

Later in 1912 Cowell bought his first piano with money he had saved, and he received piano lessons from his neighbour, Mrs Boylan, in exchange for garden

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<sup>13</sup> Hicks, 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> Lichtenwanger, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Hicks, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Hicks, 32-33.

<sup>18</sup> Hicks, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Hicks, 33-34.

maintenance. In October Cowell updated his piano, costing \$235. He received a \$50 trade-in for his old piano and paid \$24 over a four-month period towards it. Mrs Veblen generously paid for the rest.<sup>20</sup>

In 1913 Cowell met a Stanford English professor, Samuel S. Seward Jr, while selling flowers and plants at the El Camino train station. Seward became fond of him, and began giving him English instruction. Seward was so taken by Cowell's creativity that he organised an ongoing fund for him to study music in Germany, where he believed the best training was available. To heighten Cowell's profile, Seward organised for him to give a recital at Seward's neighbours' house on 15 January 1914.<sup>21</sup> Cowell performed works he had composed in 1913, *Adventures in Harmony* (dedicated to Veblen), *Creation Dawn*, *The Cauldron* and *Constance*. Unfortunately Cowell's mother was seriously ill with breast cancer and being nursed by Veblen, so neither could attend the recital.<sup>22</sup> When Seward died in 1932, Cowell wrote to his widow: "I feel that he was responsible for my being educated ... without his aid, I would never have been able to have a public career."<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, not much is known about Harry's role as a father after the divorce, other than him frequently taking Henry to concerts, as well as having Henry stay overnight at his home in San Francisco. In the summer of 1914, Cowell heard Arnold Schoenberg's First String Quartet (1904-05), his first introduction to the composer.<sup>24</sup> A month or so later in the autumn, Harry took Cowell to visit Charles Seeger (1886-1979) who was on the board of the Music Department at the University of California, Berkeley, "in the hope that his remarkable musical talents might find some appropriate outlet."<sup>25</sup> Cowell played *Adventures in Harmony* and *Minuetto* Op.108 (1914), then Seeger played some of his own works plus some by Scriabin and Stravinsky, and Schoenberg's *Drei Klavierstücke* Op. 11 (1909).<sup>26</sup> Up until then, Cowell had little exposure to contemporary music, so Seeger thought he might try to educate him about what others were doing.<sup>27</sup> When showing him Schoenberg's Op.11, Seeger said to Cowell, "You might like to see how someone else handled

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<sup>20</sup> Hicks, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Hicks, 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> Hicks, 55-56.

<sup>23</sup> Cowell to Amy Holman Seward, 18 September 1932. Cited in Hicks, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Hicks, 60.

<sup>25</sup> David Nicholls, "Henry Cowell's "New Musical Resources,"" in Cowell, *New Musical Resources*: 153-54.

<sup>26</sup> Hicks, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Rita H. Mead, "The Amazing Mr. Cowell," *American Music* 1.4 (1983): 65.

similar problems.”<sup>28</sup> On 15 September 1914, Cowell began studying composition with Seeger, which continued until 1916.<sup>29</sup> For the following two semesters, Cowell stayed at his father’s home between Tuesdays and Thursdays, so he could attend classes, and then returned to his mother’s place for the remainder of the week.<sup>30</sup> Cowell also studied theory with E.G. Stricklen and for two years studied counterpoint with Wallace Sabin, both composers and teachers at Berkeley, and piano with Uda Waldrop.<sup>31</sup> Cowell’s time at Berkeley inspired over a hundred compositions, including his first two larger-scale student works, *Sonate for cello and piano* (March 1915) and *Scenario* for two violins, cello and piano (April 1915).<sup>32</sup>

Cowell’s study with Seeger placed him in direct contact with Seeger’s experimentation with dissonances, and the search for ways in which they could be systematically used.<sup>33</sup> Seeger’s 1913 teaching manual of dissonant counterpoint, called *Outline of a Course in Harmonic Structure and Simple Musical Invention*, was written in collaboration with Stricklen and became an influential treatise that contributed to the musical development of various twentieth century composers.<sup>34</sup> Some ideas in Cowell’s *New Musical Resources* came from his studies with Seeger.<sup>35</sup> Cowell’s musical ideas were also similar to Seeger’s “use of tone clusters, unusual chord progressions and other experimentation within a traditional context.”<sup>36</sup> It is hardly surprising that Seeger influenced Cowell to such a degree, considering the years spent together and the fact that Seeger taught Cowell dissonant counterpoint.<sup>37</sup> Seeger himself later wrote, “He [Cowell] himself swiped many of his best (and some of his worst) ‘ideas’ from me, and occasionally acknowledges it.”<sup>38</sup> Cowell commented on Seeger’s influence on him as a young student and throughout his life:

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<sup>28</sup> As reported in Hugo Weisgall, “The Music of Henry Cowell,” *Musical Quarterly* 45 (1959): 487.

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Hicks, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Hicks, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Hicks, 70 & Lichtenwanger, 38-39.

<sup>33</sup> Ann M. Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A Life in American Music* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992): 65.

<sup>34</sup> Pescatello, 66 & Hicks, 69. Volume 2 (1916) was written by Stricklen alone.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholls, 153-54.

<sup>36</sup> Pescatello, 66.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger*, Ed. Arnold Whittall (Cambridge: CUP, 1995): 86.

if I proposed to use new and unusual musical material I would have to work out a systematic technique for them so things would hang together ... [Seeger] told me that if my innovations were to establish themselves, I would have to build up a real repertoire embodying them, myself, letting them develop as I thought about them to make a sound world of their own. I have thought in these terms about my music ever since.<sup>39</sup>

Cowell's first publicly reviewed concert, on 5 March 1914 at the San Francisco Musical Club, was largely criticised for his use of these ideas in his works. The critics suggested, as they did to most new talents, that he needed to study overseas. For example, Redfern Mason wrote:

But Mr. Cowell has not the faintest notion of what is meant by development. To gain knowledge he needs several years drill in a conservatory, and I should like to see him packed off to Germany... Even if young Cowell is a genius, which is not proven, he will have to go through the discipline to which Bach and Mozart and Beethoven were subjected.<sup>40</sup>

Presumably Cowell played all his own music, although the only piece mentioned was his *Fairy's Dance* (Jan-Apr 1913), which was the first to be named in a review.<sup>41</sup>

In May 1916 Cowell's mother died and, on Seeger's advice, Cowell moved to New York and enrolled at the Institute of Musical Arts (Juilliard), which was paid for by Seward's fund.<sup>42</sup> Here Cowell met the 'futurist' pianist and composer, Leo Ornstein (1893-2002).<sup>43</sup> Ornstein was excited by Cowell's compositions, exclaiming: "These are the most interesting compositions I have seen by any living American

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Seeger, "Henry Cowell," *Magazine of Art* 33 (May 1940): 288. Cited in Pescatello, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Cowell, in an interview with Hugo Weisgall in 1959. Cited in Pescatello, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Mason, "Work of Merit at Concert of Local Society," *San Francisco Examiner* 6 Mar. 1914. Cited in Mead, "Amazing Mr. Cowell," 65, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Lichtenwanger, 9-10.

<sup>42</sup> Hicks, 75, 81 & Charles Hopkins, "Buhlig, Richard," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Ed. Stanley Sadie, Vol. 4 (London: Macmillan, 2001): 565.

<sup>43</sup> Michael, Hicks, "Cowell's Clusters," *Musical Quarterly* 77.3 (1993): 437.

composer.”<sup>44</sup> Cowell admired Ornstein’s piano technique and compositions, which was not surprising since he had already received the same notoriety as Cowell would in later years. At a concert in 1916, Ornstein recalled, “The crowd whistled and howled and even threw handy missiles on the stage...but that concert made me famous.”<sup>45</sup> Cowell would later receive the same reaction in Europe. By the early 1920s, Ornstein retired from touring and relocated to Philadelphia.<sup>46</sup> Years later, Cowell published Ornstein’s song *The Corpse* (1917) in his *New Musical Quarterly*.<sup>47</sup>

In July 1916, after only two months at the Juilliard and dissatisfied with its conservative attitudes, Cowell returned to California. Soon after his mother’s death Cowell had been introduced to the theosophical group, Temple of the People at Halcyon, California, by an Irish poet named John Varian, whom Cowell had already met in 1913 via his son, Russell, a neighbourhood friend. When Cowell returned to California, he joined the group and took an active part in it.<sup>48</sup> Varian’s devotion to Irish myths and his creation of a ‘harp-like’ instrument influenced Cowell’s creativity. Varian’s instrument, although never completed, was envisaged partly in reference to the ‘Harp of Life’ in Irish mythology and to create an amplified instrument that could be heard outdoors for Halcyon’s annual meeting in 1917. Varian’s harp, attached to a keyboard, resulted from his constant interest in expanding the keyboard’s capabilities.<sup>49</sup> In August 1917 Cowell produced for the group’s annual meeting *The Building of Bamba*, an Irish mythological opera for soloists, mixed chorus and piano, set to a text by Varian. The introduction begins with Cowell’s famous cluster-piano piece, *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1917).<sup>50</sup> Throughout Cowell’s life, Irish mythology provided inspiration for many works, the most famous being *The Banshee* (1925), which is performed entirely on the piano strings, imitating a wailing banshee.

Veblen was by then Cowell’s surrogate mother; the relationship between them had become very intense, and she wanted Cowell to live with her. Although she was a member of the group, at first Cowell was nervous about telling her that he had joined because she was very protective of him and he feared she might think it would

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<sup>44</sup> A newspaper article by an unknown reporter from Anna Strunsky Walling Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. Cited in Hicks, *Bohemian*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Van Vechten, *Music and Bad Manners* (New York: Knopf, 1916): 238. Cited in Hicks, 76.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Broyles, Carol J. Oja, “Ornstein, Leo,” *New Grove* Vol. 18, 747.

<sup>47</sup> Rita H. Mead, *Henry Cowell’s New Music, 1925-1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings*, PhD diss., City University of New York, 1981, 585.

<sup>48</sup> Hicks, *Bohemian*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> Hicks, 84-85, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Lichtenwanger, 53-54.

interfere with his independent thinking. He reassured her that it would not.<sup>51</sup> Cowell was also aware that relations between Veblen and other members were strained. Varian warned him that Veblen was “inhibited by jealousys [sic] and prejudices,” “a big soul . . . with queer karma.”<sup>52</sup> Veblen was receiving some kind of ongoing therapy at the Temple Sanatorium, but she abruptly left the group two days before the début of *The Building of Bamba* in August 1917. According to Varian’s wife Agnes, writing in her diary at the time, Veblen was “heart broken because Henry is not what he was 3 years ago, & blaming it on the Temple.” Agnes thought Veblen “very tragic, but quite beyond help. Life moves on for him, but she looks backward.”<sup>53</sup> Cowell then began planning to move back to New York, and Veblen asked if she could go with him but he refused.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Cowell and Veblen reconciled and remained close. When Veblen died later in 1926, she left him her cabin at Halcyon and he became executor of her estate.<sup>55</sup>

When Cowell returned to New York in late 1917, he met the composer Carl Ruggles (1876-1971) in Greenwich Village.<sup>56</sup> Ruggles was a friend of Edgard Varèse (1883-1965), who had emigrated to New York in 1915 after studying with Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) in Berlin. However, despite the fact that both Cowell and Varèse were Ruggles’s friends, the two composers did not meet until the early 1920s.<sup>57</sup> They met in 1921 when Varèse established the International Composers’ Guild and, in 1923, the League of Composers in New York City. Both groups performed progressive European music, which was of interest to Cowell.<sup>58</sup>

In February 1918 Cowell enlisted in the army,<sup>59</sup> in which he served as “assistant director and flutist in a band at Camp Crane” in Pennsylvania.<sup>60</sup> It is unclear how long or how well he played the flute, presumably well enough to play in the band. In November 1918 Cowell and members of his band were moved to Fort

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<sup>51</sup> Hicks, 84.

<sup>52</sup> John Varian to Henry Cowell, 19 March 1917, Varian papers, Stanford University Archives, California. Cited in Hicks, 87.

<sup>53</sup> Agnes Varian Diary, Varian Papers. Cited in Hicks, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Hicks, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Hicks, 132.

<sup>56</sup> Jan Swafford, *Charles Ives: A Life with Music* (New York: Norton, 1998): 369.

<sup>57</sup> Higgins, *Life and Its Shadows*, Accessed 11 February 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Hicks, 110.

<sup>59</sup> Hicks, 92.

<sup>60</sup> Lichtenwanger, xxviii.



Ontario in Oswego, New York, before being discharged in May 1919. Cowell returned home to Menlo Park and relaunched his career as a pianist and composer.<sup>61</sup>

In 1922 the composer Charles Ives (1874-1954) was receiving harsh criticism in New York about some of his privately published *114 Songs* (1922). Ives was a successful businessman, which enabled him to explore musical possibilities without having to be concerned about making a living from them. His music is best described as authentically American without the influences of contemporary European music.<sup>62</sup> Ives had sent five hundred copies of *114 Songs* to various composers and musical establishments. Critics included the editor of the *Musical Courier*, who wrote: “Who is Ives?.. Ives is the American Satie, joker par excellence.”<sup>63</sup>

Seeger was in New York at this time, and was given a copy of Ives’s *114 Songs*. He showed them to Cowell and to Seeger’s dismay, Cowell became interested in them, even though both Seeger and Ruggles “felt strongly that one shouldn’t waste time on this music: it was the work of an amateur, a dilettante, a charlatan and a clown.”<sup>64</sup> Presumably this influenced Cowell’s delay in contacting Ives at the time.<sup>65</sup> However, like Ives, Cowell preferred American music that was not moulded around European ideas. He did not have any qualms in expressing his distaste for American composers who mimicked the Europeans. In 1922, at a Whitney Club concert in New York, Cowell fervently and without hesitation criticised composers who continued to write traditional or European-influenced music, as Ruggles recalled:

[H]e determinedly and painstakingly read out sizzling criticisms which called composers names and by names. The presence of Mrs. Hadley in the audience did not deter him from opening his lecture with this remark: ‘I thought that music had reached the lowest possible point when I heard the works of John Alden Carpenter. Now, however, I have been examining the scores of Mr. Henry Hadley.’<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, “The Music of Henry Cowell,” Ph.D diss., Cornell University, 1969, 11.

<sup>62</sup> David Hall, Sleeve notes, *Charles Ives: Works for Piano* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: VoxBox, 1995): 2.

<sup>63</sup> Swafford, 334.

<sup>64</sup> “Ivesiana: More than just something unusual” from ‘New Forward’ in Henry & Sidney Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music*, Rev. ed. 1955 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983): v.

<sup>65</sup> Stuart Feder, *Charles Ives “My Father’s Song”: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992): 320.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Cowell, “Carl Ruggles: A Note by Henry Cowell,” in Lou Harrison, *About Carl Ruggles* (Yonkers, NY: Oscar Baradinsky at the Alicat Bookshop, 1946): 1-3. Cited in Mead, “Amazing Mr. Cowell,” 67, 88.

In the spring of 1923, Cowell embarked on his first tour of Europe, which was paid for by Seward's fund.<sup>67</sup> The usual custom was for musicians to travel to Europe to study music with established European composers but Cowell went there "to assault Europe with his innovative pianistic techniques" and to alert the "Europeans to what America had to offer."<sup>68</sup> He went with his former piano teacher, the composer Richard Buhlig (1880-1952), and another Buhlig student, Wesley Kuhnle (1898-1962). Buhlig had been taught by Busoni and was also a friend of Artur Schnabel, and he later taught John Cage (1912-1992).<sup>69</sup> When they arrived in Bremen, Germany, on June 8/9, they immediately set off for Berlin. On June 11, they met Schnabel, and that evening Buhlig and Cowell had dinner at his home.<sup>70</sup>

Initially they intended to stay mainly in Berlin. However due to the German economic collapse, Cowell and Buhlig ventured forth to Munich then Vienna, while Kuhnle went to London for employment opportunities. His lack of success forced him back to New York earlier than intended, and he finally settled in Glendale, California, in 1925. Cowell, however made an enormous impact, not only in Berlin but also in London and Paris.<sup>71</sup> Cowell's 'assault' also enabled him to also absorb contemporary developments in European music by meeting European composers who had heard of his much-publicised premières.

While Cowell's tour was significant for the advancement of American music, details of his tour remains sparse. Between his arrival in June and October, there is little detail of his activities other than him visiting Vienna, Basel and Munich. What he did in those places remains unclear. The first detailed account of Cowell's tour is in October, when he performed in Leipzig. His performance provoked an uproar, causing audience members to fight on stage and throw programs at Cowell while he continued performing.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, some of his activities indicate how music in Europe influenced his future activities in America. Cowell was invited to perform for the third Melos Association Chamber Music concert series in Berlin in November 1923. His concerts

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<sup>67</sup> Godwin, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 26.

<sup>69</sup> Mead, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Kuhnle to his parents, 11 June, 1923. Kuhnle Collection held at the California State University, Long Beach.

<sup>71</sup> Mead, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Hicks, 190.

were received enthusiastically. Melos not only performed contemporary music, it also published a journal containing articles and recent music. Cowell's exposure to Melos would later influence the founding of the New Music Society (1925) and the *New Music Quarterly* (1927) which published scores of contemporary American music.<sup>73</sup>

In December, Cowell performed in London. Here he premièred *Piece for Piano with Strings* (1923), which was written while on the tour. In London, he met Béla Bartók (1881-1945), who asked Cowell if he could use his 'tone-cluster' idea in his own music. Several days later Cowell returned to Paris, where Bartók introduced him to other prominent European composers such as Maurice Ravel and Manuel de Falla. Cowell performed again on 16 December in Paris, this time including *Piece for Piano with Strings*. The French liked it so much that it was published in *Le Courier Musical* within two months of its performance.<sup>74</sup> This concert marked the end of Cowell's European tour; he sailed back to America on 30 December and arrived in New York on 10 January 1924. Cowell's activities in Europe are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Upon Cowell's return to America, his success in Europe brought him respect and his popularity increased. His début at Carnegie Hall, New York on 5 February 1924 was a magnificent success inspiring a second concert on 17 February.<sup>75</sup> Another musical centre Cowell visited throughout the 1920s was Chicago, where Siegfried and Djane Herz encouraged new music through their salon, frequented by Cowell, Rudhyar, Varèse and others. In 1925, Ruth Crawford (1901-1953) began studying piano with Djane Herz after having studied with Artur Schnabel.<sup>76</sup> She met Rudhyar and Cowell through the Herzes and studied composition firstly with the former and later with Cowell in New York.<sup>77</sup>

While in Berlin, Cowell's growing desire to found a society where American music would be heard brewed via his introduction to the Melos society. On 22 October 22 1925 he formed the New Music Society, affiliated with Varèse's International Composers' Guild of New York.<sup>78</sup> Its beginning was marked by a concert in Los Angeles, which premièred works by ultra-modern composers from the

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<sup>73</sup> Mead, 29.

<sup>74</sup> *Le Courier Musical*, 15 Feb 1924 [musical supplement], 4-7. Cited in Hicks, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Mead, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Straus, 207.

<sup>77</sup> Straus, 201, 214.

<sup>78</sup> Mead, 36.

West Coast.<sup>79</sup> The committee consisted of Cowell, Dane Rudhyar, Carl Ruggles and Edgard Varèse, as well as other musicians and/or composers Winifred Hooke (Treasurer), Arthur Bliss, Henry Eichheim, Eugene Goossens and Carlos Salzedo,<sup>80</sup> some of whom were already well-known and popular with audiences. The society's flyer for the first concert announced that the conductor was 'the distinguished composer, Arthur Bliss,' giving the society "a certain prestige."<sup>81</sup>

Cowell's success with his 'string piano' in Europe and America resulted in more compositions for this new idiom. As well as *The Banshee*, Cowell wrote the *Duet for St. Cecelia* (1925) and *A Composition for String Piano and Ensemble* (1925), whose second movement comprised an arrangement of the duet. The latter work was premièred in January 1926 in Los Angeles by Winifred Hooke, and in February Cowell played it in New York.<sup>82</sup>

Blanche Walton (1871-1963), whom Cowell had met in New York around 1920, was a great supporter of the New Music Society. Mrs Walton, a patron of the contemporary arts, was a wealthy widow and musical amateur. From the early 1920s she supported many 'ultra modern' composers like Cowell, Ruggles, Varèse and Adolph Weiss, generously providing financial assistance to the development of music and even free lodging at her New York apartment,<sup>83</sup> where Cowell stayed for the winter of 1928.<sup>84</sup> When Bartók first went to New York in 1927 he lodged at Mrs Walton's apartment, and in 1929 Cowell arranged for Ruth Crawford to lodge there and organised composition lessons with Seeger.<sup>85</sup>

In July 1927 Cowell made his first contact with Ives, in a letter inviting him to subscribe to the forthcoming *New Music Quarterly*. He also asked if Ives would be interested in submitting his own scores, and invited him to join the advisory board of the society. Ives accepted Cowell's offers and replied: "Your idea of a circulating music library via a magazine of unsaleable scores is admirable."<sup>86</sup> It is possible that Cowell finally decided to contact Ives, five years after becoming interested in his music, because he knew Ives was a successful businessman and thought he might

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<sup>79</sup> Swafford, 370.

<sup>80</sup> Mead, 35.

<sup>81</sup> Mead, 31.

<sup>82</sup> Hicks, 113.

<sup>83</sup> Matilda Gaume, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: Memoirs, Memories, Music*, Composers of North America 3 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986): 63.

<sup>84</sup> Mead, 544.

<sup>85</sup> Gaume, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Swafford, 368.

assist financially with the publication. It is also possible that Cowell's invitation to submit scores for publication was partly "meant to flatter [Ives's] ego."<sup>87</sup> However Cowell genuinely admired the composer's music and was searching for works to be published. Furthermore, Cowell often asked other composers if they wanted their music published in the *NMQ*. Composer and conductor Nicolas Slonimsky (1894-1995) was asked the following year if he had music he wanted published.<sup>88</sup> Whatever the reasons for Cowell's invitation to Ives, the partnership between them became most important for the development of twentieth-century American music. Both Cowell and Ives were intensely concerned with the promotion of contemporary American music and they disliked music composed along European models.<sup>89</sup>

In October 1927 Cowell published the first edition of *NMQ*, consisting solely of Ruggles' *Men and Mountains* (1924).<sup>90</sup> The purpose of *NMQ* was to publish actual scores of modern, avant-garde music, mainly by American composers, as opposed to articles about their music.<sup>91</sup> The musical journals in Europe that published scores, such as *Melos* and *Le Courier Musical* clearly influenced the founding of Cowell's *New Music Quarterly*.<sup>92</sup> Publicising *NMQ* began with Cowell sending nine thousand flyers to potential supporters, who included composers, musicians, and critics from America and Europe.<sup>93</sup>

Ives was the largest supporter of *NMQ* and responsible for its survival. He at first bought two copies, but Ruggles' *Men and Mountains* was received badly and at least half of the subscriptions were cancelled, so Ives sent \$50 for another twenty-five subscriptions.<sup>94</sup> After their first meeting, in New York in 1928, Cowell wrote to Ives "If you feel like donating something to it financially, it would be of great aid."<sup>95</sup> In its thirty years, Ives covered a third of *NMQ*'s costs. Not surprisingly, when Ives died *NMQ* collapsed and on 9 June 1958, Cowell relinquished it to the Theodore Presser company.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Mead, "Amazing Mr. Cowell," 73.

<sup>88</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 133.

<sup>89</sup> Mead, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music," 539.

<sup>90</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 73.

<sup>91</sup> Mead, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music," 539.

<sup>92</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 60.

<sup>93</sup> Mead, "Cowell, Ives, and New Music," 539.

<sup>94</sup> Mead, 40, 541.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Henry Cowell to Charles Ives, 27 March 1928. Cited in Mead, 544.

<sup>96</sup> Swafford, 370-71 & Mead, 558.

Publication of Ives' *Comedy* (from the Fourth Symphony) was proposed for a 1928 issue of *NMQ* but due to engraving delays it was not published until early 1929.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, Cowell met composer and conductor, Nicolas Slonimsky, whose *Studies in Black and White* were published in a subsequent 1929 issue of *NMQ*.<sup>98</sup> The quarterly remained largely for composers from the Americas. However, the occasional European work published included Webern's *Geistlicher Volkstext* Op. 17 in 1930, and Schoenberg's *Klavierstück* Op. 33b in 1932, as well as a publication of music from Russia in a 1934 issue.<sup>99</sup> Along with the New Music Society and *NMQ*, recording of works began in December 1933 including works by Crawford and Weiss.<sup>100</sup> While Cowell's music was often performed at the society's concerts, he did not publish it in *NMQ*.

Ultimately the publication became a vehicle to promote American music at home as well as abroad. Cowell believed that until American music developed its own identity, it could not stand on its own merits and would be continually overshadowed by its European counterpart. His introduction to *American Composers on American Music* demonstrated his feelings: "American composition up to now has been tied to the apronstrings of European tradition..."<sup>101</sup> *NMQ* was the main vehicle for avant-garde composers such as Ruggles, Rudhyar, Wallingford Riegger, John J. Becker and Colin McPhee to have their music published. Other publishers paid little attention to this 'new music' since it deviated from European influences and mainstream tastes and was therefore, as Ives had said, "unsaleable."<sup>102</sup>

In 1928 Varèse formed the Pan-American Association of Composers, based in New York.<sup>103</sup> It comprised members from the USA, Canada and Latin and South America, thus unifying the Americas. Its members included North American composers like Ives, Cowell, Ruggles, Rudhyar, Slonimsky, Seeger and Crawford, as well as South American composers like Carlos Chávez and Carlos Salzedo.<sup>104</sup> PAAC was formed partly in opposition to the League of Composers, which included composers such as Copland, Sessions and Piston, who followed European traditions.

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<sup>97</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 112.

<sup>98</sup> Slonimsky, 114-15 & Mead, "Amazing Mr. Cowell," 76-77.

<sup>99</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 151, 186, 298-301.

<sup>100</sup> Mead, 263.

<sup>101</sup> Cowell, ed., *American Composers on American Music*, x.

<sup>102</sup> Mead, "Amazing Mr. Cowell," 81.

<sup>103</sup> Vivian Perlis, "Pan American Association of Composers," *New Grove* Vol. 19, 29.

<sup>104</sup> Boziwick, 49 & Straus, 214.

Known as the ‘ultra-modernists,’ PAAC endeavoured to present concerts of new music which did not follow European traditions. The music presented was by “Americans who have developed indigenous materials or are specially interested in expressing some phase of the American spirit in their works,” and “Foreign-born composers who have made America their home, and who have developed indigenous tendencies in their works.”<sup>105</sup> Slonimsky was the principal conductor, and made recordings of PAAC concerts and distributed them via *NMQ*.<sup>106</sup>

Meanwhile, Cowell continued his career as a performer. At a concert on 11 March 1929 in Boston, Cowell was soloist in the first performance of his *Suite for Solo String and Percussion Piano with Chamber Orchestra*, whose three movements are *The Banshee*, *The Leprechaun*, and *The Fairy Bells*. *The Banshee* became Cowell’s most famous work. It is performed entirely on the piano strings, and at its première,

There was a gasp in the audience when Cowell got under the lid and began to tickle the naked strings. He also tapped piano strings with rubber-headed drumsticks, plectrum, pencil and a darning egg. The latter implement inspired the headline writer in the *Boston Post* to say: ‘Uses Egg to Show off Piano’. This headline became Cowell’s favourite, and he never failed to mention it in his lectures and seminars.<sup>107</sup>

By the early 1930s Cowell’s interest in non-western music, initiated in San Francisco’s Chinatown and during his studies with Seeger, prompted him to study ethnomusicology with Erich von Hornbostel at the University of Berlin,<sup>108</sup> where he also studied Indian Music with Sambamoorthy and Javanese Music with Radan Mas Jodjhana.<sup>109</sup> He was supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship between 1931 and 1932. Cowell also met, at long last, Arnold Schoenberg, with whom he played tennis at the

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<sup>105</sup> Cowell, “Trends in American Music,” *American Composers on American Music*, 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> Slonimsky, 139.

<sup>107</sup> Slonimsky, 117.

<sup>108</sup> Weisgall, 488.

<sup>109</sup> David Nicholls, “Henry Cowell’s ‘United Quartet’,” *American Music* 13.2 (1995): 199.

Borussia Tennis Club.<sup>110</sup> Cowell was introduced to Schoenberg by Adolph Weiss, an American composer and bassoonist who had studied with Schoenberg in Vienna and Berlin between 1925 and 1927.<sup>111</sup> Weiss was a Guggenheim Fellow along with Cowell in 1931.<sup>112</sup> Schoenberg arranged to meet Cowell so that he could ask him to publish his *Klavierstück* Op.33b in *NMQ*.<sup>113</sup> It was subsequently published in the April 1932 edition.<sup>114</sup> For a few months Cowell spent eight hours a week in Schoenberg's masterclasses where they analysed Mozart's String Quartet in F K.590 and compared it with Schoenberg's String Quartet Op. 7. Here Cowell also played *Dynamic Motion*, displaying his forearm and fist clusters and also his use of harmonics, the same device as used by Schoenberg in his Op. 11 No. 1.<sup>115</sup>

On his return to America, Cowell continued to champion the music of modern composers (especially American) by expanding New Music's activities with the New Music Orchestra Series (1932-1939) and the *New Music Quarterly Recordings* (1934-1949). However, after his four-year imprisonment on molestation charges (1936-40), he became more subdued. His fifteen-year sentence was reduced to just under ten years. However due to the efforts of his family and friends, including many prominent American musicians, Cowell was released after serving four years, on the condition that he worked and lived at Percy Grainger's (1882-1961) home in White Plains, New York.<sup>116</sup> By June 1940 he was pardoned.<sup>117</sup>

While Cowell still gave lectures and taught at various institutions, composed music and managed *NMQ*, his imprisonment and public humiliation seemed to have robbed him of spontaneity and showmanship. It also affected his relationships with some friends and colleagues. Prior to his imprisonment, Cowell's letters to Ives often

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<sup>110</sup> Sabine Feisst, "Henry Cowell und Arnold Schönberg: Eine Unbekannte Freundschaft [Henry Cowell and Arnold Schönberg: An Unknown Friendship]," Trans. Patricia Shaw, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1998): 61.

<sup>111</sup> Feisst, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Stevenson, "Adolph Weiss," *New Grove* Vol. 27, 257.

<sup>113</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music," 186.

<sup>114</sup> Mead, 586.

<sup>115</sup> Feisst, 60.

<sup>116</sup> Hicks, 140.

<sup>117</sup> The origins of Cowell's and Grainger's friendship is not clear. While they were both enlisted in the army around the same time as band members, it is possible that they did not meet then as Grainger was stationed at Fort Hamilton, then Governors Island, NY, while Cowell was in Pennsylvania then Fort Ontario, NY. Antonia Sawyer, "America, 1914-1922," *Portraits of Percy Grainger*, Ed. Malcolm Gillies & David Pear (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2002) 77. First mention of Grainger in connection to Cowell and New Music is on the flyer for the first announcement (Dec. 1933) of the *New Musical Quarterly Recordings*. He is on the list of the advisory board of composers. Cowell and Grainger presumably met sometime before then. See Mead, 259.



began with ‘Dear Charlie.’ Ives broke ties with Cowell during his imprisonment, but when he was released and then pardoned, they reconciled. However Cowell’s subsequent letters began formally with ‘Dear Mr. Ives.’<sup>118</sup> In July 1941, Cowell married Sidney Robertson, a musicologist and former student of Seeger whom Cowell had known since 1919. She was a divorcee and six years older than Cowell,<sup>119</sup> so it was a marriage very similar to that of his own parents.

This discussion has placed emphasis on Cowell’s life prior to and just after his 1923 European tour. Focusing on Cowell’s early years provides a detailed understanding of how his unconventional upbringing influenced his daring and confident approach to life as a pianist-composer and as an advocate of twentieth century American music. The period following the tour up until his death in 1965 is discussed in Chapter 6. During these years Cowell suffered the humiliation of prison, and his post-prison years were much less active in terms of his composition and performance of piano music. Cowell also distanced himself somewhat from public life and became more interested in ethnomusicology and musical education, and less interested in showcasing new music, his own or anybody else’s. His interest in world music resulted in a 1956-57 world tour during which he spent much time in Iran, India and Japan. His awards ranged from honorary doctorates to the Henry Hadley Medal in 1962 by the National Association of American Composers and Conductors.<sup>120</sup> This is rather ironic, considering Cowell’s harsh comments about Hadley at a concert in 1922. However as Mead wrote: “The great legacy left by Cowell was the spirit of *New Music* - a spirit of newness, of excitement, of freedom - a spirit embodied throughout his life in its founder and editor, the amazing Mr. Cowell.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Mead, “Cowell, Ives, and New Music,” 557.

<sup>119</sup> Hicks, 141.

<sup>120</sup> David Nicholls, “Cowell, Henry (Dixon),” *New Grove* Vol. 6, 622.

<sup>121</sup> Mead, “Amazing Mr. Cowell,” 87.

## Chapter 3. The European Context for Henry Cowell's First Tour (1923)

Cowell arrived in Europe in June 1923. What eventuated was a successful tour that received mostly favourable, but also some unfavourable reactions. As Cowell wrote in a letter to Wesley Kuhnle dated 10 January 1924, "I kicked up quite a stir in Berlin and London, and had some very good, and some very bad notices from both places."<sup>1</sup> Cowell was not the first American composer/pianist to tour Europe and receive recognition and criticism for his new piano techniques. Leo Ornstein had traveled there nine years earlier, making his début in London on 27 March 1914. Ornstein became popular mainly for his tone-clusters and became known as a 'futurist', described by one critic as "the most salient musical phenomenon of our time."<sup>2</sup> Clusters first appeared in the piano music of Ornstein around 1913 in *Suicide in an Airplane* and *Danse Sauvage*. However they were explored in more detail by Cowell, who showed that many new sounds were created when hands, fists and arms are used to strike the keys.<sup>3</sup> By 1922 Ornstein had given up a rigorous performing life, while Cowell was just beginning to nurture a long career that would change the future of American music.

There are many detailed sources which cover the musical scenes in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London in the first twenty or so years of the twentieth century; a summary of these is necessary to provide a broad view of what Cowell encountered when he arrived in Europe in 1923. Vienna in the early 1920s was musically conservative compared to other capital cities around Europe. As Paul Bechert wrote in the *Musical Times* in 1923:

The general public ... is essentially conservative ...  
where an old musical tradition is still rampant; and not  
only the public, but even more so the professional  
critical fraternity is uncompromisingly reactionary ...  
The sole common feature to all of their criticisms is,

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhnle Collection held at the California State University, Long Beach.

<sup>2</sup> Charles L. Buchanan, "Ornstein and Modern Music," *Musical Quarterly* 4 (1918): 176.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle," *Dial* 76 (1924): 390. Cited in Hicks, "Cowell's Clusters," 440.

however, their outspoken hatred against the ‘perilous musical Bolsheviks’ – or modernists.<sup>4</sup>

After World War I, Vienna was suffering its own crisis. Not only was Austria unstable, due to its continued deliberation over whether it should unify with Germany, but the uncertainty and instability created by war had drastically affected the population. Inevitably, the enormous change in society would also influence the enormous change in the arts. The orchestras and the opera, playing many of the works by popular pre-twentieth century composers, remained popular in Vienna. Orchestras such as the Vienna Symphony and Philharmonic performed only the occasional contemporary work.

Nevertheless, modernist activities did take place, especially from composers like Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, commonly known as the Second Viennese School. In 1918 Schoenberg and Berg had founded the Verein für Musikalische Privataufführungen (Society for Private Musical Performances). It performed large amounts of new music as well as music from the past.<sup>5</sup> The dislike of the Viennese for atonal music forced the Society to discontinue in 1921.<sup>6</sup> Schoenberg then encouraged the formation of The Kolisch Quartet which was committed to the performance of modern music in 1922.<sup>7</sup> Its first performances included Schoenberg’s Third and Fourth Quartets, Berg’s *Lyric Suite*, Webern’s String Trio and String Quartet and Bartók’s Third and Fifth Quartets.<sup>8</sup> While it may seem that the modernists faced an uphill battle with the public and critics, it is obvious that they maintained their enthusiasm, including the publication of a journal that dealt with modern music. *Musikblätter des Anbruchs* operated between 1919 and 1937, and was edited by Otto Schneider and published by Universal. It stemmed from a journal, *Das Anbruch*, which published avant-garde art and literature. Similarly, *Musikblätter* wrote about and published modern music, and its directors included Bartók from 1921, Schoenberg from 1924, and Franz Schreker from 1928.<sup>9</sup>

Between c.1908 and 1923, Schoenberg, Webern and Berg wrote atonal music and when Henry Cowell was travelling in Europe in 1923, Schoenberg had begun to

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Bechert, “Musical Notes from Abroad,” *Musical Times* 1 July 1923: 506.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Botstein, “Vienna: 1806-1945,” *New Grove* Vol. 26, 572.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, 101.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 96.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 103.

formulate the twelve-tone method. In February 1923, upon hearing of Josef Matthias Hauer's publications on his own twelve-tone system, Schoenberg gathered approximately twenty of his students and introduced them to his new method.<sup>10</sup> Hauer had started to publish articles on his method from 1919 and some of Schoenberg's students were aware of them. Schoenberg, however, did not know of their existence, since he generally disliked reading articles.<sup>11</sup> Therefore he thought it was best to clarify that Hauer's theories had not influenced his own.<sup>12</sup> Schoenberg was largely absorbed in his own work; this can also explain why he did not hear of Cowell and his success, despite his notoriety, until much later in 1931 when Cowell returned to Europe. Up until 1931, "Schoenberg did not seem to know that Cowell was also a composer ... [He] didn't know Cowell's piano pieces published in 1922 by Breitkopf & Härtel ... and also didn't know the sensational piano recitals [of 1923–24]."<sup>13</sup>

Despite Vienna's conservatism, for approximately the first twenty years of the twentieth century, it remained the centre of Germanic modernism, even though its dominance diminished somewhat with the departure of Franz Schreker. Schreker was a well-known Viennese composer of contemporary opera and a conductor who premièred works by Schoenberg, Berg, Alexander Zemlinsky and Erich Korngold. He moved to Berlin in 1921 to take up the position of director of the Hochschule für Musik. The institution under his direction became one of the most distinguished music schools, with a faculty comprising many important composers/musicians of the day including Artur Schnabel, Carl Flesch, Emanuel Feuermann, Edwin Fischer and Paul Hindemith.<sup>14</sup> Due to Vienna's lack of support for and interest in modern music, Schoenberg also moved to Berlin in 1926. He took a teaching position at the Akademie der Künste, succeeding Busoni, and remained there until moving to the USA in 1933.<sup>15</sup>

Berlin in the 1920s was one of the major cultural centres of Europe. After WWI, it became an important centre of modern music with composers such as Ernst

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<sup>9</sup> "Periodicals: Europe: Austria," *New Grove* Vol. 28, 343.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, 197.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 194

<sup>12</sup> H. H. Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, Trans. Humphrey Searle (London: John Calder, 1977) 443-44.

<sup>13</sup> Feisst, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Hailey, "Schreker, Franz," *New Grove* Vol. 22, 640.

<sup>15</sup> O.W. Neighbour, "Schoenberg, Arnold," *New Grove* Vol. 22, 581.

KreĚek and Busoni, and later Schreker and Schoenberg, working and living there. With the removal of government censorship during the Weimar Republic, the future looked brighter. However artists and intellectuals still had to live with political insecurity and economic instability. Despite the end of the Wilhelmine era (1890-1914), partial distrust for the recent past remained. Composers, performers, and audiences resisted reminders of Wilhelm II's Germany. Any reminders of this recent past, such as post-Romanticism and expressionism, were distasteful to many younger composers. The distant past became more of a focus, especially Baroque music. Composers also became interested in public tastes, exploring popular music, especially jazz. Interest extended to modern technology of the time, such as electronic and mechanical music, sound recordings, radio and film.<sup>16</sup>

The Weimar Republic also gave rise to the politically satirical Berlin Cabaret in the 1920s, influenced by the German idea of jazz. After the war, other nations ostracised Germany, therefore it became somewhat isolated from new developments occurring in other parts of Europe. American jazz musicians also avoided Germany in the 1920s, and recordings of American jazz did not arrive until the end of the decade. So while Berlin was obsessed with jazz, they were not listening to 'authentic' jazz. Commercial German musicians created their own jazz music, a combination of earlier American ragtime music and German salon dance music. Due to the popularity of jazz, many composers could not help but pay attention to it. Composers such as Paul Hindemith, Kurt Weill and KreĚek soaked up the 'jazz' rhythms in some of their compositions.<sup>17</sup>

A central figure in Berlin, Ferruccio Busoni, had taught composition at the Akademie der Kġnste until 1923. He often invited his young students and fellow musicians to congregate at his apartment on the Victorie-Luise-Platz, where conversations usually centred on music. Guests included Alois Hġba, Hindemith, KreĚek, Eduard Erdmann, Jascha Horenstein and Dimitri Mitropoulos.<sup>18</sup>

Considerable interest in new music sparked the publications of music periodicals and the founding of societies devoted to the publication, performance and critique of new music. The most influential of these was *Melos*, founded in 1920 by Hermann Scherchen. The Melos Association was a committee of musicians and

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<sup>16</sup> Bryan Gilliam, "Preface," *Music and Performance during the Weimar Republic*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) xi.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, 114-15.

composers that presented concerts that contained avant-garde contemporary European music. They also published a periodical which contained scores and articles on current European music. The board of directors included Bartók, Busoni, Leichtentritt, Erdmann, Schoenberg, Dohnányi and Adolf Weissmann. *Melos* was an example of the activities that promoted the performance and publication of avant-garde music in Europe and influenced Henry Cowell's later decision to found the New Music Society.

Parisians were even more enthusiastic about new music than the Berliners. After WWI, Americans' dislike for the Germans led them towards French culture.<sup>19</sup> The American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, founded in 1921, was where many American composers went to study with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979). She was one of the first to take an interest in contemporary American music. There were three kinds of North American composers active in the 1920s in Paris. Firstly the students of Boulanger, though they were hardly noticed on the concert scene. Secondly there were those that were independent of European influences. Paris's like for the exotic and new experimental music brought musicians such as Cowell and Varèse to the fore. Varèse, for example, created a great sensation with the performance in Paris of *Octandre* on 2 June 1927.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, jazz became increasingly popular after 1918 and was adopted by both French and American composers in the early 1920s. John Alden Carpenter's *Krazy Kat* (1921) and George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) were popular examples by American composers. Paris-based composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Darius Milhaud, among many others, were influenced by jazz. Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat* (1918), *Ragtime for Eleven Instruments* (1918) and *Octet* (1923) were influenced by jazz syncopations, instrumental combination and harmonic progressions. Milhaud's *La Création du Monde* (1923) uses the blues third and the typical jazz instrument, the saxophone.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, Paris was open to the idea that interesting new music could come from outside Europe.

French composers responsible for changes included Erik Satie and Les Six, comprising Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric, Louis Durey and Germaine Tailleferre. Its spokesman, Jean Cocteau, boldly expressed the changes

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<sup>18</sup> Antony Beaumont, "Busoni, Ferruccio," *New Grove* Vol. 4, 670.

<sup>19</sup> Elliott Antokoletz, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1992) 202.

<sup>20</sup> Nichols, 259.

<sup>21</sup> Antokoletz, 202-03.

in new French music in *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (1918).<sup>22</sup> Les Six believed it was time for French music to remove itself from the Romanticism of Wagner.<sup>23</sup> The new music “should communicate without artifice, allowing the listener to participate fully and enjoyably rather than being emotionally overwhelmed...the music that best exemplified these criteria was that of the Parisian café and music hall with its clear rhythms, catchy melodies, and high good spirits.”<sup>24</sup> When the Ballet Russe first came to Paris in 1909, many French composers were commissioned by its impresario Serge Diaghilev. Composers for the Ballets Russes included Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky, Auric, Milhaud, Poulenc and Honegger.<sup>25</sup> They were associated with other prominent musicians, writers, dancers and artists such as the artist Pablo Picasso, who between 1917 and 1924 designed for the Ballet Russe, the writer Jean Cocteau, the composers Albert Roussel, Florent Schmitt, Alfredo Casella, Manuel de Falla, Béla Bartók, the pianist Ricardo Viñes, and the choreographers for the Ballet Russe, Mikhail Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky and George Balanchine.<sup>26</sup> The new music scene in Paris extended to the formation of new orchestras and music groups, including the Concerts Koussevitsky (1921-1929), founded by Serge Koussevitsky, another Russian, who also published new Russian music through his publishing house Éditions Russes de Musique. Other music journals like *La Revue Musicale* contained articles and reviews dedicated to new music and *Le Courrier Musical* also published new music. Piano manufacturers Pleyel and Erard had salons which put on concerts including music by many avant-garde composers and visiting artists.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile another American pianist and composer, George Antheil, had been causing quite a stir in Europe. When Ornstein retired from his concert career in 1922, his manager, the New York impresario Martin H. Hanson needed a replacement. In Europe there existed a market for ultramodern American pianists and Hanson was so impressed by Antheil that he took him to London, where he gave a performance at Wigmore Hall on 22 June 1922.<sup>28</sup> His performance included music by Chopin,

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Griffiths, “Six, Les,” *New Grove* Vol. 23, 460.

<sup>23</sup> Brody, 155.

<sup>24</sup> David Burge, *Twentieth Century Piano Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990): 110-11.

<sup>25</sup> Brody, 130.

<sup>26</sup> Brody, 133, 145.

<sup>27</sup> Jann Pasler, “Paris: After 1870,” *New Grove* Vol. 19, 118.

<sup>28</sup> George Antheil, *Bad Boy of Music* (1945, Hollywood, CA: Samuel French, 1990): 9-11 & Linda Whitesitt, Charles Amirkhanian/Susan C. Cook, “Antheil, George [Georg] (Carl Johann),” *New Grove* Vol. 1, 716.

Mozart and Schoenberg, as well as his own works.<sup>29</sup> In June 1923 he moved from Berlin to Paris. On Thursday 4 October Antheil gave his first performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. He played three of his short piano sonatas, *Sonata Sauvage* (1922/23), *Airplane Sonata* (1921) and *Mechanisms* (1923), as the opening act for the opening night of the Ballet Suédois. After the Ballet Russe, this opening was the most important concert of the season, attracting many distinguished audience members. A year later, when watching a film by Fernand Leger called *L'Inhumaine*, Antheil saw footage of this performance. His friend, Margaret Anderson, then told him that his performance had always been intended for the film, as well as a publicity act for the Ballet Suédois. Antheil was known for causing riots, so Leger and the Ballet wanted him to perform because they knew that Parisians loved riots. As soon as Antheil began playing, rioting indeed broke out. In the front row, the American artist Man Ray punched someone in the nose, while in the second row, Marcel Duchamp argued boisterously with somebody else. Antheil also heard Erik Satie clapping and shouting, 'What precision! What precision!'<sup>30</sup> Such a riot had not occurred since Stravinsky's première of *Sacre du Printemps* ten years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Antheil had not been told because Leger and the Ballet were afraid he might get nervous.

London after WWI was perhaps the most musically conservative capital city in Europe. At Covent Garden, operas by Mozart, Verdi, Puccini and, to a lesser extent, Wagner continued to reign. After Puccini's death in 1924, Richard Strauss was the only living composer whose work was continually performed. The Opera performed some contemporary English works though these were rarely popular. The West End attracted large audiences because of its productions of English and American musicals. In 1923, Fred Astaire made a sensational début in *Stop Flirting* at the Shaftesbury Theatre. To a certain extent the West End can be compared to the Berlin Cabaret, in that the musical content was generally made up of mainstream styles, making it attractive to a broad range of the public.

When Diaghilev and the Ballet Russe first performed in London in 1911, it was very popular with audiences. From 1917 to 1929, London, then Montecarlo became the headquarters for the Ballet Russe, since after the war the company lost

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<sup>29</sup> Antheil, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Antheil, 7, 116, 136.

<sup>31</sup> Wickes, 207-08.



ground in Paris.<sup>32</sup> Although Diaghilev and his company were still highly esteemed in Paris, from September 1918 to December 1919 the company remained in London, which was the longest period spent in any city. Diaghilev knew that London saved him from bankruptcy.<sup>33</sup> The Ballet Russe was celebrated because dance became fashionable throughout the entire social spectrum, unlike Paris, where it remained an activity for the social elite.<sup>34</sup> Their first London performance of Petipa's St Petersburg classic, *Sleeping Beauty*, at the Alhambra Theatre in 1921 was significant since it encouraged the establishment of ballet companies throughout England. Diaghilev's recruitment of Marie Rambert, Ninette de Valois and Alicia Markova laid the foundations of classical ballet in England. The Ballet Rambert and the Vic-Wells Ballet, which later became the Royal Ballet, were formed.<sup>35</sup>

Orchestral and instrumental groups also remained conservative with their continual performances of music by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Haydn, Mozart and Wagner. Some new music was presented, mainly by those belonging to the 'leaders' of contemporary music such as Ravel, Stravinsky, Richard Strauss and Schoenberg. Contemporary English music featured more frequently but remained in the shadows of mainland European music. The most celebrated English composers were Elgar and later Ralph Vaughan Williams. The Promenade Concerts, held each year from mid-July to mid-September, were also popular and featured music from all eras, though the styles of new music performed remained relatively conservative. As in Paris, piano manufacturers like Broadwood, Aeolian and Erard staged concerts in their music salons. In the 1920s, celebrity pianists and musicians continued to make their débuts in the salons, with Cowell being amongst them. These concerts were very popular with audiences, thus providing an effective way of promoting artists.<sup>36</sup>

As in Vienna, Berlin and Paris, the publication of music journals was elemental in the music scene in London. Journals like *The Musical Times*, issued monthly, contained articles on music from all eras, as well as offering information of pending performances and reviews of performances in and outside of London. *The Musical Times* also gave overviews of musical culture in other European cities as well as larger American cities, especially New York and Los Angeles. Perhaps of most

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<sup>32</sup> Garafola, 344.

<sup>33</sup> Garafola, 211.

<sup>34</sup> Garafola, 358.

<sup>35</sup> Noël Goodwin, "Ballet: 20th Century: Classical," *New Grove* Vol. 2, 586.

interest is the section devoted to performances of New Music, both in England and in other cities throughout Europe.

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Several developments in piano composition were taking place in the European capitals. In Vienna, Schoenberg had been writing atonal music since c. 1908. His most well known piano works were *Drei Klavierstücke* Op. 11 (1909) and *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke* Op. 19 (1911). Since Cowell knew the former and admired Schoenberg's music, presumably he also knew the latter work before 1923. In February 1923, Schoenberg had just revealed his twelve-tone system to his followers. By the time Cowell arrived in Europe, and particularly when he settled in Vienna in early September, Schoenberg had been feverishly working on this new twelve-tone method;<sup>37</sup> his first works to fully utilise the twelve-tone technique are the last movement of the *Fünf Klavierstücke* Op. 23 and the five-movement *Suite für Klavier*, Op. 25, both completed in 1923. However, these were not yet known by the general public and in 1923 Schoenberg was still known for his atonal music, which was challenging enough for conservative Viennese audiences.

Although Bartók was based in Budapest, he travelled extensively, giving successful tours as a concert pianist throughout Europe and the USA, and playing his own music based on folk music. When Bartók met Cowell in London in 1923, it was also a significant year for him. He had achieved his first great commercial success with his orchestral work *Dance Suite* (1923).<sup>38</sup> His most recent work for solo piano was *Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* (1921-1922). The fifth improvisation begins with a reiterated minor 2nd dyad accompanying a melody. From bar 13-20, another minor 2nd is introduced, becoming a reiterated three-note microcluster. Bartók here creates a percussive effect and unlike Cowell, the dyads and microclusters are not used melodically. Since the same pitches are continually reiterated, the dyads and microclusters act only as a largely accompaniment. Bartók's microclusters have a different theoretical basis from Cowell's clusters. Bartók's

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<sup>36</sup> Cyril Ehrlich, Simon McVeigh, and Michael Musgrave, "London: Musical Life 1800-1945: Concert Life," *Grove Music Online*. 2004, Available: <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>, Accessed 20 July 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Griffiths, "Schoenberg, Arnold," *The New Oxford Companion to Music*, Ed. Denis Arnold, Vol. 2 (Oxford: OUP, 1992): 1636.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Griffiths, "Bartók Béla," *New Oxford* Vol. 1, 179.

microclusters were derived from modes of Hungarian folk music and based on intervallic relationships, while Cowell's clusters were timbral sonorities based on overtones. Bartók was one of the few European composers using a device that was integral to Cowell's piano writing, and which Cowell had already taken much further.

In France Debussy and Ravel had made great strides in piano music. Debussy's interests lay in exploring timbre and trying to liberate music from past conventions. His piano music from *Pour le Piano* (1894-1901) to the *Etudes* (1915) was very popular, perhaps due to his ability to create many colourful sounds and their leanings towards neo-classicism with their clarity, simplicity and restraint.<sup>39</sup> Ravel's piano music, often compared with Debussy's, was also very popular perhaps due to his ability to create luscious sounds.<sup>40</sup> His works include *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899), *Miroirs* (1904-5), *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908), and the suite, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-17); this last work, also tended to the neo-classical style, with its simpler harmonies, well-defined forms and tribute to music from the remote past.<sup>41</sup>

Members of Les Six, the most popular of whom were Poulenc and Milhaud, continued the neo-classical trend; they were interested in the simplicity but expressive possibilities of popular-song styles, partly to pay tribute to bygone eras but also in reaction against the complexities of post-romantic music. Their titles alone suggest their reaction against the post-romantics. The *Album des 6* (1920) contains one piano work by each composer: Auric's *Prelude*, Durey's *Romance sans Paroles*, Honegger's *Sarabande*, Milhaud's *Mazurka*, Poulenc's simple yet sublime *Valse* and Tailleferre's *Pastorale*. Poulenc's *Promenades* (1921), on the other hand, use a thicker texture than his other piano works of the period, and harmonically he experimented with 4ths, 7ths, and 9ths.<sup>42</sup> Milhaud's piano music was influenced by popular styles, as in his *Trois Rag-Caprices* (1923), which contain continuous changes of metre and syncopation, creating displacement of the first-beat accent characteristic of ragtime. There is also some harmonic experimentation, as in the exploration of minor ninths played chromatically in the third rag-caprice.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Orledge, "Debussy, Claude," *New Oxford* Vol. 1, 543-44.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Griffiths, "Ravel, Maurice," *New Oxford* Vol. 2, 1528.

<sup>41</sup> Griffiths, 1528.

<sup>42</sup> Roger Nichols, "Poulenc, Francis," *New Grove* Vol. 20, 228.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Gammond, "Ragtime," *New Oxford* Vol. 2, 1520.

Two other prominent European composers for the piano were Stravinsky, based in France, and Hindemith in Germany. The former composed *Piano-Rag-Music* (1919), *Les Cinq Doigts* (1921) and *Three Movements from Petrushka* (1921); the latter wrote only one piano work before 1923, Suite “1922” (1922). Both composers also tended to use popular styles such as ragtime and neo-classical tendencies.<sup>44</sup>

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Such new music was, however, only a minority of the repertoire heard by audiences at piano recitals. Examination of all the concert listings and reviews for all of 1923 in *Le Guide du Concert*, *Musical Times* and *Die Musik* provided the following information regarding representative programmes presented in Paris, London, Vienna and Berlin. Piano recitals in Paris in 1923 were frequent, the bulk consisting of Classical and Romantic repertoire and especially French music. A typical example is the recital on 20 January by Ninette Derisoud, who performed works by Scarlatti, Bach/Boskoff, Franck, Mendelssohn, Weber, Maurice Imbert, Chopin, Liszt and Saint-Saëns/Liszt.<sup>45</sup> On 25 June, the celebrated Alfred Cortot performed works by Franck, Chopin, Debussy and Schumann.<sup>46</sup> Also in June, Ricardo Viñes performed music by Poulenc, Claude Dubasq, Ravel and Falla.<sup>47</sup> Both Cortot and Viñes were noted for their advocacy of new music. In October 1923, a Ms Hruskova performed an all-Chopin programme, while Paul Loyonnet performed music by Chambonnières, François Couperin, Rameau, Beethoven, Franck, Ibert and Chopin. On the evening of Cowell’s début in Paris on 17 November, M. A. Konovaloff also gave a concert consisting mainly of Russian music (Moussorgsky, Scriabin, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev), alongside Franck, Debussy and Liszt.<sup>48</sup> While this performance contained interesting Russian music, including music by the very young Prokofiev, it could not match Cowell’s spectacular performance with his hands, fists, elbows and arms.

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Griffiths, “Hindemith, Paul,” *New Oxford* Vol. 1, 857.

<sup>45</sup> “Ninette Derisoud,” *Le Guide du Concert* 9.4 (12 Jan. 1923): 204.

<sup>46</sup> “Alfred Cortot,” *Le Guide du Concert* 9.35 (8 June 1923): 523.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bold, “Musical Notes from Abroad,” *Musical Times* 1 July 1923: 505.

<sup>48</sup> “M.A. Konovaloff,” *Le Guide du Concert* 10.5 (9 Nov. 1923): 80.

Piano concerts in London in 1923 contained a mixture of traditional repertoire, early music and English music. On 16 February at Wigmore Hall, Harold Craxton gave a performance of Elizabethan keyboard music by Byrd, Bull, Farnaby, Blow, Purcell and Arne.<sup>49</sup> In April Mitja Nikisch performed works by Brahms and Chopin, while d'Albert gave an all-Beethoven recital.<sup>50</sup> Also in April, at the Contemporary Music Centre, Kathleen Long performed piano works by modern English composer, William Baines. On 7 May, Bartók played a selection of his piano works, preceded by his two Sonatas for violin and piano with violinist Jelly d'Aranyi.<sup>51</sup> Harold Samuel performed a series of Bach keyboard concerts from 30 April to 5 May.<sup>52</sup> On 25 June, 4 July and 12 July Arthur Rubinstein performed, at Wigmore Hall, works by Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Albeñiz, Ravel, Poulenc, Villa Lobos and Prokofiev,<sup>53</sup> while in November at Aeolian Hall Walter Giesecking performed Bach, Debussy, Beethoven and Schubert.<sup>54</sup> It is noteworthy that a great deal more pre-classical music was performed in England, reflecting a musical culture less interested in contemporary music than Paris's.

While musical tastes in Vienna remained largely conservative there were some interesting piano concerts given in the first half of 1923. In February, French pianists gave concerts of mostly modern French music. Paule de Lestang played Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc and Florent Schmitt, while M. Trillat covered a vast range of French works from Chabrier to d'Indy and Poulenc. Jane Mortier played works by Dukas, Roussel, Ravel, Honegger, Milhaud and Satie.<sup>55</sup> In April, Antheil performed, as part of a series of new chamber and instrumental concerts, his *Jazz* and *Aeroplane* Sonatas. The reaction from the audience was "laughter, hissing and scant applause,"<sup>56</sup> a reaction similar to those at Cowell's later performances in Vienna. In May 1923 English pianist Violet Clarence gave a performance of old English music (specific repertoire were not mentioned by author).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> P. A. S., "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 Apr. 1923: 276.

<sup>50</sup> E. N., "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 May 1923: 354.

<sup>51</sup> Edwin Evans, "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 June 1923: 424.

<sup>52</sup> H. F., "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 June 1923: 425.

<sup>53</sup> H. J. F., "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 Aug. 1923: 572.

<sup>54</sup> M. "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 Nov. 1923: 795 & B. V., "London Concerts," *Musical Times* 1 Dec. 1923: 864.

<sup>55</sup> Egon Wellesz, "La Musique en France et à L'Étranger," *La Revue Musicale* 1 Mar. 1923: 174.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Bechert, "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 1 May 1923: 364.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Bechert, "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 1 June 1923: 436.

Due to the economic crisis in Germany, concert life in Berlin in 1923 was subdued compared to Paris, London and Vienna. However piano concerts were given, some of which were noted in the journal *Die Musik*, although usually without details of repertoire. The January issue noted a recent performance by “idiosyncratic” Polish pianist, Ethel Leghinska.<sup>58</sup> Other piano recitals in 1923 included Wilhelm Kempff’s Beethoven concert,<sup>59</sup> and the Russian emigré Nikolaus Medtner performed his own ‘Romantic influenced’ piano music and also music by Romantic composers.<sup>60</sup> Bartók performed his own piano works as part of a series of concerts organised by the Melos Society. Other piano recitals included performances by Ludwig Kentner, Lubka Kolessa, Roszi Frankl and Karol Szreter.<sup>61</sup> Eduard Steuermann played a piano reduction of Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie* as part of Austrian Music Week.<sup>62</sup>

The various sources consulted revealed that, compared to other music, contemporary piano music occupied only a fraction of programmes. In Paris, French piano music was common, along with the standard repertoire of music by Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven and Bach, despite the fact that they were less conservative than other European cities. In London, English piano music, especially early English keyboard music, was common along with standard repertoire similar to that heard in Paris. In Vienna, piano concerts mainly featured standard repertoire with some exceptions including French and early English keyboard music. While contemporary piano music by Schoenberg, Bartók and some members of Les Six was heard a little in recitals, music by composers like Debussy, Ravel and Poulenc were included more often. With the economic crisis in Germany, piano performances in Berlin were not as plentiful as those given in Paris, London and Vienna. Nevertheless, the majority of performances contained standard repertoire, despite the occasional performances of music by Schoenberg and Bartók.

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<sup>58</sup> Adolf Weissmann, “Konzert,” *Die Musik* XV.4 (Jan. 1923): 306.

<sup>59</sup> Adolf Weissmann, “Konzert,” *Die Musik* XV.5 (Feb. 1923): 384-85.

<sup>60</sup> Adolf Weissmann, “Konzert,” *Die Musik* XV.6 (Mar. 1923): 465.

<sup>61</sup> Adolf Weissmann, “Konzert,” *Die Musik* XV.7 (Apr. 1923): 545-46 & XV.8 (May 1923): 624.

<sup>62</sup> Adolf Weissmann, “Konzert,” *Die Musik* XV.10 (July 1923): 766.

## Chapter 4. Cowell's Tour: His Musical Activities, His Concerts, and their Reception

Cowell went to Europe with his friend and most recent piano teacher from Los Angeles, the composer and pianist, Richard Buhlig, and another Buhlig student, Wesley Kuhnle. It is not known how long Cowell studied piano with Buhlig in Los Angeles or if in fact he was still studying with him when they embarked on their European tour. For a short period in 1918, Buhlig taught at the Institute of Musical Arts in New York. Later he spent time in Los Angeles, where he did as many concerts there as he had previously done in Europe, and taught Cowell and Kuhnle. He did not return to Europe until 1923.<sup>1</sup> Buhlig was mainly known for his performances of Bach and his transcriptions of the composer's music, the sonatas of Beethoven, and the works of Brahms and Franck. However, it is important to note that Buhlig had given the American premiere of Schoenberg's *Drei Klavierstücke* op.11,<sup>2</sup> and was also the dedicatee of the third version of Busoni's *Fantasia Contrappuntistica [Edizione Minore]* (Chorale Prelude and Fugue on a fragment by Bach) (1912).<sup>3</sup> Wesley Kuhnle was a musician and teacher from Southern California. Several years after becoming an Associate of the American Guild of Organists, he had begun studying with Richard Buhlig, and they remained friends and colleagues until their deaths. He became an accomplished performer, especially playing the avant-garde music of Leo Ornstein, Henry Cowell, Arnold Schoenberg and others. In 1925, the *Los Angeles Times* referred to him as 'Ultra Modern.'<sup>4</sup> However, he later focused on the research of early keyboard music, prompted by exposure to early music during the 1923 tour.

On Cowell's tour of Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London, he performed only his own piano works, which displayed the numerous techniques that would make him famous. It has been difficult to get complete programmes of the works performed by Cowell in Europe, although these may exist in the NYPL Cowell Collection. However, the French publication *Le Guide du Concert* (a Parisian weekly) published

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<sup>1</sup> Wolbert, 72.

<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, 565.

<sup>3</sup> Beaumont, 160.

<sup>4</sup> Rayner, 17-18.

Cowell's programme for his Paris début on Saturday 17 November at Erard Hall. It corresponds exactly with the programme for his New York concert on 4 February 1924 except for the *Piece for Piano with Strings* written between 17 November and 10 December, which Cowell added for the New York concert (Refer to Appendix C). The works he performed in Europe were:

- *Dynamic Motion* (Nov. 1916)
- *Two Episodes* (D minor and G# minor) (Jan. 1921)<sup>5</sup>
- *Chiaroscuro* (1922)
- *Fabric* (Sep. 1920)
- *Exultation* (May 1921)
- *Three Irish Legends* (May 1922):
  - The Tides of Manaunaun* (Jul. 1917)
  - The Hero Sun* (May 1922)
  - The Voice of Lir* (Nov. 1920)
- *Six Ings*:
  - Floating* (c. 1922)
  - Frisking* (c. 1922)
  - Fleeting* (Sep. 1917)
  - Scooting* (Nov. 1917)
  - Wafting* (Sep. 1917)
  - Seething* (Nov. 17)
- *Piece for Piano with Strings* (1923)
- *Four Encores to Dynamic Motion*:
  - What's This?* (Nov. 1917)
  - Amiable Conversation* (Nov. 1917)
  - Advertisement* (Nov. 1917)
  - Antinomy* [sic] (Dec. 1917)

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<sup>5</sup> A.E., ["Musik"], *Münchener Post*, 15 October 1923 [in German]. Cited in Martha L. Manion, *Writings About Henry Cowell: An Annotated Bibliography* (Brooklyn, New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1982): 126. Cowell's concert programmes do not mention which Episodes he



The table below outlines Cowell's activities during his 1923 European tour. Details are drawn primarily from Mead's 1981 thesis (pp. 24-27), Manion (pp. 126-35) and Wolbert (p. 73). Additional information comes from Cowell's concert reviews and the Kuhnle Collection. Since I was not able to access the Cowell Collection in New York, it is difficult to trace a more detailed description of Cowell's activities throughout his 1923 European tour.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<b>Tuesday, 29 May, 1923.</b>	New York, USA.	Sailed for Europe with Richard Buhlig and Wesley Kuhnle.
<b>Friday/Saturday, 8/9 June.</b>	Bremen, Germany.	Arrived. Went directly to Berlin.
<b>Monday, 11 June.</b>	Berlin, Germany.	Arrived, attended dinner at Artur Schnabel's home.
<b>Friday, 10 August.</b>	Munich, Germany.	Buhlig (and probably Cowell) spent last day in Munich. Date of arrival in Munich uncertain. Meeting Kuhnle in Berlin the following morning. Kuhnle departed for London, sometime between 11 and 27 August.
<b>c. Sunday, 2 September.</b>	Vienna, Austria.	Buhlig and Cowell moved to Vienna.
<b>Friday, 14 September.</b>	England.	Kuhnle sailed to New York.
<b>Wednesday, 3 October.</b>	Basel, Switzerland.	Cowell gave a private concert.
<b>Thursday, 11 October.</b>	Munich, Germany.	Performance.
<b>Monday, 15 October.</b>	Leipzig, Germany.	Performance.
<b>Saturday, 20 October.</b>	Dresden, Germany.	Performance.

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played but this review in Munich states that he played Episodes in D minor and C# minor. The reviewer must have meant in G# minor as there are none in C# minor.

<b>Tuesday, 23 October.</b>	Hamburg, Germany.	Performance.
<b>Wednesday, 31 October.</b>	Vienna, Austria.	Performance. Due to success, Cowell invited to perform the same program for the International Society of Modern Composers on Thursday 8 November. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Thursday, 1 November.</b>	Vienna, Austria.	After 1 November, new postal address, c/o American Express 11 Rue Scribe, Paris. <sup>7</sup>
<b>Monday, 5 November.</b>	Vienna, Austria.	Possible performance for the International Society of Modern Composers.
<b>Thursday, 8 November.</b>	Vienna, Austria.	Presumably Cowell performed for the International Society of Modern Composers therefore not yet arrived in Paris. <sup>8</sup>
<b>Saturday, 17 November.</b>	Paris, France.	Performance at Salle Erard.
<b>Thursday, 22 November.</b>	Berlin, Germany.	Performance at Grotrian Steinway Hall.
<b>Monday, 10 December.</b>	London, England.	Performance at Aeolian Hall.
<b>Sunday, 16 December.</b>	Paris, France.	Cowell's 17 November was repeated at Salon d'Automne, with dancer Yvonne Daunt.
<b>Sunday, 30 December.</b>	Place of departure unknown.	Sailed back to the USA. <sup>9</sup>
<b>Thursday, 10 January, 1924.</b>	New York, USA.	Arrives in USA.
<b>Monday, 4 February.</b>	New York, USA.	Début at Carnegie Hall.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Bechert, "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 1 Dec. 1923: 874-75.

<sup>7</sup> Undated letter from Cowell to Kuhnle. Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>8</sup> "European critics award praise to Henry Cowell for his compositions," *Daily Palo Alto* 15 Dec. 1923: 3. Cited in Manion, 134.

<sup>9</sup> Christmas card from Buhlig to Kuhnle, Kuhnle Collection. Mead referred to the same Christmas card in *Henry Cowell's New Music, 1925-1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings*, saying that Cowell sailed back to the USA on Thursday, 20 December, 1923. It clearly states the 30<sup>th</sup> not the 20<sup>th</sup>.

In May 1923, Cowell, Kuhnle and Buhlig met in New York, where they got visas for Germany and Austria, and then departed for Europe on 28 May.<sup>10</sup> Upon arrival on 8/9 June, they went directly to Berlin, and on 11 June, Cowell and Buhlig had dinner with Artur Schnabel.<sup>11</sup> However, staying in Berlin was far too expensive because of the German economic crisis, so Cowell and Buhlig decided to move to Vienna, via Munich. Kuhnle decided to go to London instead. Presumably, Cowell, Buhlig and Kuhnle first went to Berlin because of Buhlig's connections there. Buhlig had spent time in Berlin especially as a concert pianist, studying with Busoni, and he knew other prominent figures such as Schnabel. While in Berlin, Kuhnle planned his concert tour in Europe. This tour included, in part, the participation of Cowell. The planned concerts included Prague, Cologne, Zurich, Stuttgart, Copenhagen, Dresden, Leipzig, Bremen and Hanover. While Kuhnle and Cowell waited for these plans to come to fruition, they and Buhlig went to many concerts, going as far as Leipzig to hear a concert for harpsichord and viola da gamba.<sup>12</sup> It was this concert that first introduced Kuhnle to the sounds of these early instruments. He became increasingly interested in early music and by the 1940s his life was entirely devoted to the performance and teaching of it.<sup>13</sup> Since the musicians arrived in Berlin in the middle of the German economic collapse, they found it difficult to organise concerts and work. Buhlig and Cowell decided to retreat to Munich where living expenses were lower, while Kuhnle remained in Berlin.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in Salzburg, the Festival of Modern Chamber Music was being held from Thursday 2 August to Tuesday 7 August. The event was organised by the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM), which had been formed only a year earlier by the Viennese modernists at the Salzburg festival in the summer of 1922.<sup>15</sup> Its committee consisted of six prominent international composers: Busoni, Strauss, Ravel, Schoenberg, Sibelius and Stravinsky.<sup>16</sup> At the 1923 festival, a concert was held every day at the Mozarteum with performances of thirty-five contrasting

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<sup>10</sup> Wolbert, 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> Letter by Wesley Kuhnle to his parents, 11 June 1923. Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>12</sup> Wolbert, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Rayner, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Rayner, 17 & Mead, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Bechert, "Musical Notes from Abroad," *Musical Times* 1 July 1923: 506.

<sup>16</sup> Edwin Evans, "Occasional Notes: Donaueschingen and Salzburg," *Musical Times* 1 Sept. 1923: 631.

works, by thirty-four composers, presumably chosen by the committee.<sup>17</sup> For example the programme for the first concert on 2 August contained Berg's String Quartet Op. 3, Schoenberg's *Die Hängenden Gärten* Op. 15, and Bartók's Sonata No. 2 for violin and piano.<sup>18</sup> Surely Cowell would have heard of this event and attended it if at all possible. Given his interests, he would have made it a priority to know what was happening in the contemporary music scene.

During the Festival of Modern Chamber Music, a conference of delegates of the ISCM was also held. The twelve countries represented were Austria, Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. In addition, "Several American musicians were in the town, and would have been welcomed at the meetings had not the section disputed exclusive authority to two delegates neither of whom was present."<sup>19</sup> American music was not yet taken seriously by some and was relatively unknown. Weissmann wrote in the *Vossische Zeitung*:

But in America also, people, discerning and undiscerning alike, demand a spectacle in performance. And very few achieve great success. ... Only when composition and performance are given equal importance is there a musical life. And Europe remains the motherland of music.<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that Cowell, Buhlig and Kuhnle could have been amongst those 'several American musicians' in Salzburg. In Munich, however, three days after the final concert in Salzburg, Buhlig and Cowell decided to return to Berlin. On Friday 10 August, Buhlig sent Kuhnle a telegram, which read, "komme morgen frueh" [coming tomorrow morning].<sup>21</sup> Presumably Cowell travelled with Buhlig.

The continued economic crisis in Germany, with its high inflation and strikes, influenced the three Americans to leave Berlin and settle elsewhere. Kuhnle went to London to pursue employment. It is not clear why Kuhnle's concert plans on the continent were curtailed, while Cowell's concert touring was about to flourish.

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<sup>17</sup> "Occasional Notes," *Musical Times* 1 July 1923: 477.

<sup>18</sup> Evans, 632. For the week's programme refer to pp. 632-34.

<sup>19</sup> Evans, 634.

<sup>20</sup> *Vossische Zeitung* [Berlin] 14 October 1923. Cited in "Echo Der Zeitschriften," *Die Musik* XVI.3 (Dec.1923): 200.

<sup>21</sup> Kuhnle Collection.

Cowell and Buhlig decided ultimately to settle in Vienna. In a letter, probably written in late August, Buhlig wrote to Kuhnle in England: “Henry and I go to Vienna tomorrow...I may settle there for the winter...conditions are quiet and ordered there – but very expensive ... Let me hear ... how you do and how you like England.”<sup>22</sup> Shortly after, Cowell and Buhlig departed for Vienna, arriving around Sunday 2 September. Less than a month after arriving in London, Kuhnle sailed back to New York on Friday 14 September. Buhlig and Cowell encouraged Kuhnle to settle with them in Vienna but he did not think it was a “good place to go.”<sup>23</sup> Perhaps he was just dissatisfied with his lack of success in securing a concert tour.

Cowell’s first performance in Europe was a private concert given on Wednesday 3 October in Basel, Switzerland. At the concert Buhlig introduced him to Oscar Bie, the writer and Berlin Correspondent for the *Basel National Zeitung*. Bie’s review of Cowell’s performance was restrained:

Cowell is a mechanistic type of modern artist. He is a dynamic performer and composer ... He plays not only with his fingers but also with his arms, he depresses particular groups of keys simultaneously with his forearm. The result is modern harmonies organised dynamically and rhythmically. He employs timbre well. Occasionally there is a glimmer of expression and lyricism. But the whole thing is written according to the cold laws of the structuralism that is the skeleton of modern art.<sup>24</sup>

On Thursday 11 October, Cowell returned to Munich for a performance. Four days later, on Monday 15 October, he performed in Leipzig. Out of all the European cities, Leipzig was, according to Cowell, the least ecstatic about his concert, and its critics wrote harsh reviews. The *Leipziger Neuste-Nachrichten* called his techniques,

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<sup>22</sup> Kuhnle Collection. Along with this letter, Buhlig sent a bill for Kuhnle from the shipping company, Brasch & Rothenstein, dated 27 August 1923 for £ 5, 10. Although the letter is undated, it must have been sent after 27 August and before Cowell and Buhlig went to Vienna at the beginning of September.

<sup>23</sup> Mead, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Oscar Bie, “Berliner Kunst, Musik und Tanz,” *Basel National Zeitung* (Switzerland) Oct. 1923. [In German]. Cited in Manion, 126.

“musical grotesqueries” although they were “serious and sometimes humorous, and not at all bad.”<sup>25</sup> The *Leipziger Abendpost* wrote:

... what we got to hear and see here was, with the exception of two pieces in the first half, such a meaningless strumming and such a repulsive hacking at the keyboard not only with hands, but also even with fists, forearms and elbows, that one must call it a coarse obscenity—to put it mildly—to offer such a cacophony to the public, who in the end took it as a joke.<sup>26</sup>

Cowell later recalled that the audience was divided into two groups, one group shouted their distaste for his music, while the other retorted to be quiet. This provoked a brawl on the stage. He kept performing, even though programs and other paraphernalia were being thrown at him.<sup>27</sup> The *Volkszeitung* wrote that Cowell “was received with astonishment, laughter or scorn” by the audience.<sup>28</sup> Similar riotous reactions occurred with performances of ‘challenging’ repertoire by other composers. The most obvious of these were in Paris with Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* in 1913, three performances in 1921 of ‘futuristic’ works with titles such as *Risveglio di una Città (Revival of a City)* (1913-14) and *Convegno di Automobile e Aeroplani (Meeting of an Automobile and Aeroplanes)* (1913-14) by Luigi Russolo (1885-1947) as well as other works by his brother Antonio and Nuccio Fiorda,<sup>29</sup> and Antheil’s performance for the opening of the Ballet Suédois on 4 October 1923.

On Saturday 20 October, Cowell performed in Dresden and on Tuesday 23 October in Hamburg. The following Wednesday 31 October, Cowell performed in Vienna with such success that he was invited to perform the same program for the ISCM on 8 November. Also “the noted critic, Kastner, was so deeply impressed ... that he at once took steps to have [Cowell] engaged next season as soloist at the great music festival in Salzburg.”<sup>30</sup> However, it seems that Cowell did not return to

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<sup>25</sup> M.S.T., [“Musik”], *Leipziger Neuste-Nachrichten* 5 Nov. 1923 [In German]. Cited in Manion, 127.

<sup>26</sup> *Leipziger Abendpost* 5 Nov. 1923. Cited in Manion, 128.

<sup>27</sup> “Reminiscences of Henry Cowell” (16 Oct. 1962): 19. In the Columbia University Oral History Research Office Collection. Cited in Hicks, *Bohemian*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> “Konzerte,” *Volkszeitung* (Leipzig) 7 Nov. 1923. Cited in Manion, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Flora Dennis, “Russolo, Luigi,” *New Grove* Vol. 22, 34.

<sup>30</sup> “European critics award praise to Henry Cowell for his compositions,” *Daily Palo Alto Times* 15 Dec. 1923: 3. Cited in Manion, 134.

Salzburg for the festival in August 1924, as the list of performances does not contain his name either as a performer or as a composer.<sup>31</sup> Cowell's next trip to Europe was not until 1926.

Cowell's invitation to perform for the ISCM on 8 November occurred during Modern Music Week, held in Vienna to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Konzerthaus. It was an important event because it was

its first really comprehensive survey of contemporary left-wing music, and breaking as it did an unwritten law of the Konzerthausgesellschaft which hitherto had barred modern music from the activities of that society, and had limited its enterprise to the production of oratorio, ranging from Bach to Handel to Brahms and the neo-classics.<sup>32</sup>

It gave Cowell the opportunity to hear "contemporary left-wing music" and to mingle with his European, 'bohemian' counterparts. Unfortunately, he did not publish his views on the music he heard. Independently of the Modern Music Week, the Vienna group of the ISCM staged the first of a series of concerts to be given on the first Monday of each month. Held at the Mozart Hall, it would consist mainly of chamber music. Out of the other performances that evening, Cowell's performance received the most favourable review from Paul Bechert:

Most unique of all, perhaps, was a recital given by, and devoted exclusively to works of, Henry Cowell, an American composer-pianist. His pianoforte pieces – doubtless the most radically modern ever heard in a Vienna hall – apparently aim at extending the scope of the keyboard as a medium for tonal expression. He asks for direct contact of the hands (even the fist) with the strings; the alternate application to the strings of the nails or flesh of the fingers, and a manifold treatment of the pedals. Melodically, his compositions are comparatively simple, even conventional; yet some of them

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<sup>31</sup> Hubert J. Foss, "The Salzburg Festival," *Musical Times* 1 Sept. 1924: 844-47.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Bechert, *Musical Times* 1 Dec. 1923: 874-5.

reveal supreme contrapuntal craftsmanship and decided rhythmic fancy.<sup>33</sup>

This suggests that either Cowell's second performance was actually on Monday 5 November rather than Thursday 8 November, or that he performed in Vienna on both dates. Bechert's view of Cowell also suggests that George Antheil, *le sauvage*, was not considered more radical than Cowell. It is possible that Bechert did not know of Antheil's performance in Vienna. Unlike Cowell, who performed his own works, Antheil toured Europe as a concert pianist performing mainly works by other composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Schoenberg.<sup>34</sup>

While in Vienna, Cowell sent an undated letter to Kuhnle in New York. Cowell's letter was written on the back of a reminder notice for an outstanding bill, dated Thursday 13 September, stating that his new postal address "after November 1 [would be] c/o American Express 11 Rue Scribe, Paris."<sup>35</sup> It seems that Cowell was organising his move to Paris. It is unclear when he finally arrived in Paris, but it was definitely before Saturday 17 November, the date of his *début* at the Salle Erard. Both the audience and critics were so dazzled by his performance and his compositions that he was invited to do a second concert on 16 December. On the eve of Cowell's first Paris concert, an unknown writer in *Le Guide du Concert* wrote of Cowell's employment of clusters and explained the novel notation using an excerpt from *Dynamic Motion* as an example and noting that "Mr. Henry Cowell does not hesitate to employ new musical signs of an unquestionable novelty, as shown just below"<sup>36</sup> (See Example 1). This indicates the general French attitude towards new music; they had a strong interest in it and they also wished to be educated about it. Journals in other cities, such as *Die Musik*, did not do this, and while *The Musical Times* included musical supplements, these were related to articles not concert reviews. Presumably, Cowell sent *Le Guide du Concert* a copy of his score, or the journal requested one, given its interest in new music.

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<sup>33</sup> "Vienna – The Modern Music Week Musical Times," *Musical Times* 1 Dec. 1923: 875.

<sup>34</sup> Antheil, 3-4, 88.

<sup>35</sup> This reminder notice was issued a day before Kuhnle's departure for New York. It refers to the Brasch & Rothenstein bill dated 27 August 1923 (Refer to fn. 56). Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Guide du Concert*, 10. 6 (16 Nov. 1923): 90.



**Dynamic Motion de HENRY COWELL.**  
M. Henry Cowell n'hésite pas à employer des signes musicaux d'une incontestable nouveauté comme ceux ci-dessous :

The image shows six musical staves arranged in a 3x2 grid. The top-left staff shows a few notes with stems. The top-right staff shows a dense cluster of notes with stems, some of which are shaded. The middle-left staff shows notes with stems and sharp signs. The middle-right staff shows notes with stems and sharp signs, with some notes having a different shape. The bottom-left staff shows notes with stems. The bottom-right staff shows notes with stems and sharp signs, with some notes having a different shape.

Example 1. *Dynamic Motion de Henry Cowell.*

Cowell had been causing a stir with *Dynamic Motion* for some time. In a review of a concert he had given in San Francisco on 18 June 1919, the *San Francisco Call and Post* had written: “*Dynamic Motion* is the musical impression of the New York subway. The clamor in the subterranean darkness ... rushing along insanely under the earth.”<sup>37</sup> Three years later, after a concert in New York, Louise Vermont wrote in the *Greenwich Villager* on 15 April 1922: “At the finish of it three women lay in a dead faint in the aisle and no less than ten men had refreshed themselves from the left hip.”<sup>38</sup> These reactions encouraged Cowell to compose the five encores to *Dynamic Motion*, which contained similar techniques of clusters.<sup>39</sup>

On Thursday 22 November, Cowell was back in Berlin for his début performance at the third Melos Association Chamber Music concert at Grotrian Steinway Hall. Melos had invited Cowell to perform and consequently sponsored his concert.<sup>40</sup> Adolf Weissmann, the composer and critic, attended Cowell’s performance in Berlin and wrote in *Die Musik* that the performance was “the most remarkable event of an otherwise unremarkable concert season.” Furthermore he wrote that:

<sup>37</sup> Lichtenwanger, 49.  
<sup>38</sup> Lichtenwanger, 49-50.  
<sup>39</sup> Lichtenwanger, 50.  
<sup>40</sup> Mead, 28.

Cowell is by no means satisfied with using his fingers, but also puts to work his arms, his fists and the palms of his hands, and lies inside the piano in a way one could only describe as physical exertion ... The gymnastics he performs are intended as a means to music. Whatever one thinks of the value of this music, the man himself is certainly not a charlatan ... he considers himself a melodist, and through his unusual technique, in which he binds clusters of notes, makes his melodies even more expressive.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note the close similarities between the reviews by Weissmann and Bechert's review of Cowell's earlier performance in Vienna.

While in Berlin, Cowell also met Busoni. According to Cowell's former student, Dick Higgins, he knew Busoni,<sup>42</sup> but it remains unclear as to how and when they met. Presumably, Buhlig introduced them in 1923 since he had known Busoni well since they first met in Berlin in 1901 and Busoni was interested in the latest developments in avant-garde music. It seems likely that they met when Cowell first arrived in Berlin, and when he was organising his tour and going to concerts. Cowell spent much more time in Berlin in June-July than when he made his début there in November, when Busoni was in Paris with his wife.<sup>43</sup> Although Busoni was in Paris when Cowell performed there on 17 November, it seems unlikely they met then as Cowell was in the midst of a busy tour, while Busoni was recovering from ill health.<sup>44</sup>

On Monday 10 December, Cowell made his début in London at the Aeolian Hall, at which he premièred the newly completed *Piece for Piano with Strings* (1923), his first composition that involved playing directly on the piano strings. Since it was not played before London, it seems that Cowell composed the work while on tour and had completed it towards the end, since there is no mention in the reviews of its being performed at his previous concerts. He composed it specifically to demonstrate and promote his new 'string-piano' technique as well as his other techniques such as the tone-clusters.<sup>45</sup> It is not clear how the audience reacted to his performance but critics

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<sup>41</sup> Adolf Weissmann, "Konzert: Berlin," *Die Musik* XVI.4 (16 Jan. 1924): 294.

<sup>42</sup> Dick Higgins in Cowell, *Essential Cowell*: 144.

<sup>43</sup> Dent, 284.

<sup>44</sup> Ferruccio Benvenuto Busoni, *Ferruccio Busoni: Selected Letters*, Trans., ed., introd. Antony Beaumont (London: Faber, 1987): 371.

<sup>45</sup> Hicks, *Bohemian*, 110-15.

seemed to be impressed solely with his new techniques. “As a technician, Mr. Cowell is indeed inventive and venturesome ... as a composer ... he is on the whole uninspiring.”<sup>46</sup>

While Cowell was in London in December 1923, he met Bartók, who asked him if he could utilise Cowell’s tone clusters in his own music.<sup>47</sup> Bartók later acknowledged this borrowing from Cowell; when he visited Scottish pianist and composer, Erik Chisholm, in Glasgow in November 1933, he showed Chisholm his Second Piano Concerto. In the *Presto* section, Chisholm noticed the employment of tone-clusters, and Bartók admitted: “Not my invention, I’m afraid. I got the idea from a young American composer, Henry Cowell...”<sup>48</sup> In 1954, when Chisholm was visiting Boston and met Cowell, Cowell stated that when he was in London in 1923, both he and Bartók were guests in the same residence. He was playing his tone-clusters on the piano when Bartók heard him from a different room. For Cowell, it was a great meeting, professionally and personally. Not only was Bartók on the committee of the ISCM, he also extended an invitation for him to play again in Paris, where he was introduced to other leading European composers such as Ravel, Roussel and Falla.<sup>49</sup>

It is unclear when Cowell returned to Paris but it must have been some time before his second concert on 16 December. At this concert he performed for the first time in Paris his *Piece with Strings*, as well as a repeat of his 17 November programme. The concert was performed in the afternoon at the Salon d’Automne, a government institution, with the première danseuse of the Paris Opéra, Yvonne Daunt, requested to “dance to his pieces. The salon was filled to capacity,”<sup>50</sup> according to a later report of the concert. As a direct result of its success in both London and Paris, *Piece with Strings* was published in *Le Courrier Musical* within two months of this

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<sup>46</sup> “Recitals of the Week: Mr. Cowell’s Compositions,” *The Times* [London] 14 Dec. 1923: 12. Cited in Manion, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Carol J. Oja, Ray Allen, eds., *Henry Cowell’s Musical Worlds: A Program Book for the Henry Cowell Centennial Festival* (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music and Brooklyn College, City University of New York, 1997): 8.

<sup>48</sup> Erik Chisholm, “Béla Bartók”, an unpublished paper delivered in Cape Town (1964): 1-5. Cited in Gillies, 118.

<sup>49</sup> Gillies, 118.

<sup>50</sup> “Composer back from concert tour of Europe/local genius introduces his original works to foreign audiences,” *Daily Palo Alto Times* 18 Mar. 1924: 1. Cited in Manion, 3.

performance.<sup>51</sup> This was also Cowell's last concert in Europe in 1923 before returning to America.

It is uncertain what Cowell did in his last days in Paris, although he spent at least the last four nights at the Hotel Victor-Emmanuel III.<sup>52</sup> Buhlig remained in Vienna for the winter; he stated in a belated Christmas card to Kuhnle in California, dated 30 December, that Henry was in Paris and leaving for the USA on 30 December.<sup>53</sup> On Thursday 10 January 1924, Cowell arrived back in New York. On the back of his last hotel receipt from Paris, dated 29 December 1923, Cowell wrote a letter to Kuhnle in Los Angeles, postmarked 10 January 1924 New York, "Just arrived in N.Y. today after a rather stormy voyage."<sup>54</sup>

Finally on Monday 4 February 1924, fresh from Europe, Cowell gave his first major concert in New York at Carnegie Hall, the first of several triumphant performances throughout the USA, including his first performance in Chicago on 28 February at the Fine Arts Recital Hall.<sup>55</sup> These first concerts were presumably arranged before Cowell's return from Europe. On 24 April, Cowell performed at the University Fine Arts Association in San Francisco to much acclaim, with reviews stressing that he had just returned from a successful tour of Europe. On 23 June, Cowell performed again in San Francisco for the first season of the Ida G. Scott Fortnightlies and the following month he performed in Carmel.<sup>56</sup>

It is surprising to note that after much publicity and fame, Cowell's next recorded performance appears to be seven months later on 8 February 1925 for an International Composers' Guild performance in New York. This raises a question: what happened to Cowell in those seven months? Perhaps Cowell did return to Europe to spend the summer of 1924 with Buhlig in the English countryside. It is suggested by Wolbert that Buhlig and his students attended the Festival of Chamber Music near Haslemere. The festival's objective was to perform rarely heard music from the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical periods using authentic instruments, and it included music by Pierre Attaingnant, John Bull and Henry Purcell.<sup>57</sup> There does

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<sup>51</sup> Hicks, 111.

<sup>52</sup> A hotel receipt dated Saturday, 29 December 1923 from the hotel in Paris shows Cowell spent five days there, 25,26,27 and 28 December. Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Kuhnle Collection.

<sup>55</sup> Manion, 138, 146.

<sup>56</sup> Manion, 148-52.

<sup>57</sup> Wolbert, 75-76.

not seem to be any evidence to prove or disprove Cowell's presence in Europe during this period, although it is clear that either Cowell did not accept the offer of performing in Salzburg or perhaps it never eventuated. Also, it does not seem plausible that Cowell would travel to Europe for a single event in Haslemere. It seems more likely that after his 1923 tour and performances in America, he focused on composing. Cowell wrote at least thirty works during this period, some of which were incomplete; unfortunately the autograph scores do not specify where these works were composed.<sup>58</sup> He may also have been making plans for the founding of the New Music Society.

Surveying Cowell's 'assault' on Europe, especially Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London, several conclusions had been reached. Despite the ravages of WWI, Cowell was able to make arrangements for performances throughout Europe, presumably through Buhlig's contacts there. He received mixed reactions but the overall perception in America was that he made an enormous impact. Perhaps the best description of Cowell's impact is an article written about Cowell's San Francisco's performance after his European trip.

Vienna acclaimed him. Paris ... gave him an ovation. ...  
Berlin nodded solemnly, wrote hundreds of Germanic  
articles upon his art. ... Berlin and Paris and London all  
agreed that the American lad was a supreme musician.<sup>59</sup>

According to an article published in the *Daily Alto Times*, shortly after his return, Cowell "was least liked in Leipzig (where a listener asked him, "Do you take us for idiots in Germany?") and most liked in Paris."<sup>60</sup>

I have been able to document much of Cowell's tour and place his concerts into the context of the musical culture of the cities in which he performed, including how he was received. I have also been able to ascertain other activities such as attending concerts, and which prominent musicians Cowell met. Although he did not meet Schoenberg, it is presumed that he met Busoni. When Cowell met Bartók in London, he was then introduced to Ravel, Roussel and Falla in Paris. All of these

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<sup>58</sup> Lichtenwanger, 95-106.

<sup>59</sup> Evelyn Wells, "Henry Cowell wins laurels abroad," *San Francisco Call* 26 Apr. 1924. Cited in Manion, 148.

activities and contacts were Cowell's springboard to furthering his performing and compositional career in the USA. The contacts he made and his introduction to various new musical societies and their journals throughout Europe were perhaps most significant, in that these would influence him in founding the New Music Society in 1925 and the *New Music Quarterly* in 1927 (Refer to Chapter 6).

While piano recitals in general included contemporary music, it is clear that the majority of performances in Paris, London, Vienna and Berlin consisted of standard repertoire, and even new and avant-garde music took a conventional approach to pianism. While Cowell and Antheil were similar, in that both were young American composer-pianists, Antheil included predominantly conventional repertoire in his performances, while Cowell played none. Performances of his kind of avant-garde pianism were virtually unheard of. This explains the extensive review in *Die Musik* of his Berlin performance and the general responses to Cowell's performances in Europe.

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<sup>60</sup> "Composer back from concert tour of Europe/local genius introduces his original works to foreign audiences," *Daily Palo Alto Times* 18 Mar. 1924: 1. Cited in Manion, 3.

## Chapter 5. Cowell's Tour Repertoire: New Musical Resources for Piano

When Cowell performed his repertoire throughout Europe, his radical techniques received mixed reactions. His unique style received critical responses favourable or unfavourable, from the various European musical journals. Before touring Europe, many American critics and audiences considered Cowell's music highly eccentric and like many emerging talents, they believed that Cowell's music would benefit tremendously from some traditional study in Europe. But Cowell challenged established traditions, and he created new resources for the piano that had never been heard before by anyone. Therefore it is not surprising that some audiences and critics responded with suspicion, excitement, and in the case of Leipzig, a riot. Nevertheless, most critics took Cowell seriously. In this chapter I will examine the music Cowell performed throughout his tour and the techniques he used, thereby revealing the contrast between piano music in Europe and Cowell's piano music, and explaining why Cowell made such an impact there.

The piano works Cowell performed in Europe contain techniques discussed in his treatise on musical language and harmony, *New Musical Resources*, therefore it can be said that the piano works are a practical treatise which works alongside *NMR*. When Cowell studied with Seeger, he had indicated to Cowell that if he wanted to use his new ideas in music, he would have to create a 'systematic technique' that would make them exist cohesively.<sup>1</sup> Cowell's reaction to this is summarised in the introduction of *NMR*:

The purpose of *New Musical Resources* is not to attempt to explain the materials of contemporary music, ... but to point out the influence the overtone series has exerted on music throughout its history, how many musical materials of all ages are related to it, and how, by various means of applying its principles in many different manners, a large palette of musical materials can be assembled.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pescatello, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, x-xi.

Cowell argued that his musical theories stem from the overtone series, just as music had done for centuries before. In the first chapter of *NMR*, “The Influences of Overtones in Music,” he explained that when a tone is sounded, a series of overtones are generated and are related to the tone and to each other mathematically<sup>3</sup> (Example 2).

1  
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 etc.

♭ = quarter-flat; ♯ = quarter-sharp.

Example 2. The Overtone/Harmonic Series.<sup>4</sup>

His argument was that since ancient instruments were not as rich in overtones as modern instruments, it could explain why the major chord, formed in the lower regions of the overtone series, became known as a ‘natural’ chord and that the intervals between the higher tones were considered ‘discordant’. Cowell argued that, since the higher overtones could be heard on modern instruments and were related to the fundamental tone, major and minor seconds are just as ‘natural’ sounding as the major and minor thirds. While music in ancient Greece was in unison, in early Christian times the first overtone, a perfect octave was used. Later music used the second overtone, a perfect fifth, then the third overtone, a perfect fourth and so on.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Baines, “Harmonic Series,” *New Oxford* Vol. 1, 811.

<sup>5</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 4-5, 12.



Cowell gave an example of a technique where the higher overtones can be heard: “If the notes B, D, F, A flat are pressed down without sounding, and then the notes C, E flat, G flat, A are played sharply staccato, without pedal, the sound which will remain is a complex of higher and more dissonant overtones.”<sup>6</sup> This technique was inspired by Schoenberg’s *Drei Klavierstücke* Op. 11 No. 1,<sup>7</sup> which contains a silently depressed four-note chord played by the right hand, while the left plays short figures (Example 3). Cowell had been impressed by this piece when Seeger first played it to him in 1914.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a cluster of notes (B, D, F, A-flat) held down. Above it are instructions: "Die Tasten tonlos niederdrücken!" and "Flag. id.". The middle staff is a bass clef with short, sharp staccato figures. Above it is the instruction "langsam". The bottom staff is a bass clef with short, sharp staccato figures. Above it are instructions: "sf" and "ohne Ped.". The entire score is enclosed in a rectangular box.

Example 3. Schoenberg, *Drei Klavierstücke* Op. 11 No. 1, bars 14-16.

Cowell explored this technique in a more elaborate way in *Dynamic Motion* (Example 4). It opens with three different four-note chords in the bass clef that are silently depressed by the left hand without pedal, while the right hand plays sforzando staccato chords to bring out the overtones. From bars 9-12 the left hand contains different silent chords and sounded tones while the right hand plays a melodic figure, firstly *mf* then *mp*. This example also demonstrates how Cowell’s chord structures are based on minor 2nds/9ths, perfect 5ths, and major/minor triads.

<sup>6</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Hicks, “Cowell’s Clusters,” 439.

Allegro

Example 4. *Dynamic Motion*, bars 1-12.

Towards the end of *Dynamic Motion* the method is reversed in that the sounding notes (in this case double arm clusters marked *fffff*) are played before the silently depressed chords. The sostenuto pedal sustains the double arm clusters and the damper pedal is used to “grab” sounds from the clusters, at which point the silently depressed chords are employed. The silent chords consist of two diminished triads a diminished octave apart, and an A major/minor chord. After a minim the damper pedal is released, leaving just the overtones sounding (Example 5).

Example 5. *Dynamic Motion*, bars 56-61.

The formation of chords is discussed in Part III of *NMR* and also draws on Cowell's discussion of the overtone series. The chapter "Building Chords from Different Intervals" discusses why major and minor seconds can be used to form chords, thus legitimising tone-clusters. Cowell mentions that in 'traditional' harmony thirds are used to form chords. Initially chords were made up of the first three overtones – octaves, fifths and fourths - because they were considered most concordant. Later, the fourth and fifth overtones, thirds (and their inversions, sixths) were also accepted as being concordant.<sup>8</sup> So eventually:

The use of chords based on clusters of seconds, built as they are on the next reaches of the overtones after thirds, would seem inevitable in the development of music. There is no reason to suppose that the progress along the overtones which has been made from early musical times to the present will suddenly stop.<sup>9</sup>

The following chapter "Tone-Clusters" proceeds to discuss how clusters should be used melodically, harmonically and contrapuntally. Cowell does not discuss the different types of clusters he used, concluding: "There are infinitely more ways of using clusters, but the working-out details cannot be treated of here ... Any composer sufficiently interested will probably wish to work out such details himself."<sup>10</sup> As published by *Le Guide du Concert*, the types of clusters Cowell used in works he played in Europe are either: clusters of minor seconds, where the black and white notes are combined; black-note clusters (using the notes of a pentatonic scale); or white-note clusters comprising major and minor seconds (Refer to Example 1).

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<sup>8</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 111-12.

<sup>9</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 114-15.

<sup>10</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 137-38.

The clusters are categorised as thus:

1. Micro-clusters (chords of two or three notes, all a major and/or minor second apart),<sup>11</sup> mostly played with fists, which are indicated by an x
2. Hand clusters encompassing fifths and octaves
3. Forearm clusters encompassing two octaves (or slightly over)
4. Arpeggiated or rolled clusters
5. Hand clusters where one hand is placed on the notes and the other hand's fist presses down on it
6. Left arm octave-clusters and left hand fingers playing notes simultaneously
7. Arm clusters supporting a melody a fifth above
8. Two-arm clusters encompassing approximately four and a half octaves
9. Hand clusters in which the inner notes are released earlier than the outer notes
10. Hand clusters in which the outer notes of a cluster are then followed by the cluster
11. The process of adding individual notes that form clusters and then releasing them
12. Hand clusters played on the piano strings

With these cluster techniques above, Cowell was able to compose works “by transposing his basic techniques into disparate registers and then juxtaposing them with more conventional passage work.”<sup>12</sup> He also superimposes cluster chords over melodic/linear counterpoint. According to Cowell, there are two methods by which clusters are used melodically. The first uses clusters of the same interval, for example the compass of a third (Example 6).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hicks, “Cowell’s Clusters,” 438.

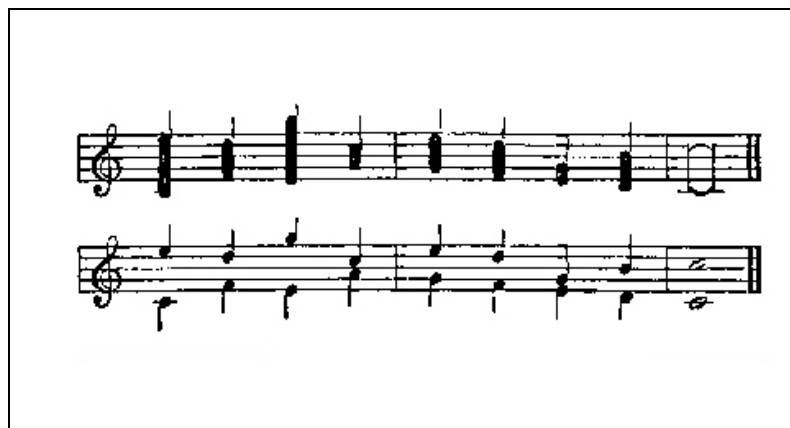
<sup>12</sup> Hicks, “Cowell’s Clusters,” 439.

<sup>13</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 122.



Example 6. Melodic Clusters 1. Cowell, *NMR*, 122.

The second is altering the intervals of the clusters so that the bottom and top notes of the clusters create two simultaneous melodies which are used contrapuntally (Example 7).<sup>14</sup> However, Cowell used only the first method in the piano works played in Europe.



Example 7. Melodic Clusters 2. Cowell, *NMR*, 123.

Of all the techniques discussed in *NMR*, clusters are the most prevalent in Cowell's piano works, and "it is quite clear that Cowell's cluster pieces broke down into two main types: the virtuosic futurist pieces such as *Dynamic Motion* and its Encores and the resonant mystic pieces written under the spell of John Varian, all of them from the late 1910s through the 1920s."<sup>15</sup> The clusters in the virtuosic pieces were for technical display and to show that clusters were viable piano techniques. The clusters in the mystic pieces were utilised to provide programmatic descriptions.

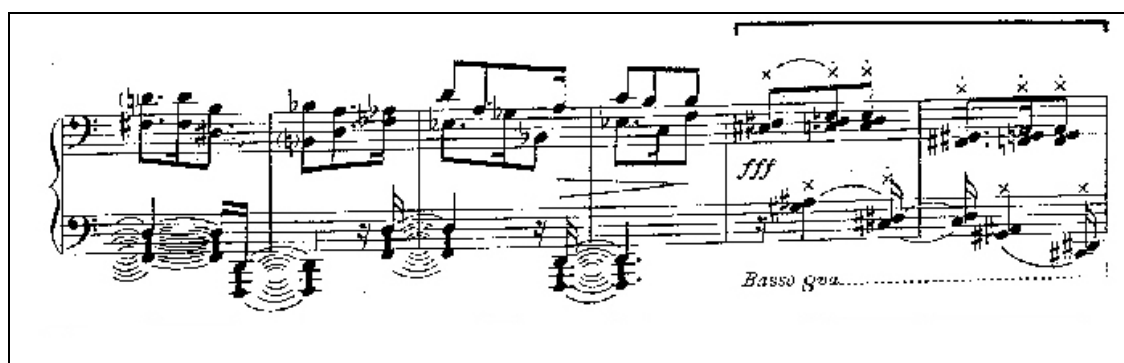
<sup>14</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 122-23.

<sup>15</sup> Hicks, *Bohemian*, 101.

In *The Tides of Manaunaun*, Cowell used hand clusters which seem to narrate the myth: “Manaunaun was the god of motion, and long before the creation, he sent forth the tremendous tides which swept to and fro through the universe...”<sup>16</sup> (See Example 13).

### 1. Micro-Clusters

The Presto section in the first encore to *Dynamic Motion, What’s This?* is dominated by micro-clusters struck by the fists (Example 8). This is an example of Cowell superimposing cluster chords over linear counterpoint. One wonders if the fists are used simply to provide a visual effect, as the micro-clusters can easily be played by the fingers. However using the fist makes it easier to strike the notes evenly, so that they sound more unified and less as separate notes. Moreover, the fists add to the visual as well as the aural effect of playing clusters.



Example 8. Encore 1. *What’s This?* bars 11-16.

The third encore, *Advertisement*, is essentially a study of micro- and hand clusters, ‘advertising’ these techniques. The third section, *Allegro*, is written on three staves (Example 9). The right hand uses ‘fist always’, for *fff* micro-clusters on black notes (top staff) and white notes (middle staff), almost three octaves higher than middle C. Notice the top staff is given a five sharps ‘key signature’ while the middle is not given any; the key signature is merely used as a notational convenience so that

<sup>16</sup> Henry Cowell, *The Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, Ed. Oliver Daniel, Vol. 2 (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1982): 59.

the black clusters will not continually require accidentals. The left hand plays a mixture of hand clusters and fisted micro-clusters ranging from two octaves below middle C to an octave above middle C. These micro-clusters are also played quickly with a different rhythm in the fourth section, from bar 38. From bar 46, these micro-clusters begin a four-octave descending ‘scale-like’ passage of micro-clusters.

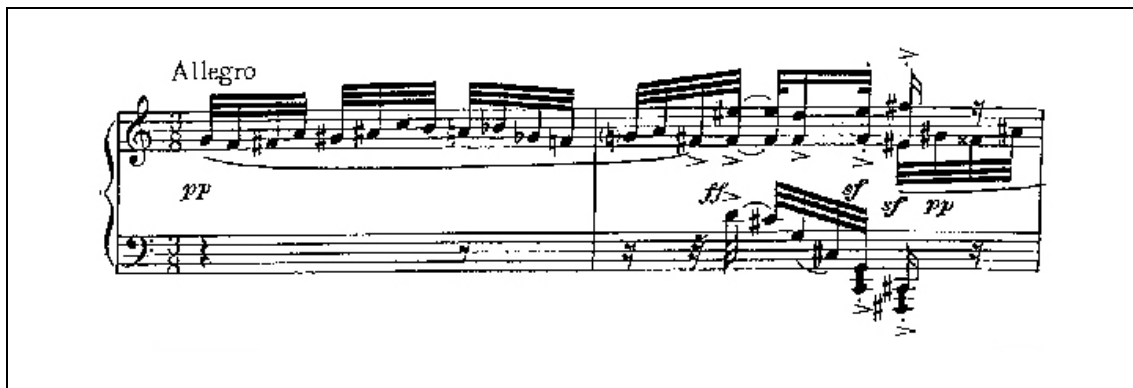
Example 9. Encore 3. *Advertisement*, bars 23-26.

The fourth encore, *Antinomy*, is the epitome of a cluster work. The Moderato section contains various micro-clusters played staccato (Example 10). Bars 31-33 consist of micro-clusters in the left and right hands, some of which support an upper melodic figure. Some micro-clusters are also utilised in *Piece for Piano with Strings*.

Example 10. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 31-33.

## 2. Hand Clusters

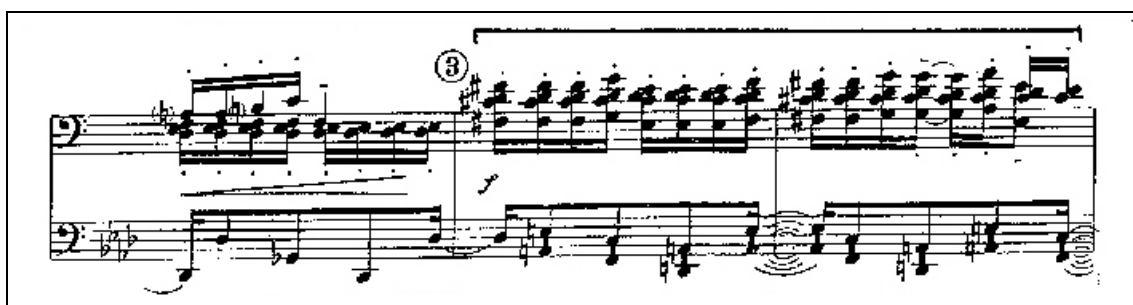
The first encore to *Dynamic Motion, What's This?*, is the shortest cluster piece, at approximately one minute. The first clusters occur in bar 2, after an innocuous pianissimo demisemiquaver figure, with two left hand sforzando clusters a tritone apart (Example 11). The effect of the clusters would be of surprise, an effective way to bring attention to the technique.



The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score begins with a pianissimo (pp) demisemiquaver figure in the right hand. In the second bar, there are two left-hand sforzando (sf) clusters, one in the lower register and one in the upper register, separated by a tritone. The score ends with a final pianissimo (pp) cluster in the right hand.

Example 11. Encore 1. *What's This?* Bars 1-2.

*Antinomy* contains examples of hand clusters in the left hand from bars 41-44 (Example 12). These are repeated at bars 49-52 and 65-68.



The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score shows a sequence of hand clusters in the left hand, starting from bar 40 and continuing through bar 42. A circled number '3' is placed above the first cluster in bar 41. The clusters are dense and span across the staff.

Example 12. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 40-42.



The *Three Irish Legends*, based on traditional stories according to John Varian, are also largely cluster works. In *The Tides of Manaunaun*, Cowell employed his first method of using clusters melodically, where each cluster encompasses the same interval (Refer to Example 6). A relatively short piece (36 bars), *The Tides* begins with left hand chromatic clusters in the lowest region of the keyboard (Example 13). With the sustaining pedal throughout, a cluster based on the lowest note on the piano (A) alternates with another cluster up a fourth (based on D). The roaring sound is intended to depict the tremendous tides moving back and forth. Other fifth and octave clusters are utilised in *Advertisement*, *The Hero Sun*, *The Voice of Lir* and *Piece for Piano with Strings*.

Example 13. *The Tides of Manaunaun*, bars 1-5.

### 3. Forearm Clusters

*Antinomy* begins with two-octave arm clusters, the right playing black notes while the left plays white notes, and both arms playing pianissimo, beginning on the lowest notes of the piano (Example 14). The clusters are used in many ways, firstly as a sustained semibreve, then as a tremolo, followed by a rapid alternation of right- and left-arm two octave clusters. The black and white clusters respectively sound different considering, since white clusters consist of major and minor seconds, while

black clusters consist of major seconds and minor thirds. Again, the clusters follow Cowell's first method of outlining melody.

Moderato maestoso *cresc. poco a poco*

Basso qua *pp*

tramplo

With pedal

Basso qua

Example 14. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 1-3.

For the first time, Cowell introduced a new cluster-technique in *The Voice of Lir*, the last piece of *Three Irish Legends*. In the four-stave *fff* section, a two handed chordal passage must continually alternate with right- and left-arm clusters (the right playing only black notes and the left playing white notes) (Example 15). Fortunately, this section is very slow, making the thick chords interspersed with clusters more manageable to play. Other works that utilise the two-octave forearm clusters are *Amiable Conversation*, *The Tides of Manaunaun*, *The Hero Sun*, *Exultation* and *Piece for Piano with Strings*.

[Largo]

Meno mosso

rit.

*fff*

R. Arm

Basso qua

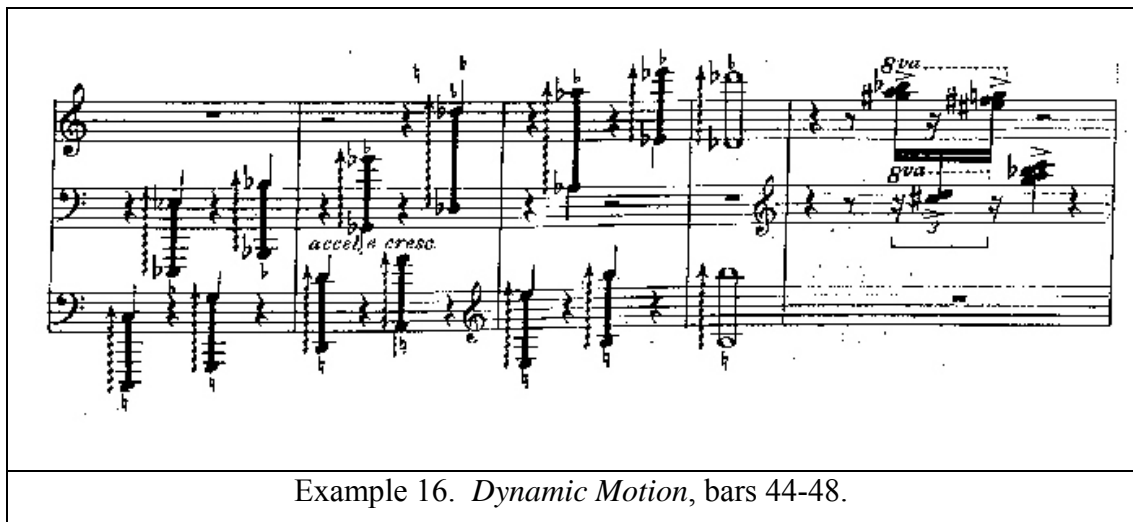
L. Arm

Basso qua

Example 15. *The Voice of Lir*, bars 19-23.

#### 4. Arpeggiated Clusters

Aside from the many other types of clusters used in *Dynamic Motion*, ascending arpeggiated arm clusters towards the end in bars 44-47 and descending arpeggiated clusters in bars 49-51 are added to this conglomeration of sound (Example 16). The term ‘arpeggiation’ in “Explanation of Symbols” refers to the rolling of arm-clusters, by commencing on the bottom or top notes of the cluster (depending on whether they are ascending or descending arpeggiated clusters) and then dropping the arm.<sup>17</sup>



Example 16. *Dynamic Motion*, bars 44-48.

In the Presto section of *Antinomy*, fortissimo interlocking major sevenths form the harmonic basis to a cluster melody played in octaves (Example 17). To emphasise the top melody notes, the clusters are arpeggiated upwards. Arpeggiated clusters are also utilised in *The Tides of Manaunaun*.

<sup>17</sup> Cowell, *Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, 3.

Example 17. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 13-17.

### 5. Hand Clusters Pressed Down With Other Hand

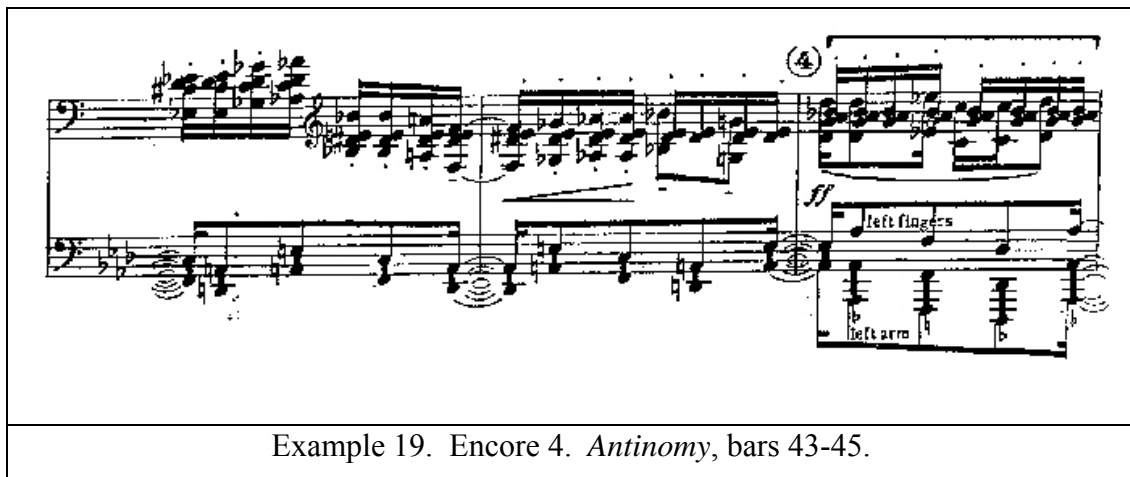
From bar 25 in *Dynamic Motion*, Cowell places an x over certain clusters (Example 18). Usually the x signifies the use of the fist. However in this instance, Cowell specified at the bottom of the score “x Lay left hand on keys, then press left hand down with right fist.”<sup>18</sup> He presumably did this as a visual effect for performance since the clusters could be played simply and just as effectively with one hand. Just prior to this in bar 24, the left hand manages to play the same cluster on its own, when the right hand is required to play a figure in the treble.

Example 18. *Dynamic Motion*, bars 23-28.

<sup>18</sup> Cowell, *Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, 28.

## 6. Left Arm and Finger Clusters

In *Antinomy*, the most interesting and perhaps the most difficult cluster technique is executed (Example 19). From bar 45, one-octave clusters in the bass are played with the left arm, while the fingers of the left hand play a melody an octave above. Micro-clusters in the right hand support an octave melody. Audiences in Europe had not have seen or heard this before. With such virtuosic techniques as this, it is not surprising that Cowell's performances created headlines.



The image displays a musical score for Example 19, Encore 4, from the piece *Antinomy*, covering bars 43-45. The score is presented on a grand staff with two systems of staves. The upper system consists of a bass staff and a treble staff. The lower system also consists of a bass staff and a treble staff. The notation is dense, featuring many notes and rests. A circled number '4' is visible in the upper right corner of the score. Below the main score, there is a section labeled 'left fingers' and 'left arm' with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). This section shows a series of notes on a single staff, likely representing the specific techniques mentioned in the text.

Example 19. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 43-45.

## 7. Arm Clusters Supporting a Melody

*Antinomy* concludes with the left and right hands playing the same major seventh dyad, in octaves in the bass register, sustained by the pedal (Example 20). In the treble register, the left arm plays white and black two-octave clusters, while the right hand plays a melody a fifth above.

Example 20. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 76-79.

### 8. Two-Arm Clusters.

The *fff* coda of *Antinomy* presents massive sounds of double-armed clusters, spanning four and a half octaves from the bottom A upwards (Example 21). This chord is played on the first beat of bar 81 and each of the following five bars. Sustained by the pedal, both arms shift to play a four and a half octave cluster melody, again using Cowell's first method of melodic cluster writing.

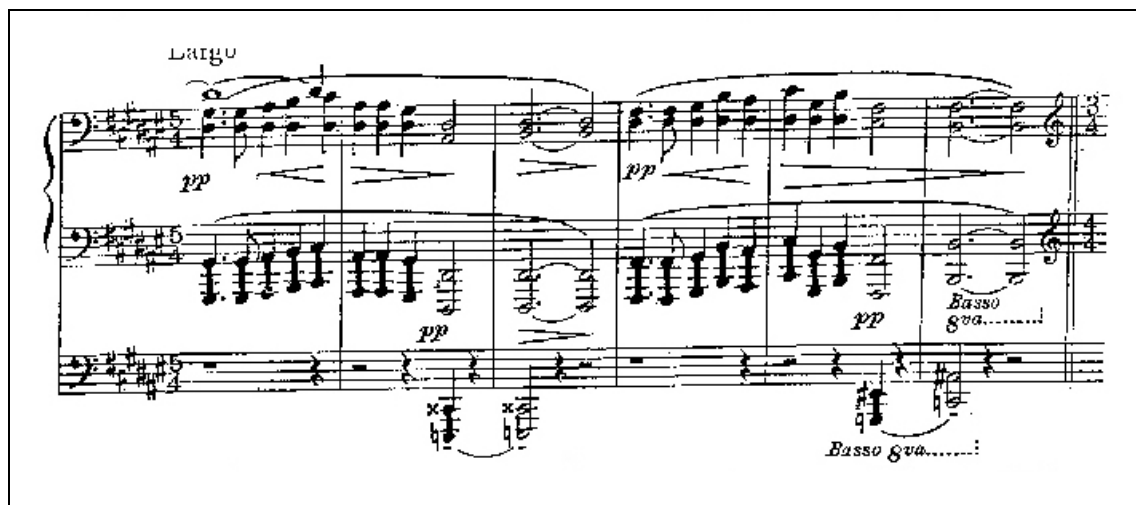
Example 21. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 80-84.

*Antinomy* concludes with a massive descending scale that covers all eighty-eight keys of the piano, as the two-arm clusters move from the highest to the lowest note of the piano. This reminds the listener of the virtuosity of Liszt in works such as his *Transcendental Studies* (Example 22).

Example 22. Encore 4. *Antinomy*, bars 88-90.

## 9. Releasing Inner Notes of Clusters

From bars 20-25 in *The Hero Sun*, left-hand octave clusters accompany a soft chordal melody, where the top notes of the chordal melody double the outer notes of the clusters (Example 23). Then Cowell uses a cluster technique not found in earlier pieces. Clusters in the lowest stave (also played with the left hand) consist of the chromatic notes that fit within the octaves written on the middle stave. To emphasise the octaves, the cluster notes within the octaves are then released a crotchet earlier than the octaves, so that only the octaves remain sounding. This technique is also used in bars 15-18 in *The Voice of Lir*.



Example 23. *The Hero Sun*, bars 20-25.

## 10. Clusters Played After the Outer Notes of Clusters

*Piece for Piano with Strings* (Example 24) contains clusters similar to those in *The Hero Sun* but rather than releasing the inner notes of the clusters here, the outer tones are played, then the clusters are played a quaver beat later. From bars 9-10, the



right hand plays perfect fifth dyads, followed by their respective hand clusters. These are heard again in bars 19-20.

Example 24. *Piece for Piano with Strings*, bars 8-11.

### 11. Adding Notes of a Cluster One by One

*Advertisement* begins with a cluster-chord introduction written on four staves and marked without pedal, in which each note is sounded and then sustained to form a perfect fifth cluster, G-D (Example 25). Then, notes are released one by one, leaving the G and Ab sustained. The tempo is *Moderato*, so once the notes have been released, the last notes G and Ab can still be heard. This technique is not useful at a slow tempo because once the process of adding and then releasing the notes has been completed, the last two notes would either sound extremely weak or not at all. This technique is not mentioned in *NMR*, but was used again in *The Hero Sun* in the introduction and throughout the second *Allegro con brio* section (bars 26-41).

Example 25. Encore 3. *Advertisement*, bars 1-3.

## 12. Hand Clusters Played on Strings

A fascinating piano work, *Piece for Piano with Strings* not only explores clusters but was also the first work to notate the plucking and strumming of the piano strings.<sup>19</sup> Figures 1-11, which do not occur in the score in numerical order, instruct the performer how passages should be realised. These are:

1. Run over the strings with the pads of the fingers from A to Bb of the following measure
2. Gently place the hands on the strings without creating vibration
3. Strike the strings gently with the palm
4. Play on the strings
5. Play with the fingertips
6. Pluck the strings with the pad of the finger
7. Play on the strings
8. Play on the keyboard
9. Play on the strings
10. Play with the pad of the finger
11. Place the hand silently, no sound to be heard<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Hicks, *Bohemian*, 111.

From the beginning of this work Cowell utilises a variety of cluster techniques. It is not until bar 51 that Cowell introduces the method of striking the piano strings (Example 26), a technique not mentioned in *NMR*. Apart from a single-note melody and the harp-like glissandi, the string-piano techniques used in this work are essentially clusters played on the strings. Figure (4) from the above instructions appears at the beginning of bar 51, instructing the performer to prepare for playing only the material on the lowest stave on the strings. Sustained right-hand clusters are sounded and at (1) the right hand moves to the inside of the piano to strum its first glissando with the pads of the fingers, starting from the lowest A in the bass to the Bb just over two octaves higher. The pedal is used to hold the sounds of the previous sustained cluster, but more importantly to keep the dampers raised so that the strings will sound. Then at bar 52, marked *sans Ped* and on the bottom stave (2), the right hand is placed silently on the strings between all the notes which form a cluster, while the left hand plays clusters in the middle stave, sounding the overtones from the silently depressed cluster. The left hand clusters are then repeated but played with the palms of the right hand directly onto the strings (3). Bar 54 begins with the silently pressed cluster now strummed (7). Then another glissando played with the fingertips (5) is played while the pedal continues to hold plucked notes (6). This section of playing on the strings is short, consisting of only four bars (bars 51-55). At bar 56, a pause allows the performer time to return to playing the keyboard (8). The next nineteen bars consist of clusters, fist-clusters, chords and some virtuosic playing on the keyboard. At bar 74 the performer is instructed to play the next bar on the strings (9). From bar 75, the string-piano technique returns to complete the work, using the same techniques as those executed in bars 51-55.

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<sup>20</sup> Cowell, *Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, 51-52.

Example 26. *Piece for Piano with Strings*, bars 51-58.

Cowell's works employing clusters are all miniatures, ranging from one minute to approximately four minutes in duration. It is clear that in these earlier works, Cowell was either not skilled in developing larger cluster or string-piano works, or development of these were limited. However, most of these works are programmatic, one little picturesque idea for each piece. Perhaps also, these were merely works which demonstrated Cowell's theories as influenced by his teacher Seeger and expounded in *NMR*.

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There are other techniques from *NMR* that Cowell used in only a few of his piano works played in 1923. The chapter "Dissonant Counterpoint" discusses firstly how harmony had arisen from counterpoint and that over the course of history, counterpoint like harmony, became more complex by making use of the intervals between the higher tones of the overtone series. The difference, however, was that the developments in harmony continued, but developments in counterpoint stopped after

Bach. Cowell argued that the development of harmony has led to dissonances being considered consonant and that if the development of counterpoint had not ceased, it would have inevitably progressed in the same manner as harmony.<sup>21</sup> Cowell used this theory to justify the validity of this argument that dissonant counterpoint is a natural development in music.

There are various examples of dissonant counterpoint in the piano works performed in Europe. The most obvious is *Fabric*, which consists of three parts, the alto being the principal melody. *Fabric* also uses a new notational system to accommodate the complex rhythm of the dissonant counterpoint, which will be discussed below. The harmonic intervals between the parts are 'dissonant' throughout most of the work. Firstly the bass in each bar consists of an ascending major or minor triad, followed by a descending diminished triad, which is approached by a leading-note (Example 27). The alto and soprano parts consist of independent chromatic melodies. The intervals between the two parts consist predominantly of 2nds/7ths, which are sometimes displaced over an octave, and augmented and diminished intervals. The intervals between the bass and alto and the bass and soprano, consists mostly of 2nds/7ths and augmented intervals. Likewise, the chords as a whole are predominantly made up of 2nds/7ths and augmented intervals (as marked on Example 27).

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<sup>21</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 35-37, 38-39.

Andante

*Principal melody in Alto*

*mf*

S+A

M7 P5 A5 Mb A4

mb

P8 D7 7 P5 M3 P4

m9

P5 P8 M7 M3 m2 P8 M7 M2 M7 A8 M2 m3

m2 D4 m3 D4 M7 M2 m3 P4 M2 m3 b

A2 M4 M7 M3 A2 M3 P5 M6 m7

A+B

b b m2 D4 P4 D4 m3 D5 m6 D7

S+A

A2

P8 M3 m3 P4 M3 Mb mb

M7 P5 A4 P4 M3

P8

7

S+B

m3 m6 A2 M3 M2 P4 M3 A4 P4 D5

A3 M7 P5 A6 A6 M7 m7 M7 A6 M7

A+B

D5 m3 m6 P5 P8 m7 M6 P8 M2 M6 m7

A2 A3 M7 P8 A2 M3 P4 A4 P5

Example 27. *Fabric*, bars 1-4.

The fifth *Ing*, *Wafting*, is another example of dissonant counterpoint, containing at least four individual parts (Example 28). The main patterns created are that the parts move chromatically and stepwise and the harmonies are made up of major/minor 2nds and 7ths, sharpened octaves, augmented and diminished intervals. For example, note the patterns between the 2nd and 4th parts (as marked on Example 28).

Example 28. *Wafting*, bars 1-3.

Unlike Bach, Cowell treated dissonances in the same way as consonances; therefore dissonances no longer create tension and do not need to resolve. This treatment of dissonances was similar to that of progressive European composers like Schoenberg, Bartók, and members of Les Six, in that regardless of their own unique styles, they treated dissonances as equivalent to consonances. Cowell argued that the new treatment of dissonances was simply a natural development in music.

The second section of *NMR*, “Rhythm”, refers to elements in rhythm such as time and metre, and discusses the “relationship of rhythm to sound-vibration.”<sup>22</sup> Cowell argued that, like harmony and counterpoint, rhythm is related to the overtone series. His example shows how the fundamental tone C, over a course of one second, vibrates sixteen times (Example 29). The second note of the series C’ vibrates 32 times per second and so on. Therefore, the rate of vibration is a ratio of 2:1 (32:16), the simplest ratio. The point that Cowell made is that although the vibrations of the

<sup>22</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 46.

notes do not coincide within a second, they do at the start and end of a second. Therefore a pattern is created in which they begin vibrating at the same time, then separate and at the end of the second they coincide. This process continues while the tones are sounded.<sup>23</sup>

<i>Partial Series</i>	<i>Intervals</i>	<i>Tones</i>	<i>Relative Period of Vibration</i>	<i>Time</i>
5	Third	E	$\frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16}$	= 80
4	Fourth	C	$\frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16}$	= 64
3	Fifth	G	$\frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16}$	= 48
2	Octave	C	$\frac{1}{16} \mid \frac{1}{16}$	= 32
1	Fundamental	C	$\frac{1}{16}$	= 16

Example 29. Tones Relative Period of Vibration Time. Cowell, *NMR*, 47.

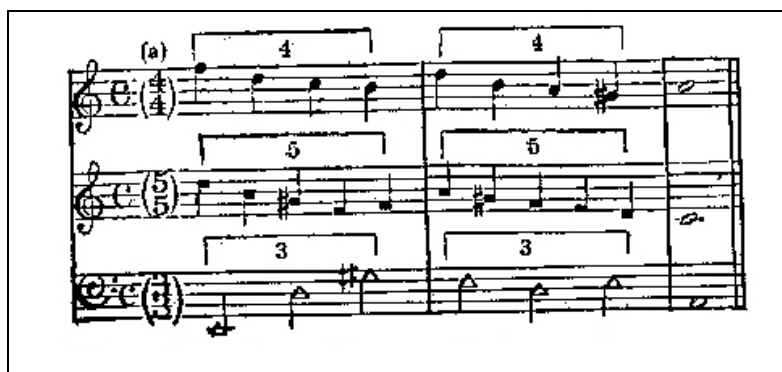
Similarly, it is possible to have different time-systems which begin and end at the same time, regardless of what happens within a bar.<sup>24</sup> Cowell superimposes 4/4, 5/5 and 3/3, demonstrating how different time-systems can begin and end together and that more complicated ratios like 4:5 and 7:4 can be used as well as 2:1. 5/5 and 3/3 are not conventional time signatures in Western notation. These were invented by Cowell in his new notational system, where exact time values can be notated and different time-systems used simultaneously as long as they begin and end at the same time. In the following example, Cowell uses quarter notes from what he called the whole note series in the top stave, and notes from what he calls fifth-note series (notated with square heads) in the middle and the third-note series (triangular heads) at the bottom (Example 30).<sup>25</sup> This creates a rhythmic ratio of 4:5:3. Cowell used this notational system in *Fabric*, which is written in 2/4 with the alto in the fifth-note series and the soprano in the sixth- or seventh-note series (Refer to Example 27). In bars 1, 3 and 4, the rhythmic ratio is 6:5:4 (i.e. there are 6 quaver pulses in the soprano, 5 in the alto and 4 in the bass). In the second bar the rhythmic ratio is 7:5:4.

<sup>23</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 47

<sup>24</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 51.

<sup>25</sup> For details regarding the notational system refer to Appendix D.





Example 30. Simultaneous Use of Different Time-Systems. Cowell, *NMR*, 52.

Although Cowell applies this new notational system in *Fabric*, these fifth and third notes can easily be notated with conventional note heads. The five square notes could simply be notated as five quintuplet crotchets and the three triangular notes as a minim triplet. Cowell's new notation makes reading the music more difficult; therefore it is not surprising that no-one else has used this new system. Most of the audiences and critics in 1923 would not have seen the score to *Fabric*, they would not even have been aware that this work was written using a new notational system, only that the work contained complex polyrhythms.

Similarly, Cowell believed that metrical change and combination of metres can be used simultaneously with independent melodies. They must at least begin at the same time and end at the same time, as in the following example in which the top figure begins with three beats then changes to two, while the bottom figure has two beats and then three:

| xxx | xx |  
 | xx | xxx |<sup>26</sup>

An example of Cowell's use of this is in *Exultation*, which uses simultaneous time signatures (Example 31). The bottom stave (bass), consisting of arm-clusters, is in

3/4, while the melody in the top stave (treble) begins in 4/4, continually alternating with 5/4. Not once do the two staves share the same time signature, and the first beats of the bar in each stave only occasionally coincide. This continues until the end of the section on the fourth stave, where the treble plays clusters in 3/4 time and a new melody is now in the bass, although it remains in 4/4. By the end of the second page, the bass returns to 3/4 while the treble alternates between C and 5/4, and so on. Aurally, this continual change of metres makes it sound disjointed, with the two parts continually out of sync.

Example 31. *Exultation*, first and second systems.

Another example is in the second Allegro con brio section of *The Hero Sun*. 3/4 and 4/4 are superimposed and every three bars, the first beats of each part coincide (Example 32). The last section of the Allegro con brio has the top stave alternating between 4/4, 3/4 and 2/4, while the bottom stave changes from 3/4 to 4/4. Eventually both parts coincide and finish in 2/4. In order to create this disjointed effect, Cowell wrote very different and clearly articulated rhythms in each hand.

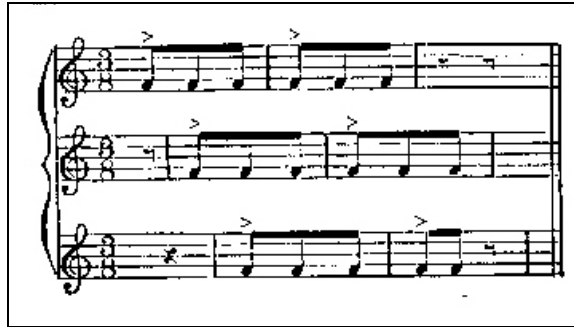
<sup>26</sup> Cowell, *NMR*, 71.

A musical score for a piano piece in 3/8 time. The score consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with many beamed eighth notes and rests, marked with a dynamic of *ff* and a tempo marking of *8va*. The lower staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, also marked with *ff*.

A musical score for the second and last sections of a piano piece in 3/8 time. The score consists of two staves. The upper staff is marked *Allegro con brio* and *ff*. It features a melodic line with beamed eighth notes, marked with a dynamic of *ff* and a tempo marking of *8va*. The lower staff provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, marked with *ff*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *rit e cresc.* and *molto rall*, and a final *fff* marking. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Example 32. *The Hero Sun*, Allegro con brio - second section & last section.

Cowell also demonstrated in *NMR* the use of the same time signature but with individual parts commencing on different beats (Example 33). In 3/8 time, all staves begin at the same time but each staff begins on a different quaver beat, so that the barlines do not align.



Example 33. Commencing on Different Beats. Cowell, *NMR*, 72.

The only piano work from the European tour to use this device is the second *Ing, Frisking*. Although both staves are in 3/8 time, the treble begins on the second quaver beat, while the bass begins on the third (Example 34). The second section continues in the same manner (Example 35). This creates a counterpoint of rhythms, where one part is rhythmically independent of the other.

Example 34. *Frisking*, first system.<sup>27</sup>

Example 35. *Frisking*, third system.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cowell, *Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, 8.

Cowell's ideas on rhythm can be compared to his ideas on dissonant counterpoint. He justified the use of dissonances as the natural direction in which the development of music was going. Dissonances were treated the same way as consonances and intervals like seconds, sevenths, ninths, diminished and augmented intervals and so on could be used freely. Since counterpoint is a series of independent melodies which are often made up of different rhythms and melodic pitch patterns, the same idea can apply to aspects of rhythm and metre. The use of simultaneous time systems, the changing and combination of metres and starting systems on different beats create more musical possibilities.

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The impact Cowell had made in Europe with his music in 1923 is evident from not only the reviews and reception he received, but also from an examination of his pianistic devices. Compared to the recitals of standard repertoire and some contemporary music, Cowell created a spectacle, especially with his cluster works and his *Piece for Piano with Strings*, heard in London and Paris. It is not at all surprising that he received the attention he did and his recital was considered by Weissmann as the highlight of the Berlin season. Many of the techniques discussed in *NMR* and used in the compositions played in Europe were innovative and unheard of in Europe. The various types of hand and arm clusters Cowell used, his experiments with dissonant counterpoint, metrical change and combination of metres, as well as the technique of parts beginning at the same time but on different beats, were the basis of his unique style of composition. Although the techniques used in the piano works occupied only a small part of the innovative musical ideas in *NMR*, they were enough to receive much attention from audiences, critics and some progressive European composers, and launch Cowell's international career as a composer-pianist.

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<sup>28</sup> Cowell, *Piano Music of Henry Cowell*, 9.

## Chapter 6. Cowell After His European Tour

The first significant impact Europe had on Cowell was that, due to his success there, he began to gain respect as a composer and performer in his homeland. His reputation had changed dramatically when he returned to the United States in 1924. Most importantly, his music was receiving positive recognition. Europe's reaction to Cowell's music gave him exposure that would ultimately allow him to promote not only new music in his own country but also new music from around the world.

The years immediately after the 1923 tour were full of activities inspired by it. After his Carnegie Hall recital in New York, he gave performances in other cities like Chicago and San Francisco. He gave performances throughout America inciting rapturous comments such as: Cowell is "an example of how a world ignores genius but once that genius becomes a success, bows down in admiration."<sup>1</sup> However, according to Manion, articles about Cowell and his performances ceased between August 1924 and February 1925, which may indicate that he performed little, if at all, and was now using his popularity to publicise modern music.<sup>2</sup> During the same period, Cowell wrote only two articles, "Modernism Needs No Excuses, Says Cowell" and "America Takes a Front Rank in Year's Modernist Output."<sup>3</sup> This indicates the start of his process of promoting new music that eventually led to the founding of his New Music Society in the summer of 1925. He also composed prolifically, writing forty-five works between 1924 and 1925, although some were incomplete. These were mainly solo piano and chamber works and included his famous string-piano work *The Banshee* (1925) and other cluster and string-piano pieces.<sup>4</sup>

Cowell's attentions were particularly directed to the dissemination of new music and support for composers, inspired by what he had seen in Europe. Contemporary music societies such as Melos and ISCM provided good models. In the USA, the only similar organisations were based on the east coast in New York; these were the International Composers League and the League of Composers. On

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ben. D. Wood in Rose A. Glavinovich, "Rough places confront genius in pursuit of beckoning star," *Oakland Tribune Magazine* 31 Aug. 1924: 10-11. Cited in Manion, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Manion, 5, 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Musical America*, XLI/13 (17 Jan. 1925): 9 & *Musical America*, XLI/23 (28 March 1925): 5, 35. Cited in Saylor, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Lichtenwanger, 95-109.

the west coast, such organisations did not exist. It is not clear when Cowell decided to form his own society and who, if anyone, helped him to organise it at the start. However, by the summer of 1925, the New Music Society was founded to publicise and create more opportunities on the west coast for composers and their music.<sup>5</sup> The original board and committee members were largely friends or colleagues, and consisted of Cowell as Organiser, and Winifred Hooke as Treasurer. The Resident Cooperating Committee in Los Angeles consisted of Bliss, Henry Eichheim and Rudhyar. The Non-resident Advisory Board consisted of Goossens, Ruggles, Salzedo and Varèse.<sup>6</sup>

NMS's aim as presented on its flyer for its first concert was "[t]o present musical works embodying the most progressive tendencies of this age, and disseminate the new musical ideas."<sup>7</sup> Although Cowell and many of his colleagues were ultra-modern composers, Mead suggested that the term 'ultra-modern' might have been omitted from the flyer because the word was too restrictive or there might have been some concern that the word would not attract audiences.<sup>8</sup> 'Ultra-modern' composers experimented with new ideas and were mostly considered too outrageous. Not all music performed by the NMS was 'ultra-modern.' To entice audiences, music by well-known contemporary composers was included alongside works by younger and/or avant-garde composers. The first concert by NMS was given at 8:15 on 22 October 1925 at the ballroom of the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. Works performed included Milhaud's *Sonate for two violins and piano*, Ruggles's *Angels* for two violins, violas and cellos, Varèse's *Octandre*, an improvisation by Feodor Kolin, Ornstein's *Musings of a Piano*, Schoenberg's *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke* Op. 19 and Rudhyar's *The Surge of Fire*.<sup>9</sup> Kuhnle played one of the three pianos for Rudhyar's work and also played the Schoenberg and Ornstein.<sup>10</sup> Milhaud's work and the improvisation by Kolin were really a ploy to attract people to the event and the society. Milhaud's popularity and Kolin's reputation for putting on a spectacle may explain these choices.<sup>11</sup> Critics from unidentified newspapers cited in Mead were

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<sup>5</sup> Mead, "Henry Cowell's New Music, 1925-1936," 16, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Mead, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Mead, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Mead, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Mead, 37 & "Cowell forms society to give modern works," *Los Angeles Evening Express* 22 August 1925. Cited in Manion, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Mead, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Mead, 77.

mostly not impressed with the music. As expected, Milhaud's work received the most attention and was praised as being "almost celestial in effect."<sup>12</sup> However Kolin's improvisation was not well liked and described as "dervish-mad."<sup>13</sup> Praise instead was given to the orchestra and conductor, Adolph Tandler, crediting him and the orchestra with being brave due to the difficulty of the repertoire.<sup>14</sup> Funding was mostly provided by an oil heiress named Aline Barnsdall, but after hearing the music, she decided against providing any further assistance.<sup>15</sup>

A month after this first NMS concert, Cowell embarked on another tour beginning with Montreal then New York, and between March and August 1926 he performed in Europe. Cities included were Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Venice, Paris and London. Following his tour, Cowell was back in California, where he gave the first of his many lectures on contemporary music in Carmel and San Francisco. The second NMS concert did not take place until 20 November 1926, thirteen months after the first, at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles.<sup>16</sup> The long gap between concerts reveals Cowell was the main force behind the Society; while he was touring, the Society "had lain dormant."<sup>17</sup> After all, the Society was his idea; it was in its early stages and still evolving. The works performed were Milhaud's String Quartet in A minor, Ruggles's *Angels* ("repeated by request" from the first concert)<sup>18</sup> and "Lilacs" (the second movement of *Men and Mountains*), Cowell's String Quartet (1915), Alfredo Casella's Five Pieces for String Quartet, Schoenberg's *Fünf Klavierstücke* Op. 23, Rudhyar's *Moments* for piano and lastly Cowell's own string-piano piece *The Sleep Music of the Dagna* (18 Oct. 1926), *The Trumpet of Angus Og* for piano (1924) and *The Snows of Fuji-Yama* for piano (1924). The piano pieces by Rudhyar and Cowell were performed by the composers themselves.<sup>19</sup> Since Cowell had finished *The Sleep Music of the Dogma* only a month before the concert, he may have written it specifically for this concert, as he had done with the *Piece for Piano*

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<sup>12</sup> Carl Bronson, "Musical Club Program is Discussed," [Unidentified newspaper] 23 Oct. 1925. Kuhnle Collection. Cited in Mead, 41-42.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Brown, "New Music Sounds Like Traffic Jam," *Los Angeles Record* 23 Oct. 1925. Cited in Mead, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Pearson, "Ultra Modern in Music Applauded at Recital Here," *Illustrated Daily News* 23 Oct. 1925. Cited in Mead, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Note by Cowell, New Music Collection, NYPL. Cited in Mead, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Isabel Morse Jones, "Musical/Introducing the New," *Los Angeles Sunday Times* 28 Nov. 1926: 24. Cited in Manion, 74-75.

<sup>17</sup> Mead, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Concert programme. Cited in Mead, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Mead, 52-53.



with *Strings* for his London début in 1923. Critic Bruno David Ussher was not impressed with the repertoire, stating that Schoenberg was “incoherent,” Cowell “witless” and Ruggles “grating.” Nevertheless, he wrote that the NMS was an “important and sincere movement ... I wish there would be a financial backing of more than one concert a season.”<sup>20</sup> This concert was funded by the distinguished patrons listed on the programme. These included Blanche Walton, Mrs Thompson Buchanan, whose husband was a well-known playwright and critic, and an editor for Goldwyn pictures, Mrs William de Mille, whose husband was a producer/director and the brother of famed director Cecil B. de Mille, and Mrs H. W. Rothwell, wife of the well-known conductor.<sup>21</sup>

Since Barnsdall had discontinued funding NMS, Cowell decided to move the NMS to San Francisco in the summer of 1927. San Francisco was Cowell’s home town and his father and his friends were there. However, his decision to move to San Francisco was perhaps further motivated by the city’s more established musical and cultural life, despite the fact that like, Los Angeles, concerts given were often conservative.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Cowell was regarded as a celebrity in his home town, and audiences in San Francisco lauded celebrities, “even those as radical as Cowell.”<sup>23</sup> The local newspaper’s headline read “Cowell Back, World Famed Composer.”<sup>24</sup>

Soon after moving to San Francisco, NMS released its first publication of the *New Music Quarterly*, which was inspired by the music journals in Europe that published new works, such as *Melos* (Berlin), *Musikblätter des Anbruch* (Vienna), *Le Courrier Musical* (Paris) and, to a lesser extent, *Musical Times* (London). *New Musical Quarterly* was created as a partner to NMS, and shared the same aims as the society concerts. Cowell realised the importance of such a publication in America because composers faced difficulty in getting their avant-garde music published by commercial music publishers.<sup>25</sup> According to Harry Cowell’s third wife, Olive,

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<sup>20</sup> “Reviewer is Filled with Stimulation and Self-Pity after New Society’s Bill,” *Los Angeles Evening Express* 22 Nov. 1925. Cited in Mead, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Mead, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Mead, 54.

<sup>23</sup> Mead, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Harry C. Donoho, “Cowell Back, World Famed Composer,” *San Francisco Call* 29 July 1927. Cited in Mead, 54.

<sup>25</sup> “All-music magazine to appear in S. F.,” *San Francisco Chronicle* 28 May 1927 & John J. Becker, “New musical magazine aids modern movement,” *South Bend News Times* 16 Oct. 1927. Cited in Manion, 75.

Henry first spoke of circulating a music journal in 1926, when the Cowells were returning from a camping trip.<sup>26</sup> In July 1927, Cowell finally met Charles Ives, who became the single largest financial patron of the NMS and *NMQ*.<sup>27</sup> The first issue of *NMQ* was published in October 1927 containing Ruggles's *Men and Mountains*.<sup>28</sup> *NMQ* usually published one work, often music played at the society concerts. In this instance, "Lilacs" (second movement of *Men and Mountains*) had been played in 1926 in Los Angeles and was also scheduled as part of the first society concert in San Francisco.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1927 and 1935, NMS and *NMQ* offered nine seasons of concerts and publications of avant-garde music. Concert programmes and the publications of music were ultimately decided by Cowell.<sup>30</sup> The first NMS concert in San Francisco and the first of the season was on 25 October 1927 at the Community Playhouse at 8:30. Works performed were Schoenberg's *Bläserquintett* Op. 26, Ruggles's *Angels* and "Lilacs" and Varèse's *Octandre*.<sup>31</sup> Other than the Schoenberg, the other works had been played in the first and/or second concerts of the NMS in Los Angeles.

The first recitals of 1928 were separate performances by pianists Imre Weissshaus and Winifred Hooke. The former performed his own works as well as pieces by Bartók, Kodály and Pál Kadosa. Hooke performed music by Ravel, Debussy, Berners, Bloch, Cowell, Kodály and Bartók, most of which was not at all 'ultra-modern'.<sup>32</sup> NMS concerts often included more conventional or accessible music to attract critics and audiences and coax them into listening to the ultra-modern music programmed alongside. Whether the critics and audiences understood the music did not matter, because they were soon enthralled with all the sensationalism.<sup>33</sup> One critic described the music played by Hooke as "epoch-making."<sup>34</sup> The second issue of *NMQ* (January 1928) published Rudhyar's three orchestral pieces *Paeans*, the third (April 1928) contained Weissshaus's *Six Pieces for Solo Voice* and Ornstein's

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<sup>26</sup> Undated interview with Mead and Olive Thompson Cowell, Harry Cowell's third wife. Cited in Hicks, *Bohemian*, 122.

<sup>27</sup> Swafford, 368.

<sup>28</sup> Mead, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Mead, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Mead, 83.

<sup>31</sup> Mead, 78-80.

<sup>32</sup> Mead, 84-85.

<sup>33</sup> Mead, 85.

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Fried, "Miss Hooke Heard in Piano Recital," *San Francisco Chronicle* 1 Jan. 1928. Cited in Mead, 85.

song *The Corpse*, while the fourth issue of *NMQ* (July 1928) comprised Carlos Chávez's *Sonatina* for violin and piano.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout the second to ninth seasons, NMS and *NMQ* continued with an impressive line of new avant-garde works. New Music's activities extended with the inclusion of the New Orchestra Series (1932-39) and the *New Musical Quarterly Recordings* (1934-49).<sup>36</sup> The members of NMS were mainly residents of San Francisco, while subscribers to the quarterly resided throughout America and Europe. There were fifty-six society members who paid a membership fee of \$5, another 353 subscribers to *NMQ* at \$2 a subscription, as well as patrons who continually donated larger amounts,<sup>37</sup> the largest of whom was Ives. Cowell himself did not make any income from his work from NMS, since it barely made any profits. Despite the funding it received from various patrons, productions of concerts and scores were extremely expensive. All monies went towards production costs, and without Ives, New Music would not have been able to exist.

Many works performed, published and/or recorded by New Music were by Americans. Most of these were Cowell's friends and colleagues, and also members of the NMS and subscribers to *NMQ* and *NMQR*. Composers/musicians such as Ruggles, Rudhyar, Weiss, Crawford, Ives, Becker, Ray Green and Riegger had works performed, published and/or recorded several times and were members and subscribers. Other composers/musicians such as Slonimsky, Ornstein, Varèse, Gerald Strang, Robert Mills Delaney, Arthur Hardcastle, Walter Piston, Paul Creston, Salzedo and Ernest Bloch were represented by the society at least once and were likewise members and subscribers. Central American composer Chávez had his music performed and/or published by NMS and was also a member and subscriber and worked closely with Cowell. Foreign music represented in NMS was mainly by leading European figures and was significantly less prominent than American music. European composers/musicians performed and/or published by NM included Goossens, Bliss, KreĚek, Malipiero, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Berg, Webern, Bartók, Milhaud, Poulenc, Honnegger and Hindemith. Some of these became resident in the USA, especially from 1933 onwards. This list reveals that in some way, most of the

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<sup>35</sup> Mead, 86, 90, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Mead, second to ninth seasons. For complete details of New Music Society concerts and *New Musical Quarterly* publications refer to Appendices II – V in Rita Mead's *Henry Cowell's New Music 1925-1936*. The following persons listed as members and subscribers are from Mead, 65-69.

<sup>37</sup> Mead, 65-66 & Hicks, 122.

music presented belonged to composers/musicians that were associated with Cowell and NM, or whose music he personally liked.

Occasionally Cowell had music performed or published for publicity, regardless of whether he liked the music or not. In July 1929, he published Copland's song, *As It Fell upon a Day*, probably because of Copland's increasing popularity rather than Cowell's opinion of it.<sup>38</sup> Similarly Cowell published Antheil's *Airplane Sonata* in the April 1931 issue of *NMQ*, presumably due to Antheil's highly publicised, sellout concerts which caused riots. Mead wrote that Cowell was

perhaps motivated by a desire to capitalize on Antheil's notoriety rather than by a particular preference for his music. When Cowell compiled his book on American composers, he commented about Antheil in a lengthy passage, but did not include a chapter on him. Cowell's chief complaint, as it was with other critics, was against Antheil's opportunism, "discovering very quickly what the latest trend is, and imitating it immediately, exaggerating it if possible." Cowell also thought of Antheil as being more European than American, living in Paris and being "much with Stravinsky."<sup>39</sup>

After the ninth season in 1936, *NMQ* continued for another twenty-two years even though the NMS concerts did not. Since Cowell directed most of the concerts over the years, his arrest and imprisonment that year brought the concerts to a halt.<sup>40</sup> Gerald Strang, who had occasionally proofread for *NMQ* and had his work, *Mirrorrorrim*, published in the quarterly (July 1932),<sup>41</sup> took over the running of both NMS and *NMQ* when Cowell went to prison. However, he felt that he always had to consider Cowell because the Society "was simply a personal enterprise of Henry's that nobody had any interest in except Henry ... As far as business was concerned there was no one to sign a check or enter into a contract except Henry."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mead, 120.

<sup>39</sup> Mead, 156, citing Cowell, "Trends in American Music," *American Composers on American Musicians*, 6-8.

<sup>40</sup> Mead, 357.

<sup>41</sup> Mead, 203, 586.

<sup>42</sup> Undated interview with Strang. Mead, 363.

Since no-one knew how long he would be in prison, Cowell decided to sell New Music and everything associated with it to Strang and on 1 October 1937, New Music was officially sold for one dollar.<sup>43</sup> Between 1936 and 1940, works published in *NMQ* included music by Siegmeister, Chávez, Conlon Nancarrow, Lou Harrison, and by two Chileans, Domingo Santa Cruz and Armando Carvajal.<sup>44</sup> When Cowell was released in 1940, he again took over from Strang and in October of that year, and Strang sold *NMQ* back to Cowell for one dollar.<sup>45</sup>

Only in January 1941 did *NMQ* make a profit for the first time and composers began to receive royalties of any profits made over a course of each year.<sup>46</sup> However, by 1945 Cowell was in his late forties and he needed to earn some money as well as re-establish his career, so he asked Lou Harrison to take over New Music, which Cowell believed would provide opportunities for a young composer like Harrison.<sup>47</sup> Other significant young American composers such as John Cage and Elliot Carter also joined NM in 1945, and other new names were published, including Richard Franko Goldman, Milton Babbitt, Christian Wolff, William Russell and Charles Wuorinen.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, Harrison became ill in 1946 and in 1951 NM was handed over to composer and teacher Frank Wigglesworth who discovered it to be a “corporate mess.”<sup>49</sup> In 1954, dissatisfied composers like Ruggles and Cage left NM. Charles Ives died, cutting off the main source of finance, and memberships and subscriptions to *NMQ* began to drop significantly.<sup>50</sup> By June 1958, NM was in debt and was therefore taken over by the Theodore Presser Company.<sup>51</sup>

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While Cowell’s successful 1923 tour of Europe influenced the New Music Society, it is also important to note how the tour influenced his own career. Although Cowell spent much time with the NMS, he continued touring America as well as touring Europe in 1926, 1929 and 1931. When Cowell performed in London in 1929, a Russian consul invited Cowell to Russia for five weeks, as his music would appeal

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<sup>43</sup> Mead, 355-56.

<sup>44</sup> Mead, 364.

<sup>45</sup> Mead, 366.

<sup>46</sup> Mead, 367.

<sup>47</sup> Mead, 369.

<sup>48</sup> Mead, 588-92.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Vladimir Ussachevsky to Elliot Carter, 11 January 1954. Cited in Mead, 374.

<sup>50</sup> Mead, 375.

<sup>51</sup> Mead, 377.

to the Russian avant-garde movement of the 1920s. When he performed for students at a Moscow conservatory, they were so excited about his music that he eventually played all his piano compositions at least three times over, while the Soviet State Publishing House published Cowell's piano pieces, *Lilt of the Reel* (1928) and *Tiger* (1928-29) in May 1930. However in the midst of the Stalinist crackdown, a scheduled concert by Cowell was cancelled due to the Russian government's Cultural Relations Society's indifference towards him. Cowell's music was too radical for the newly conservative Bolshevik musical culture with which he was confronted.<sup>52</sup>

In 1930 Cowell began teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York. This school, originally founded in 1919, provided courses on contemporary issues. Given Cowell's profile, he was asked to lecture on progressive new music. Over the next few years he taught courses such as "Contemporary American Music," "Creative Music in the Americas," "Appreciation of Modern Music," and "Workshop in Modern Music."<sup>53</sup> Cowell also gave lectures on non-Western music such as "Primitive and Folk Origins of Music" and "Music of the Peoples of the World, discussing various types of world music unknown in America."<sup>54</sup> This interest in non-Western music began from his earlier childhood experiences in the Oriental district of San Francisco and led to his receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship to study ethnomusicology at the University of Berlin in 1931. Throughout Cowell's life, he wrote prolifically, covering many different subjects on music. Many of these were articles or reviews and, in the 1930s alone, Saylor lists fifty-one published items, Cowell's entire output of articles and reviews being 197.<sup>55</sup>

In December 1935 Cowell's *Mosaic Quartet* (1935) was presented as part of a series of concerts given at the Composers Forum in New York. In January 1936 the Musical Art Quartet gave its première in the New York Town Hall, a major concert hall.<sup>56</sup> The performance directions read: "The five movements of the *Mosaic Quartet* may be played in any desired order...,"<sup>57</sup> an early example of the flexible form used later in much of Cage's music and many other works, such as Stockhausen's

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<sup>52</sup> Hicks, 117-18 & Lichtenwanger, 126-27.

<sup>53</sup> Hicks, 125-26.

<sup>54</sup> Carwithen, 201-02.

<sup>55</sup> Saylor, 6-14.

<sup>56</sup> "Cowell music played," *New York Times* 12 Dec. 1935: 32, col. 6 & Francis D. Perkins, "Cowell's work on concert list of Art Quartet," *New York Herald Tribune* 15 Jan. 1936: 15, col. 3. Cited in Manion, 216-17.

<sup>57</sup> *Mosaic Quartet* (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1965). Cited in Lichtenwanger, 147-48.

*Klavierstück XI*. Despite this novel idea, Cowell's Quartet received mixed reactions; the critic Chotzinoff was bored, while Perkins thought that despite Cowell's use of radical harmonies, "on the whole the impression made by the quartet was one of relative conservatism."<sup>58</sup> It seems that overall the critics were no longer shocked by his ideas and rather than being outraged, they wrote about him because he was highly regarded. One critic commented on a concert given by Cowell on 10 May 1935, in regard to his cluster and string-piano techniques:

Some profess to see in this strange music and the disturbing method of its production something intrinsically and uniquely beautiful. I must add my voice to such testimony, for I think that Henry Cowell belongs to that class of independent thinkers which has given the world its great things. He is an inventor, if not a genius.<sup>59</sup>

Cowell's imprisonment in 1936 was a major disruption to his life and career. However, in prison Cowell became the bandmaster for the San Quentin Education Department. He also took on other various roles, such as teaching music theory and arranging music for prison and external ensembles. He continued to compose, and wrote journal articles as well as another unpublished treatise similar to *NMR*, "The Nature of Melody." In prison Cowell composed works, many of them inspired by various non-Western musical styles. He wrote a band suite called *How They Take It: Piano Moods* (1936) using different non-Western music, depicting the many cultures within the prison population. It was hugely successful both in and out of the prison.<sup>60</sup> The *Palo Alto Times* wrote that this work was likely to be "the new composition [which] will become the sensation of the coming symphony season."<sup>61</sup> Another example of Cowell's use of non-western musical inspiration is *Dance Forms* (1936) for three melody instruments and two percussion performers. The percussion instruments included five Korean dragonmouths, four Chinese woodblocks, three

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Chotzinoff, "Musical Art Quartet heard at Town Hall," *New York Post* 15 Jan. 1936 & Perkins, "Cowell's work." Cited in Manion, 216-17.

<sup>59</sup> Homer Henley, "After beats," *Musical West* May 1935. Cited in Manion, 215.

<sup>60</sup> Hicks, 137-39. Lichtenwanger, 149.

<sup>61</sup> "Henry Cowell composes music portraying prison life moods," *Palo Alto Times* 31 October 1936: 1, col. 4. Cited in Manion, 219.

Chinese tom-toms and three stopped gongs.<sup>62</sup> He also composed *Rhythmicana* (1938) for piano, which experimented with rhythmic ratios like those in *Fabric*; like many of his works, it was not published until many years later.<sup>63</sup>

When Cowell was released in 1940, he had to rebuild his career and was able to resume a busy though somewhat more subdued, career. From his release until his death in 1965, he wrote over 350 compositions. Many of these demonstrate that Cowell was not preoccupied with experimentation any longer. He wrote easy compositions for children, larger scale compositions such as the Symphonies Nos 3-20 (1942-1965), a three act opera *O'Higgins of Chile* (1949), an oratorio *The Creator* (1963) and his collection of eighteen *Hymn and Fuguing Tunes* (1944-1964), each composition consisting of different instrumental combinations,<sup>64</sup> like Hindemith's *Kammermusik* series.

Cowell returned to teaching at the New School for Social Research until 1964, and also held teaching positions at various institutions, some of which included Columbia University (1950-55), the Peabody Institute (1952-56) and the Eastman School of Music (1962-63).<sup>65</sup> In 1954 Stanford University invited Cowell to give a series of concerts of his piano and chamber works and two lectures titled "The Autobiography of a Composer" and "Music of the World's Peoples." In the reviews of this six-day event, it is interesting to note that, as Henley indicated in his 1935 review of Cowell's piano techniques, Cowell's experimental music had become accepted and his music was considered important to American musical history and development. The *San Francisco Chronicle* critic wrote:

Cowell's experiments, which seemed so iconoclastic not very long ago, have entered the general stream of the contemporary musical idiom ... Cowell's color experiments [on the piano] remain charming, evocative, and immensely exciting, and this fact, more than anything else, confirms their solid substance.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lichtenwanger, 148.

<sup>63</sup> Hicks, 139 & Lichtenwanger, 164-65.

<sup>64</sup> Hicks, 145-46 & Lichtenwanger, 193, 198, 308, 315.

<sup>65</sup> Hicks, 146-47 & Carwithen, 206-208.

<sup>66</sup> Alfred Frankenstein, "Henry Cowell piano concert at Stanford," *San Francisco Chronicle* 24 May 1954: 2, col. 5. Cited in Manion, 257.



Cowell's literary career extended to writing articles for the *Musical Quarterly* between 1948 to 1957, and in 1955, in conjunction with his wife, he published the biography *Charles Ives and his Music*. In 1961 President Kennedy made Cowell the unofficial ambassador of American music, and in 1962 he became the vice-president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.<sup>67</sup> Also in 1962, concerts were given in honour of his sixty-fifth birthday and his fiftieth year as a composer. The New York Public Library gave an exhibit celebrating his fifty-year career, the Louisville Orchestra released a recording of his Symphony No 15 and *American Composers on American Music* was republished in 1962 with a new forward by Cowell.<sup>68</sup> By the time of his death in 1965, Cowell was considered one of the most important American composers of the first half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>67</sup> Hicks, 148.

<sup>68</sup> "Concerts to honor Henry Cowell at 65," *New York Times* 3 Mar. 1962: 13, col. 2. Cited in Manion, 284. Henry Cowell, ed. *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium*, Rev. ed. Stanford, 1933; (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1962).

## Conclusion

Examining Henry Cowell's 1923 European tour has proved to be important as it was a crucial period in the development of his musical career which has hitherto been examined only briefly, and with little analysis of how it affected his career in the long term. His success in Europe established him as a unique performer and composer in both Europe and America, and his experiences of the musical culture there prompted him to devote himself to promoting American music with great enthusiasm and commitment.

The most notable feature of Cowell's life was its unconventionality. Both his parents lived a 'bohemian' existence, but what was especially unusual was that his mother Clara was an independent, confident and outspoken woman, who not only brought up her son on her own, but also educated him at home, becoming his primary influence. It is not surprising that he developed many of the same characteristics and that his music, as well as his life, was unconventional.

Cowell's tour of Europe with Richard Buhlig and Wesley Kuhnle was also in itself unusual. Most young American musicians went to Europe to further their studies. Cowell went there to showcase his own music. While Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London were markedly different and their responses to avant-garde music were varied, Cowell nevertheless received much publicity for his unique composition and performance techniques. The piano works Cowell performed throughout Europe were innovative, especially compared to most of the piano music being heard at the time. Whilst there were avant-garde developments in European music by composers such as Schoenberg, Bartók and members of Les Six, Cowell's techniques were unique and included clusters, dissonant counterpoint, complex independent rhythmic ratios and the stringed-piano.

While Cowell's pianistic and compositional techniques may have influenced some European composers, notably Bartók, his most significant impact in Europe was that Europeans became more open to art music from America. Cowell's 1923 "assault" contributed to Europeans' taking note of the quality and seriousness of music from America, and discovering that Americans had their own identity, no longer relying on European influences. As Carol J. Oja stated:

By the End of World War II ... Connection to the European concert tradition remained strong [in America], but artistic autonomy had been achieved and composers' palettes had broadened enormously. This hard-earned cultural self-assurance would serve them well in the years ahead.<sup>1</sup>

Cowell's successful tour was extremely important because it made him famous, giving him recognition in Europe and, importantly, at home in America. This fame assisted him greatly in developing his career as well as promoting avant-garde music by other Americans through his founding of the New Music Society. Europeans were beginning to take notice of the developments in music outside their own continent. While Cowell was influenced by the various musical societies and publications in Europe, he helped increase interest and performance of American music in both America and Europe. From this trip Cowell also made connections with European composers, many of whom became involved in the NMS. Due to the devastating situation in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, many of these composers moved to a musically thriving America.

Cowell may not have had direct influence on all the latest trends, but it is important to note that without his early and continual publicising of American and other new music, mainly via New Music, many composers would not have been given the opportunities to succeed in the way they did. He helped shape music in America and influenced many important post-1950s experimental composers. His earlier students, Cage and Harrison, were influenced by his music; for example, Cage got the idea of the 'prepared piano' from him, while Cowell's work with world music influenced Harrison to use music from the Pacific Islands in his own music.<sup>2</sup>

Cowell's *New Musical Resources* and his openness to new music benefited new generations of composers. *NMR* influenced many composers but is not often mentioned perhaps due to the fact that it was only in print between 1930 to 1935 and then only for a few years after 1969.<sup>3</sup> After purchasing the book in New York, Nancarrow referred to *NMR* throughout all his life when composing. Cage read *NMR*, and it is possible that when he went to Europe in 1952 he took the book with him.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol J Oja, "The USA, 1918-45," *Modern Times: From World War I to the Present*, Ed. Robert P. Morgan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994): 228.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Rich, *American Pioneers: Ives to Cage and Beyond* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995): 137.

<sup>3</sup> Kyle Gann, "Preface," in Cowell, *Essential Cowell*, 7.

The 1955 article, "...How Time Passes..." by Stockhausen and another by Boulez, *Penser la Musique Aujourd'hui* (1963) are "suspiciously similar to Cowell's book in their attempts to apply new global procedures for the structuring of pitch and especially rhythm." Ironically, "[s]omehow, the rhythmic schemes Cowell had dreamed up as a teenager made their way across the Atlantic and were fed back to us poor Americans as The Latest Thing from Europe."<sup>4</sup> Other younger American composers such as Harry Partch, La Monte Young and Ben Johnston read *NMR* and, from Cowell's ideas on the harmonic series, they were inspired toward the realms of microtonal pitch. Music by numerous composers from the 1950s stemmed from Cowell's rhythmic and pitch structures. These included John Luther Adams, Larry Polanski, Mikel Rouse, David First, Glenn Branca, Rhys Chatham, Ben Neill and Kyle Gann.<sup>5</sup>

Cowell's most influential musical idea was clusters. Whether later works such as the *Klavierstück XI* (1956) by Karlheinz Stockhausen and György Ligeti's *Volumina* (1961-62, rev. 1966) for organ were directly influenced by Cowell's clusters, they reveal the popularity of the technique, and how clusters became an accepted and perfectly viable musical device. From the mid-1950s, orchestral clusters also were widely used.<sup>6</sup>

Cowell's tour of Europe in 1923 achieved a great deal for his own career and musical life in America. The societies and journals in Europe inspired the New Music Society and the *New Musical Quarterly*, giving modern composers a voice which was often not heard elsewhere. While New Music was not financially lucrative, its activities over the years continued to nurture American music, disentangling it from the dominance of European music and allowing it to establish its own identity. It also implied to the following generation of composers that creativity and music did not have to adhere to any preconceived rules. Europe's interest in Cowell encouraged further tours of Europe, notably Russia in 1929, and in 1931 Cowell returned to Berlin to study ethnomusicology. Back home in America, Cowell became increasingly popular with audiences and critics, even while he was in prison. His music was being performed outside of NM by other ensemble and orchestral groups. Mainstream publishers were publishing some of his music, in particular Associated Music

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<sup>4</sup> Gann, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Gann, 8.

<sup>6</sup> "Clusters," *New Grove* Vol. 6, 66.

Publishers (affiliated with Schirmers), and New Music became a respected music publishing venture that was eventually taken over by an existing mainstream publisher, Theodor Presser. Cowell was eventually honoured by institutions, and the government appointed him as the ambassador of American music. Cowell's compositions also paved the paths to following developments in America. His own experiments influenced composers from around the world and without a doubt, he was a major contributor to the foundation of American music.

Further investigation of Cowell's 1923 tour of Europe is warranted. The inaccessibility of the Cowell Collection at the New York Public Library, which only became available to the public in June 2000, had made it difficult over the years for scholars to research this and other periods of Cowell's career in detail. Whilst I have been unable to access the Cowell Collection, I have been able to assemble a detailed enough view of the 1923 tour and its contexts from other primary and secondary sources to reveal its crucial importance to Cowell's career and to the broader development of new music in America.

## APPENDIX A:

### Henry Cowell's Table of Overtones

<i>Notes of Overtone Major Notes Scale (Read up.)</i>	<i>Intervals</i>	<i>Vibration Index (on base of 16)</i>	<i>Serial Numbers of Partial s*</i>
c.....C	Large major second	128 = 8(16)	8
b (Bb)	Small minor third	112 = 7(16)	7
a g.....G	Minor third	96 = 6(16)	6
f e.....E	Major third	80 = 5(16)	5
d c.....C	Perfect fourth	64 = 4(16)	4
b a g.....G	Perfect fifth	48 = 3(16)	3
f e d c.....C	Perfect octave	32 = 2(16)	2
b a g f e d c.....	(Fundamental C, generating overtones)	16 = 1(16)	1

\* The fundamental C and its series of overtones form the series of partials.

From *New Musical Resources*, Ed. & Introd. David Nicholls, 1930;  
(Cambridge: CUP, 1996): 8.

## APPENDIX B:

### Henry Cowell's Table of Undertones

Undertone Series Illustrated by Middle C as Fundamental

Serial Nos. of Under- partials (Read down)	Under- tones	Intervals	Vibrations * per Second
	(Fundamental C, generating undertones)		
			256
1/2	C	Perfect 6th	128 (1/2 of 256)
1/3	F	Perfect 5th	85.333 (1/3 of 256)
1/4	C	Perfect 4th	64 (1/4 of 256)
1/5	A <sup>b</sup>	Major 3rd	51.2 (1/5 of 256)
1/6	F	Large minor 3rd	42.667 (1/6 of 256)
1/7	(D)	Small minor 3rd	36.5714 (1/7 of 256)
1/8	C	Major 2nd	32 (1/8 of 256)
1/9	B <sup>b</sup>	Large major second	28.444 (1/9 of 256)
1/10	A <sup>b</sup>	Small major second	25.6 (1/10 of 256)
1/11	(G <sup>b</sup> )	Second	23.2999 (1/11 of 256)
1/12	F	"	21.333 (1/12 of 256)
1/13	(E <sup>b</sup> )	"	19.6923 (1/13 of 256)
1/14	(D)	"	18.2857 (1/14 of 256)
1/15	D <sup>b</sup>	Large minor second	17.0667 (1/15 of 256)
1/16	C	Small minor second	16 (1/16 of 256)

\* Philosophic pitch.

From *New Musical Resources*, Ed. & Introd. David Nicholls, 1930;  
(Cambridge: CUP, 1996): 24.

## APPENDIX C:

### Cowell's Paris and New York Programmes

☐ A 9 h. Erard, 13, rue du Mail  
**HENRI COWELL** pianiste  
Œuvres de M. Henri Cowell :

- I. **Dynamic Motion (Dynamisme).**  
**Two Episodes (Deux Episodes).**  
Chiaroscuro. Fabric. Exultation.
- II. **Three Irish Legends :** a) Les Temps de Manaunaun. b) Le Soleil Héros. c) La voix de Lir.
- III. **Six Ings. « Six Aut » :** Flottant ; Fôlant ; Changeant ; Explorant ; Signalant ; Bouillant.
- IV. **Quatre suites à « Dynamisme » :**  
Qu'est-ce? ; Aimable conversation ; Advertissement ; Antinomie.

**Places : 15 à 5 fr. « Piano Erard » (K.D.).**

From *Le Guide du Concert* 10.5 (9 Nov. 1923): 80.

The following material is from the Wesley Kuhnle Collection held at the California State University, Long Beach, USA.

Cont.



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Monday Evening, February 4, 1924, at 8:15

*New York Debut*  
of  
HENRY  
COWELL  
*Composer-Pianist*



PROGRAM

*Compositions of Henry Cowell*

I

1. Dynamic Motion
2. Two Episodes
3. Chiaroscuro
4. Fabric
5. Exultation

III

1. Floating
2. Frisking
3. Fleeting
4. Scooting
5. Wafting
6. Seething

II

*Three Irish Legends*

1. The Tides of Manannaun
2. The Hero Sun
3. The Voice of Lir

IV

- (a) Piece for Piano with Strings
  - (b) Four Encores to Dynamic Motion
- 1st encore: What's This?  
2nd encore: Amiable Conversation  
3rd encore: Advertisement  
4th encore: Antinomy

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## APPENDIX D:

### Explanation of New Rhythms and Notes

Notes prepared by Cowell, titled 'Explanation of New Rhythms and Notes', accompany the score to *Fabric*.

From Henry Cowell, *Piano Music by Henry Cowell* (New York: AMP, 1960): 11.

(See following page)

Cont.

# Fabric

## Explanation of New Rhythms and Notes

In musical time a whole-note (♩) is the unit by which all shorter time-values are measured, for instance an eighth-note (♪) is so called because it occupies one eighth the time of a whole-note; a quarter-note (♫) is so called because it occupies one quarter the time of a whole-note, etc.

The only regular system of subdividing a whole-note is by twos into halves, quarters, eighths, etc. If notes of other time values, for instance notes occupying one twelfth of a whole-note, are desired, they are called "eighth-note triplets" and written as eighth-notes, with a figure 3 over them, thus . Why not call them twelfth-notes, as would seem natural?

It is here proposed that all these irregular time-values be called by their correct names, according to the part of a whole they occupy. Thus are third-notes instead of "half-note triplets" since each occupies one third of the time of a whole-note; are fifth-notes instead of "quarter-note quintuplets, etc.

Although heretofore not suggested in notation, it will be seen that third, sixth, twelfth and twenty-fourth-notes form a related series; fifth, tenth and twentieth-notes another, and in fact, that a new series can be formed on each odd number and its divisions by two.

A new notation which brings out these relationships will be used as follows:

Whole-Note Series  
Oval-shaped notes

Whole-note: half-note: quarter-note: 8th-note: 16th-note: 32nd-note:

Third-Note Series  
Triangular-shaped notes

2-3rds-note: 3rd-note: 6th-note: 12th-note: 24th-note: 48th-note:

Fifth-Note Series  
Square notes

4-5ths-note: 2-5ths-note: 5th-note: 10th-note: 20th-note: 40th-note:

Seventh-Note Series  
Diamond-shaped notes

4-7ths-note: 2-7ths-note: 7th-note: 14th-note: 28th-note: 56th-note:

Ninth-Note Series  
Oblong notes

8-9ths-note: 4-9ths-note: 2-9ths-note: 9th-note: 18th-note: 36th-note:

Eleventh-Note Series  
Oval notes with stroke

8-11ths-note: 4-11ths-note: 2-11ths-note: 11th-note: 22nd-note: 44th-note:

Thirteenth-Note Series  
Triangular notes with stroke

8-13ths-note: 4-13ths-note: 2-13ths-note: 13th-note: 26th-note: 52nd-note:

Fifteenth-Note Series  
Square notes with stroke

8-15ths-note: 4-15ths-note: 2-15ths-note: 15th-note: 30th-note: 60th-note:

Following is part of the second measure of "Fabric", in both old and new notation. It will be seen that the new notation saves the use of several tied notes, as well as figures and brackets.

OLD

NEW

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