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Rooted in America: The Roy Harris and Henry Cowell Sonatas for Violin and Piano

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

ROOTED IN AMERICA:

THE ROY HARRIS AND HENRY COWELL SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

By

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To my husband, David Brickle and my parents, Wanda and Edwin Cutright, for their unwavering love and support.

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ABSTRACT

The intent behind this treatise is to introduce the Sonata for Violin and Piano (1941) by Roy Harris and the Sonata for Violin and Piano (1945) by Henry Cowell. The first chapter of the document is devoted to Roy Harris, and familiarizes the reader with his background, before an in-depth discussion of his Violin Sonata. The second chapter provides biographical information for Cowell, followed by information about the Violin Sonata. In the third chapter, I explore how the historical context and similar professional experiences of Cowell and Harris, two American composers who fundamentally disagreed about American music, led to the creation of markedly similar sonatas for violin and piano.

INTRODUCTION

Sonatas for violin and piano form a large portion of the violinist's beloved repertoire. Contributions to this genre by German composers including Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, along with those of French composers Debussy and Fauré are among the most well-known examples of the genre. Although the masterful violin sonatas of Charles Ives have finally garnered some well-merited attention in the past few decades, many American violin sonatas still remain in obscurity. Some American composers who wrote violin sonatas include: Arthur Foote, Amy Beach, Daniel Gregory Mason, Ruth Crawford Seeger, Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Henry Cowell. Those of Beach (1896) and Mason (1907-1908) conform to the expectations for European Romantic violin sonatas by following in the vein of the Brahms violin sonatas, both in their harmonic language and form. While Ruth Crawford's *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1926) is an innovative work, it is not distinctly American. The sonatas of Ives, Copland, Harris, and Cowell all have characteristics that give them an American sound.

In 1893, Antonin Dvořák, a Czech composer teaching at the National Conservatory in New York, ignited a national discussion about defining American music that lasted for decades into the 20th century.¹ Dvořák advised American composers that Negro spirituals and Native American music were essential elements in creating art music with a distinctly American sound.² American composers and audiences quarreled over what it is that makes music American. Author Beth Levy names May through December 1893 as the period in which this exchange was

1. Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West*, *California Studies in 20th-Century Music* 14 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 4.

2. Levy, 4.

particularly active. Composers were not content imitating European models, and many did not wish to take advice from a Czech composer. By the 1940's, there were several different approaches to creating American music. Experimentalist composers such as Henry Cowell, Ruth Crawford, and Charles Seeger supported the evolutions in European music brought on by Arnold Schoenberg. He pioneered the "emancipation of dissonance" and his students Alban Berg and Anton Webern used elements such as tone color, dynamics, and rhythm to organize music, instead of relying on tonality. Inspired by Schoenberg, American composers Charles Seeger, Henry Cowell and Ruth Crawford worked together on "dissonant counterpoint," a method of composing in which musical consonance resolved to dissonance.

Henry Cowell explored many approaches to creating American music over his lifetime. His early compositions experimented with extended techniques for the piano and the use of cluster chords. Later on, he employed folk sounds in his work and spent a significant amount of time studying music of other cultures.

Another group of American composers sought to separate themselves from European musical models, past and present, by drawing from American folk music and simple harmonies, creating a style that was more accessible to audiences than ultra-modern music. These composers included Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Howard Hanson, and Roy Harris. Harris's style remained consistent over the course of his career. He used long, singing melodies and open harmonies, as he sought to portray the spacious landscape of the American West.

Roy Harris and Henry Cowell came from different schools of thought on American music; however, the political and cultural climate of the United States during the early 1940's influenced both men. During World War II, they came to embrace a similar compositional style in their violin sonatas. The 1941 Sonata for Violin and Piano by Roy Harris, and the Henry

Cowell Sonata for Violin and Piano from 1945 are unlike the American violin sonatas of the nineteenth century. Both works draw from American folk music and abandon Sonata form.

This treatise examines both the Roy Harris Sonata for Violin and Piano and the Henry Cowell Sonata for Violin and Piano. It provides background information on the composers and places the works in a broader cultural context that sets the scene for each work. Each work is viewed as a snapshot of a point in the composers' life, and a glimpse into an aspect of American culture in the 1940's. The final chapter explores some connections between Harris and Cowell, who have not yet been compared in scholarly writing. The intent behind discussing the composer's connections is to reveal what they had in common, which explains the works' shared traits.

The Cowell Sonata is discussed more thoroughly than the Harris, because there is a lack of writing on the Cowell Sonata. The Harris Sonata is the subject of Peter Issacson's 2005 dissertation "Roy Harris' Sonata for Violin and Piano (1942): An Analysis with Historical and Performance Perspective," which provides a detailed theoretical analysis of each movement. For more insight into Roy Harris's biography, consult Beth E. Levy's *Frontier Figures*, which explains in detail how Harris marketed himself and separates fact from fiction. Joel Sachs' *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* is by far the most exhaustive treatment of Henry Cowell, and is a must-read for any Cowell scholar.

CHAPTER 1

ROY HARRIS SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Roy Harris's Background

American composer Roy Harris lived from 1898 to 1979. Although his work is now largely neglected, from the early 1930's through 1950, Harris had a flourishing career and was considered by many to be one of the most significant American composers of his time. A polarizing figure, Harris was an ardent advocate for his distinct style of American music, and he sincerely believed that his music best represented true Americanism. Author Beth Levy states, "During the decades after World War I...artistic Americanness was still calculated as a function of one's distance from European models."³ Harris sought to break from European traditions, including standard musical forms, by creating his own formal principals. In Europe, during the first half of the twentieth century, Arnold Schoenberg and his followers Anton Webern and Alban Berg, later collectively known as the Second Viennese School, broke away from tradition by abandoning tonality for atonality and serialism. At the same time, other European composers including Igor Stravinsky and Francis Poulenc returned to tradition through neoclassicism. Harris distanced his music from the current trends in Europe by composing in a primarily tonal manner, and drawing from Renaissance polyphony and modes. In order to strengthen the connection between his music and America, Harris frequently employed American folk tunes.

Harris's works often bear descriptive titles that correspond with historical events, figures, or places in the United States. His best known works include the Symphony 1933, Third Symphony, Folksong Symphony, and Sixth Symphony, "Gettysburg." Most of Harris's 178

3. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 228.

completed compositions are for orchestra, choir, or band.⁴ In addition to the Violin Sonata, Harris's other works for strings include a cello sonata and four string quartets, as well as several chamber music works for unusual configurations.⁵

Roy Harris was born in Oklahoma, and grew up on a farm that produced potatoes and fruit in the San Gabriel Valley outside of Los Angeles, California.⁶ He studied at both the University of California Southern Branch and the University of California Berkeley, although his studies were interrupted by his service in the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I.⁷ Harris did not receive a degree from either school, and his only music class was ear training.⁸ During his time in college, Harris found his interest in music composition and wrote his first piece at age nineteen, although he did not decide to pursue composition as a career until age twenty four.⁹ It was a challenge for him to find a composition teacher due to his late start in music.

While at UC Berkeley, Harris began composing a large work for chorus and orchestra, which he showed to a history professor. This professor showed the work-in-progress to Alfred Hertz, conductor of the San Francisco Symphony. Hertz recommended that Harris study with Albert Elkus, who declined to teach Harris due to his age and lack of training. These events led

4. Dan Stehman, *Roy Harris: A Bio-Bibliography*, Bio-Bibliographies in Music, no. 40 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 14.

5. Dan Stehman and Beth E. Levy, "Harris, Roy," accessed February 1, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002256806>.

6. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 230.

7. *Ibid.*, 232.

8. Stehman, *Roy Harris*, 2.

9. Nicolas Slonimsky, "Roy Harris," *The Musical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1947): 18.

Harris to recognize his need for instruction, and he began private studies with Fannie Charles Dillon, and received several orchestration lessons from Arthur Bliss.¹⁰

A deciding factor in Harris's success came when, at age twenty-seven, he began studying privately with American composer Arthur Farwell.¹¹ Farwell was a significant figure in the American musical scene at this time. Farwell had established a company committed to publishing music by Americans called the Wa-Wan press, which operated from 1901-1912.¹² From 1909-1914, Farwell was the chief music critic for the journal *Musical America*.¹³ Farwell became much more than a teacher for Harris; he was also a powerful advocate. He introduced Harris to patrons and helped him procure a post as a music critic for the *Los Angeles Illustrated News*, which enabled him to quit his job as a dairy truck driver. From 1926-1929, Harris studied in France with Nadia Boulanger, the famed teacher of many composers including Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, and Leonard Bernstein.¹⁴ During this time, Farwell and Harris remained in communication, and together, they devised a marketing strategy for Harris. This strategy was aimed at both the music critics and American public, and the goal was to ensure that Harris would rise to be the nation's most beloved composer. In order to make this happen,

10. Stehman, *Roy Harris*, 3.

11. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 232.

12. Gilbert Chase and Bruce Neely, "Farwell, Arthur," accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009342>.

13. Ibid.

14. Caroline Potter, "Boulanger, (Juliette) Nadia" accessed February 6, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000003705>.

Farwell and Harris streamlined Harris's biography by emphasizing his connection with rural America, and hiding his cosmopolitan and European influences.

From the onset of his career, Harris was portrayed as genuine, rural, and untouched by European and cosmopolitan forces. Harris was happy to feed the legend that writers were creating about him, instead of correcting the exaggerations. He was often at odds with other composers of his time due to his self-aggrandizing rhetoric and propensity to make caustic remarks about other composers. Harris claimed to be born in a log cabin on Abraham Lincoln's birthday and to have met Idaho Bill at a cowboy reunion to which he was invited.¹⁵ In truth, Harris spent the majority of his youth on a farm not far from Los Angeles, and there are no records to corroborate either claim. The title "Log Cabin Composer" was applied to Harris in a *Time Magazine* article in 1935. The same year, Aaron Copland noted that, "A considerable legend has already grown up around his log-cabin origins and early life as a truck driver."¹⁶

American Cultural Climate, 1920-1940

In order to understand how Harris was branded, we must first look back at the historical context in which the branding took place. American audiences and music critics were eager for music that expressed a distinctly American identity and had broad appeal. Three events occurred in the late 1920's through the 1930's that changed the musical climate in America: the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the Dust Bowl (1935-1938), and the Great Depression (1929-1939), all of which left thousands of Americans in desperate need of work and food. These events led congress and President Franklin Roosevelt to create new government policies and programs including the New Deal, and the Works Progress Administration.

15. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 278, 283.

16. *Ibid.*, 227.

These dire circumstances precipitated a turn away from music for the elite toward a populist music that delivered a sense of community and pride in America. Even ultra-modernist composers such as Ruth Crawford and Charles Seeger turned from a highly intellectual style of composition towards collecting and arranging folk music. Roy Harris returned from France in 1929. This was the year that the stock market crashed, sending the United States into a decade of financial hardship. Harris returned just when the need for a nationalist American composer was greatest.

The Harris Marketing Package

In order to be successful as a composer in this new era of hardship, Harris streamlined a narrative tailored to resonate with the common American. Harris's marketing strategy involved emphasizing some elements of his biography, while ignoring others. For instance, in order to come across as more American, Harris rarely referenced his three years of study in France. If the subject was mentioned, it was to show how Harris resisted succumbing to the European influence of Nadia Boulanger. Composer and author John Tasker Howard emphasized Harris's distance from Europe in his book, *Our American Music*. "Here was a genuine American, born in a log cabin in Oklahoma, like Lincoln, tall, lanky, rawboned, untouched by the artificial refinements of Europe or even the stultifying commercialism of New York."¹⁷ With this statement, Howard closely tied Harris with America and separated him from both Nadia Boulanger and from the ultra-modernists in New York.

Additionally, Harris's white ethnicity was a factor in how he was portrayed. Harris viewed his Anglo-Saxon heritage as a symbol of true Americanism, and as a way to dismiss the

17. John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941), 133.

music of Jewish American composers as being less authentic. This most notably applied to Aaron Copland, with whom Harris had a long and fraught relationship. In his book *Our Contemporary Composers*, John Tasker Howard referred to Harris as the “white hope of American music,¹⁸ and Slonimsky stated that Harris was “thirty-five, white and healthy” in his publicity for the Symphony 1933.¹⁹ In his article “The Growth of a Composer,” Harris spoke of a composer “creating music that is true to his race,” and in his article “Problems of American Composers” he wrote that an American sense of rhythm is something that one is born with. Thus Harris’s whiteness was portrayed as essential to his American authenticity.

Harris and other writers also emphasized his connection with rural America, based on his birth in Oklahoma and childhood days farming in California. In a 1926 article in the journal *Modern Music* titled “Our Young Men of Promise,” Copland states, “Harris is a child of nature with a child’s love for his native hills.”²⁰ With this statement, Copland connects Harris with nature, but also paints Harris as a naïve child. Arthur Farwell emphasized Harris’s connection with nature in his 1932 essay on Harris for the *Musical Quarterly*.²¹ By the end of the 1930’s, Harris was established as a leading American composer, who had risen to greatness by resisting cosmopolitan and European influence, allowing himself to be guided by natural, agrarian America.

18. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 227.

19. Levy, 263.

20. Aaron Copland, “Our Young Men of Promise,” *Modern Music*, 1926.

21. Arthur Farwell, “Roy Harris,” *The Musical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1932): 18–32.

The Autogenetic Principle

This agrarian connection made its way into Harris's descriptions of his music. A principle of form that Harris used in many of his symphonies and in the Violin Sonata was called the "autogenetic" principle. The term "autogenetic" was first coined by Harris in his program notes for his Symphony 1933. It became a buzzword referring to Harris's melodic construction with his Third Symphony, written in 1938, and revised in 1939.²² Aaron Copland says this of the Third Symphony, "Harris - at least in the opening and pastoral sections of this symphony - builds the music out of a seemingly endless succession of spun-out melodies, which, if not remarkable in themselves, together convey a remarkable impression of inexhaustible profusion of melodic invention."²³ Scholar Dan Stehman described autogenesis as, "a melody or harmonic design [that] flowers from a seed motive"; he also called the approach "Beethovenian."²⁴ In a 1948 thesis, Harris's student Sidney Thurber Cox stated that autogenesis would "expand and extend the possibilities inherent in the original germ." In autogenesis, an idea presented toward the beginning of a work is used to generate more material by exploring the various directions that the material can take. In his musings on form, Harris said, "A symphony has to have a kind of new impetus all the time... It's not just that here I give you this seed, and out of this seed grows a tree."²⁵ Critics and other composers also began to conflate the autogenetic principle with Harris's western and agrarian roots. Autogenetic writing created long phrases that came to represent the vast prairies and mountains of the American West.

22. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 248.

23. Copland, "Composers in America" in *The New Music*, 124-125 quoted in Levy, 248.

24. Stehman, *Roy Harris*, 19, 20.

25. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 234.

The Harris Sonata for Violin and Piano

Roy Harris wrote his Sonata for Violin and Piano in Ithaca, New York in the fall of 1942, for a commission from medical doctor Hester Morton.²⁶ Originally, Mills Music Incorporated published the Sonata's four movements as separate pieces under the titles "Fantasy," "Dance of Spring," "Melody," and "Toccatà." Despite this, violinist William Kroll and the composer's wife, pianist Johana Harris, premiered the work as a sonata on October 30, 1942 at the Library of Congress Coolidge Auditorium in Washington D.C. The movements were renamed several times in the early life of the piece. Yehudi Menuhin and Johana Harris performed the Sonata in 1955, and a *New York Times* review of their performance explained, "This is a 21 minute work of four not very closely related salon pieces called Fantasy, Pastoral, Aria, and Toccatà Bravura."²⁷ Since it was the publishing company and not Harris that decided to release the movements as individual pieces, I maintain that Harris was not responsible for naming the movements. Additionally, if Harris had named the movements himself, he would not have changed the titles so many times. For this reason, the most recent (1974) publication has no movement titles.

The Sonata for Violin and Piano contains three of Harris's trademark compositional characteristics: the autogenetic principle, the inclusion of American Folk Music, and composite meters. Harris's autogenetic principal is used in constructing both the first and third movements of the Sonata. At the opening of the first movement, the violin enters with a dotted half-note followed by three quarter-notes (Figure 1). While this rhythm does not play a significant role in this movement, it becomes the seed motive for the third movement, and is used to generate melodic material throughout the Sonata.

26. Stehman, *Roy Harris*, 129.

27. Ross Parmenter, "Menuhin Offers a Violin Recital: 2,000 at Hunter College Hear Program of Beethoven, Bach and Roy Harris," *New York Times*, 1955.



Figure 1. Harris Sonata Movement 1, Measures 1-2

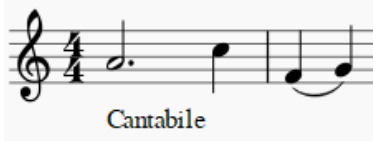


Figure 2. Harris Sonata Movement 3, Measures 17-18

The opening violin statements in the first and third movements share identical rhythm, but the melody is inverted. The first movement entrance consists of a downward leap of a minor third, an ascending perfect fifth, followed by a descending whole step. The third movement entrance has the same intervals in inversion (Figures 1 and 2).

A variant of the seed motive is also presented in the opening piano entrance of the third movement (Figure 3). The rhythm is the same as in the previous examples, but the melodic contour has changed, and the right and left hand parts travel in contrary motion. As is evident from these three examples, the seed motive is disguised by variations in how it is presented. The seed motive is not immediately evident upon a first listen, but it lends continuity to the work. The recurrence of the motive provides a feeling of familiarity for the listener, helping to tie the first and third movements together in the absence of standard movement relationships.



Figure 3. Harris Sonata Movement 3, Measures 1-2

While the first and third movements of the Sonata contain examples of Harris’s autogenetic style, the second movement is derived from a folk song. The first recording of the Sonata listed the second movement as “Pastorale - Free adaption of ‘I’ll be True to My Love.’” Harris quotes the chorus of an American folksong with Scottish–Gaelic origins called, “The Two Sisters,”²⁸ mistakenly calling it by the text of the chorus, “I’ll be True to My Love.” Harris paraphrases the folk tune several times in the second movement (Figures 4 and 5).



I’ll be true to my love If my lovell be true to me’
 Figure 4. Chorus of “Two Sisters,” from *The New Green Mountain Songster*

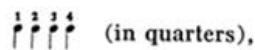


Figure 5. Harris Sonata, Movement 2, Measures 15-18

28. Peter Isaacson, “Roy Harris’ Sonata for Violin and Piano (1942): An Analysis with Historical and Performance Perspective” (University of Kentucky, 2005), 80, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304994725/abstract/1FBFA48B24EE422DPQ/1>.

Harris used composite meters in what he felt was a distinctly American compositional language (Figure 6). In his essay entitled “Problems of American Composers,” Harris wrote, “Our rhythmic impulses are fundamentally different from the rhythmic impulses of Europeans; and from this unique rhythmic sense are generated different melodic and form values. Our sense of rhythm is less symmetrical than the European sense. European musicians are trained to think of rhythm in its largest common denominator, while we are born with a feeling for its smallest units.”²⁹ In the same essay, Harris further contrasted European and American rhythmic intuition.

For instance: given a 4/4 meter, the European will generally think



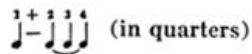
or in eighths



or in sixteenths



but the American is very apt to feel spontaneously



or in eighths



or in sixteenths



Figure 6. Harris, “Problems of American Composers”

At the top of the illustration, Harris showed how he believed Europeans divide a group of four quarter notes, and below is shown in contrast how he believed Americans divide them. Use of

29. Harris, “Problems of American Composers” in Henry Cowell, ed., *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium* (New York: F. Ungar, 1962), p.151.

uneven divisions lends a jaunty quality to the music, and for Harris, it brands the music as uniquely American.

In the fourth movement of the Sonata, combinations of compound and simple note groupings are especially prevalent. Frequent changes between 5/8 and 6/8 (3/4) lend a quirky, jaunty quality to the fourth movement. Within these meters, Harris followed his own advice for sounding American by varying how he grouped notes, and by using accents to draw attention to the groupings.

The image shows a musical score for the fourth movement of Harris's Sonata, measures 12-21. It is written for piano and consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including frequent changes in meter between 6/8, 3/4, and 5/8. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *f*, *mp*, *sub.f*, and *dim.*, as well as performance instructions like *tre corde* and *tr*. The notation features various note groupings and accents, contributing to a jaunty and unpredictable quality.

Figure 7. Harris Sonata Movement 4, Measures 12-21

Measures 12-21 are a typical example of Harris's use of meter and note groupings in the fourth movement. The meter alternates between 6/8, 3/4, and 5/8. Within these time signatures, note groupings are varied, giving the music an unpredictable and spunky quality. For example, the

first two measures of the 5/8 are divided into 3+2 , and as soon as the ear has adjusted to this pattern, it changes again into a 2+3 grouping before returning again to the 6/8 (3/4) meter.

In addition to Harris's trademark use of rhythm, another notable feature of the final movement is the twenty-six measure violin cadenza that occurs just before the ending of the piece. The use of a cadenza in a violin sonata is certainly rare, but is not without precedent as there are two cadenza-like passages in César Franck's Sonata for Violin and Piano. The cadenza incorporates double stops, left hand pizzicato, and an unusual run of chromatically ascending perfect fourths.



Figure 8. Harris Sonata Movement 4, Measure 244

The cadenza provides an opportunity for the violinist to showcase some virtuosity and special techniques. It also complements the sense of spontaneity and unpredictability that was set at the beginning of the movement by the constantly ebbing meter changes and note groupings.

Reception of the Harris Sonata

The Sonata was popular during Harris's lifetime, receiving performances and recordings by several prestigious musicians. Joseph Gingold and Eudice Shapiro both recorded the work with Johana Harris, and as mentioned earlier, Yehudi Menuhin performed the work. The Sonata won Harris the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Award for Eminent Services to Chamber Music (1942). The response of music critics ranged from disdain to enthusiasm. For the New York premiere, Donald Fuller, reviewer for *Modern Music*, stated that the Sonata was "A completely lax, self-centered indulgence." Composer Vincent Persichetti reviewed the first recording of the

Sonata by Gingold and Johana Harris and asserted, “The Harris Violin Sonata is one of the many major works by this composer. The Harris literature of major works is huge and the Violin sonata one of the strongest in the chamber category. His vitality and personality are deeply rooted in the work. This is Harris at his best, warm and full of music.” In response to Menuhin’s 1955 performance, Paul Lang wrote, “The sonata is a pleasant, inoffensive and rather entertaining piece but, unlike some of Mr. Harris’s other works, it does not seem to have a real place in the mainstream of American music.”³⁰

The opinion expressed by Lang that this sonata has no place in the repertoire foreshadowed the current state of Harris’s Sonata for Violin and Piano. The score is out of print, and the most recent commercial recording of the work was made in 2005. Harris’s works have been overshadowed by those of his contemporary, Aaron Copland. Contrary to Harris’s opinion, Aaron Copland, a Jewish composer from New York City, captured the nation’s musical imagination. Today, Copland’s music is chosen to represent the spirit of Americana, and is closely associated with cowboys and the American West. In modern concert programming, Roy Harris no longer has the status he once held as spokesman for America.

The narrative that Roy Harris created about himself (with the help of Arthur Farwell) had elements of both truth and myth. Harris was not untouched by Europe, and although he might have been born in a log cabin, he spent most of his childhood in California. Due to his myth-making, nationalistic rhetoric, excessive hubris, and commitment to musical consonance, Roy Harris fell out of favor.³¹

30. Lang, Paul Henry. “Yehudi Menuhin” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 24, 1955.

31. Levy, *Frontier Figures*, 290.

After World War II, a wave of internationalism in music swept over the United States, and Harris, unwilling to evolve his style, became viewed as obsolete.³² Despite this, Harris was in many ways a successful composer. He made significant contributions to the body of large-scale works by American composers. His ability to advocate for his music and for American music in general advanced the cause of a particular type of American music. The autogenetic principle was a noteworthy concept that allowed Harris to create large forms that did not conform to standard European models, but also did not necessitate abandoning consonance in music. Composer Henry Cowell wrote, “American Composition up to this point has been tied to the apron-strings of European tradition. To attain musical independence, more national consciousness is a present necessity for American composers.”³³ Roy Harris was part of awakening this national consciousness. His Sonata for Violin and Piano is a distinctive work that has been performed by some of the greatest violinists of the twentieth century, and it includes many of the characteristics that made Harris a beloved composer of his time. The soulful, poignant melodies, jaunty and lilting dance, and boundless enthusiasm captured in this work make it a worthy endeavor for performance.

32. Levy, 290.

33. Cowell, *American Composers on American Music*.

CHAPTER 2

HENRY COWELL SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Background on Henry Cowell

Henry Cowell was an American composer and pianist, best known for his experimental compositions. For many years, Cowell toured internationally as a pianist, exclusively playing his own works. His compositions often required unusual techniques to perform and caused a stir internationally. Many critics dismissed his innovations as asinine, a passing novelty and a laughable distraction, while composers including Bartok and Schoenberg held him in high esteem. He taught his creative ideas at several institutions including Stanford University, University of California Berkeley and the New School in New York.³⁴ His most famous students were composers John Cage and Lou Harrison. In addition to creating a vast body of compositions, he worked tirelessly as an advocate for fellow composers of his day. Cowell's organization, the New Music Society, provided a platform for other modernist composers to have their music performed.³⁵ Cowell's *New Music Quarterly* published scores that otherwise would not have been published by commercial companies. In 1919, Cowell completed *New Musical Resources*, a lengthy treatise which made suggestions for composers and rationalized the increasingly dissonant nature of modern composition.³⁶ While Cowell was a forward-thinking composer, he also held vast knowledge of various kinds of folk and world music, spending many years of his life living abroad in order to study music of other cultures.

34. Joel Sachs, *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 194,208.

35. Sachs, 130.

36. Josceyln Godwin, "The Music of Henry Cowell" (Cornell University, 1969), 73.

Henry Cowell was born in 1897 in Menlo Park, California, a rural area located southeast of San Francisco, to Irish immigrant Harry Cowell and Midwestern native Clarissa Dixon. His mother was drawn away from the Midwest to the San Francisco area in search of a better environment for her radical political and religious leanings. Both parents were writers and met while collaborating on an anarchist paper.³⁷ Cowell spent his entire childhood in poverty since neither parent had steady work. After his parents divorced in 1903, Cowell and his mother moved frequently, as she searched for work. In April 1906, a large earthquake shook the San Francisco area, and much of the city burnt to the ground. With San Francisco in ruins and job prospects lost, the pair headed for the Midwest to stay with relatives, where they remained for a couple of years until they moved to New York when Cowell was eleven years old.³⁸

The time in New York was a rich part of Cowell's education. He saw Mahler conduct the New York Symphony and benefitted from free symphony concerts at Wannamaker's and free admission days at the Metropolitan Museum.³⁹ The Cowells were met with more financial hardship in New York. While there were glimmers of hope for Clarissa's writing career, ultimately, New York was disastrous financially. Clarissa's novel, *Janet and Her Dear Phoebe*, was published and sold 310 copies, but Clarissa never received a cent from the sales.⁴⁰ The Cowell's hit rock-bottom in the winter of 1908-1909. They were discovered "in bed starving and

37. Michael Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 19.

38. Sachs, *Henry Cowell*, 27.

39. Sachs, 32.

40. Sachs, 31.

freezing” by friends.⁴¹ After spending a year with a relative in Kansas, the pair headed back to Menlo Park.

Early Musical Interest

Henry Cowell’s introduction to music came at a very young age. Neighbors and friends of the Cowells were astounded by his keen interest in music and talent at singing familiar tunes and his own invented songs. Knowing the extreme poverty that the family suffered, neighbors intervened. One neighbor gave Cowell a mandolin harp for his fourth birthday, and the following year, another neighbor furnished him with a violin.⁴² He studied violin until age nine when it became too difficult for him to play.⁴³ Cowell suffered from chorea, an involuntary movement disorder, which causes muscles to seize and spasm. He received little formal education as a child due to his health and being severely bullied when he briefly attended school.⁴⁴ His mother valued anarchist principles and did not support traditional education ideals. In her homeschooling, Clarissa allowed Cowell to read any book he chose, instead of requiring him to follow a set curriculum, and never disciplined him.⁴⁵ The lack of structure and academic deadlines left him free to experiment with unusual techniques and sounds. His interest turned more to composition and later, to the piano.

Cowell’s compositions were experimental from the start as he was influenced by his mother’s support of independence and nonconformity and his exposure to a rich sonic palette of

41. Sachs., 34.

42. Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian*, 18.

43. Sachs, 24.

44. *Ibid.*, 23.

45. *Ibid.*, 29.

world music. When Cowell first began composing, he did not have a piano. In his article “How and Why I Compose,” Cowell explained how, as a child, he practiced composition daily by engaging in mental exercises. He practiced listening to music in his mind until he could hear different timbres, pitches, and rhythms.⁴⁶ His early compositional process was influenced by his engagement with music of other cultures. In Menlo Park, the Cowell’s home bordered on Chinatown. While others frowned upon the residents of Chinatown, Cowell enjoyed spending time there and was fascinated by their music.⁴⁷ He was immersed in various kinds of music including: Chinese Opera, the Iowa folk tunes from his mother, his father’s Irish tunes, and the songs of his Filipino, Tahitian, Chinese, and Japanese friends.⁴⁸

Once he gained regular access to a piano, Cowell created new piano playing techniques to accomplish the music of his imagination. One of his first compositional experiments was with tone clusters, chords based on the interval of a second, as opposed to standard tertian harmony. In order to create these large clusters of sound, Cowell would sometimes play with his entire forearm on the piano. Cowell’s first known cluster piano piece was *Adventures in Harmony* (1913).

Another experimental method of piano playing that Cowell pioneered as a teenager is “stringpiano,” a term that refers to numerous ways of playing with the hands on the strings inside the piano. He wrote several stringpiano pieces including *Aeolian Harp*, *The Banshee*, *The Sword of Oblivion*, *The Leprechaun*, and *The Fairy Answer*. Cowell used several different methods of playing inside the piano. In *The Sword of Oblivion*, the pitch of the strings is raised by pressing

46. Cowell, “How and Why I Compose” quoted in Sachs, 26.

47. Hicks, *Henry Cowell, Bohemian*, 19.

48. Sachs, *Henry Cowell*, 25.

with the fingernail; in *Aeolian Harp*, the strings are strummed; and in *The Leprechaun*, the strings are hit with a mallet. In these stringpiano works, Cowell explored untapped resources for varying the sound of the piano that lay hidden beyond the keyboard.⁴⁹

Musical Education and Performance Career

In 1910, Cowell began studying piano with seventeen-year-old Edith Partridge, who assigned him pieces including Chopin's *Military Polonaise* and the first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. It seems that Cowell did not play his own music for his teacher, as she never mentioned any of his unusual techniques.⁵⁰

From 1910-1912, Cowell met many influential individuals who took interest in him. The first of these was Stanford Professor Lewis Terman, who invented the Stanford-Binet IQ test.⁵¹ There are several conflicting accounts about how Cowell and Terman first met; however, Terman recognized Cowell's genius. He spent six hours a week administering intelligence tests to Cowell, and he paid Cowell for his time. In 1912, Cowell met Ellen Veblen, the wealthy wife of economist Thorstein Veblen, while selling flowers door to door.⁵² Ellen soon discovered Cowell's talent, and bought a Steinway B piano for his use.

Cowell first began performing his compositions in 1912 for other children through the Toyon Club, a group of neighborhood children who gathered weekly.⁵³ The same year, Cowell played one of his own pieces at the Pacific Musical Society's anniversary celebration at the

49. Hugo Weisgall, "The Music of Henry Cowell," *The Musical Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1959): 487.

50. Sachs, *Henry Cowell*, 44.

51. Sachs., 37.

52. *Ibid.*, 44.

53. *Ibid.*, 36.

Palace Hotel in an impromptu performance.⁵⁴ Sam Seward, an English professor at Stanford University, was at the performance, and took special interest in Cowell. Together, Seward and Terman began soliciting funds for Cowell's education and living expenses.⁵⁵ Due to his mother's poor health, Cowell had been supporting his family for much of his childhood by selling flowers, serving as a school janitor, cleaning chicken coops, and participating in Terman's research.⁵⁶ Terman convinced Cowell that it was time to find a composition teacher, and they set out to find someone who would appreciate and build on Cowell's eccentric musical skill set.

Cowell found an ally in Professor Charles Seeger, head of the music department at University of California Berkley.⁵⁷ Cowell began studying with Seeger at age sixteen, having already written over one hundred compositions without instruction. Although Cowell was unable to enroll in the university because he lacked a formal elementary and high school education, Seeger was able to get special status for him at the University so that he could study counterpoint with Wallace Sabin and theory with E. G. Strickland.⁵⁸ Cowell, whose longest period of school enrollment had been four months spent in third grade, was now a college student.⁵⁹

While Cowell did not receive a formal degree from the University, his time there (1914-1916) was important to his musical development. Seeger exposed Cowell to novel musical ideas, including Seeger's theory of dissonant counterpoint, and showed him music of other

54. Ibid., 55.

55. Ibid., 55.

56. Ibid., 35.

57. Sachs, 59.

58. Ibid., 59.

59. Ibid., 29.

contemporary composers, such as Schoenberg.⁶⁰ Strickland and Sabin furthered Cowell's understanding of Western music history and theory. This new knowledge gave him perspective on where his music stood in the continuum of classical music evolution. Seeger assured Cowell that his music fit "right in line with music history."⁶¹

After Cowell's mother died in May 1916, lessening his financial burdens and making his attachment to California less profound, he began to go back and forth between California and New York. During this time, Cowell began writing his *New Musical Resources*, and he was briefly enrolled at the Institute of Musical Art. In March 1918, with World War I in full swing, Cowell enlisted in the Army Medical Corps, where he served until May 1919.⁶²

Cowell's renown as a pianist spread, and he took two tours to Europe, one in 1923, and another in 1926. Although he had studied traditional repertoire with Edith Partridge, Cowell exclusively performed his own works. On February 4th 1924, just after returning from Europe, Cowell gave his New York debut at Carnegie Hall.⁶³ This recital was the subject of an outpouring of newspaper reviews. Eight reviews appeared in New York the day after the recital, and reviews were published throughout sixteen other states in the weeks to come.⁶⁴ The majority of the reviews of the debut were negative, but after another performance on February 17th, there

60. Sachs, 60 - 61.

61. Ibid, 59.

62. Ibid., 81,85.

63. Ibid., 125.

64. Ibid. 126.

was a more equal balance between appreciative and scathing reviews. Negative and positive publicity made Cowell into a “media star”, enabling him to have a career as a concert pianist.⁶⁵

Irish Connections

Cowell had many connections with Ireland and Irish music. His father was an Irish immigrant, and Cowell heard his father sing Irish folk songs as a child. Cowell first went to Ireland in 1929 and returned there in 1956, and many of Cowell’s works, including *Tides of Manaunaun*, are based on Irish legends. He also met a group of Irish musicians in 1936 when they came to Broadway for the filming of *Man of Aran*.⁶⁶ During this time, Cowell seized the opportunity to make six LP recordings of the group’s music, and he arranged a lecture recital for the lead singer.⁶⁷ Cowell’s article, “Hidden Irish Treasure,” written after his first stay in Ireland, discusses the differences between the indigenous music that he heard, and the notated versions that he had seen in the United States. In the final paragraph of the article, Cowell makes this statement, “These characteristics of Irish traditional music: the curves of sound which run through delicate gradations as opposed to a fixed scale of set pitches; the peculiar resting-points; the rhythm closely following the rolling nuances of Gaelic, and the indigenous conception of phrase ending and length might well form the background for an art music.”⁶⁸ This statement demonstrates Cowell’s connection with his Irish heritage and knowledge of traditional Irish music, giving insight into how he integrated it into art music.

65. Sachs, 226.

66. Ibid., 222.

67. Ibid., 223.

68. Henry Cowell, “Hidden Irish Treasure,” *Modern Music* 6 (June 1929): 31–33.

Cowell's Sonata for Violin and Piano

Cowell wrote the Sonata for Violin and Piano in 1945 and it is the only sonata that he wrote for two instruments.⁶⁹ Violinist Joseph Szigeti commissioned the work; however, violinist Sol Babitz and Cowell gave the premiere in Los Angeles on November 10, 1947. Originally, there were only four movements, but at Szigeti's request, Cowell added a fifth movement, which was included both at the premiere and in the first edition of the score. The movements are "Hymn," "In Fuging Style," "Ballade," "Jig," and "Finale." The Sonata draws from both Irish and American folk music influences. Although Cowell did not borrow from any existing folk tunes, the original themes of the composition are so grounded in folk style that a reviewer of Szigeti's February 1949 Carnegie Hall performance erroneously referred to Cowell's Sonata as an "adaption of an early nineteenth century American work."⁷⁰

Cowell branded this Sonata as American through the use of Irish musical forms and ties to colonial America. In Cowell's mind, Irish music was one of the primary roots of traditional American music. He stated that Irish music was the "main American folk-dance influence" in a 1934 letter to Nicolas Slonimsky.⁷¹ His use of forms like the Irish jig and the *comeallye* ballade form, combined with the hymn and fuging tune of William Billings's colonial America, created a distinctly American work. Cowell conveyed the American and Irish folk music influence on the Sonata through the movement titles, which are more descriptive than those of European sonatas. In a traditional sonata, a common tempo relationship between the movements would be fast-

69. Godwin, "The Music of Henry Cowell."

70. Philip Hamburger, "Musical Events: The Quick and the Good," *New Yorker*, February 19, 1949.

71. Sachs, *Henry Cowell*, 209.

slow-fast. In contrast, Cowell chose to begin and end the piece with slow tempos. By beginning the Sonata with “Hymn” and “In Fuging Style,” he also draws a link to early American compositional practices in New England.

A fuging tune is defined as “An Anglo-American psalm tune or hymn tune, designed for strophic repetition, which contains one or more groups of contrapuntal entries involving textual overlap.”⁷² William Billings (1746-1800) is the American composer most closely associated with the hymn and fuging tune genre. Cowell wrote eighteen independent sets of hymn and fuging tunes in the period of composition from 1943 to 1964, and included hymn and fuging tunes in other large scale works such as his Fourth Symphony.⁷³

Hymn

At only 42 measures, the “Hymn” is the shortest movement of the Sonata, and is marked *Largo* in 3/2 meter. At the beginning, the score indicates “intense tone” for the violin, and “*sostenuto* with fervor” for the piano. Cowell imbued this movement with a hymn quality by writing in a polyphonic chorale texture with singable lines, and gave the hymn the sound of antiquity by writing the movement in mixolydian mode. The key signature indicates D major, but the pitch center of the movement is A. The opening melody is repeated multiple times, and only measures 16-23 contain new material. The final measure consists of only perfect intervals, finishing the movement with a sense of resignation, but also incompleteness. The simplicity and

72. Crawford, Richard. “Fuging Tune | Grove Music,” accessed February 10, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000010358>.

73. Godwin, “The Music of Henry Cowell,” 300.

brevity of the movement, combined with the open ending make the “Hymn” serve as an introduction to the following movement, “In Fuguing Style.”

In Fuguing Style

The movement “In Fuguing Style,” is in D minor and has an imitative, polyphonic texture. Marked *Allegro Maestoso*, the movement has a fiery, but also grounded and sturdy character. The frequent use of octave doubling in the bass of the piano part enhances this character. The opening statement of the violin becomes the fugal subject that reoccurs throughout the movement in both parts. The interest of the statement lies in the rhythmic contrast between the triplets and eighth notes, and the tie between beats 2 and 3 creates tension that propels the subject forward (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Cowell Sonata Movement 2, Measures 1-5

Ballade

The third movement, “Ballade,” is written in the style of an Irish *comeallye*. A *comeallye* is a form often used in Irish ballades, and is characterized by the phrase structure AABB. In the *comeallye*, the two A phrases are equal in length. The B phrases are higher in register than the A phrases and are also equal in length.⁷⁴ In the “Ballade” movement of the Violin Sonata, Cowell clearly delineates between A and B sections by imbuing them with different meters, tempi, and dynamics. The movement has two complete iterations of the AABB form, and then returns to A

74. Sidney Robertson Cowell, liner notes for *Songs of Aran*. (New York: Folkways Records & Service Corp., 1957).

to close. Cowell was so pleased by the movement that he made two more arrangements: one for woodwind quintet and another for string orchestra.⁷⁵ Not everyone shared Cowell's assessment. Joscelyn Godwin made this scathing remark about the movement: "The 'Ballad' can hardly be described otherwise than as a sentimental fantasy on a cousin of the 'Londonderry Air.'" While the "Ballade" is certainly sentimental, it is the emotional centerpiece of the work, and is a moment of great sincerity, reflection, and catharsis.

Jig

"Jig" begins like a typical Irish jig; it is in a fast tempo with a compound meter. The movement takes a surprising turn when, after the first *Vivace* section in G major, the piece continues on without any transition, into a *Meno mosso* section in E minor, where the violin part is marked "intensely." After one phrase in this new section, a one measure *accelerando* returns the music to Tempo One, and the key modulates from E minor to A minor. This brief Tempo One section at measure 33 consists of new material, but after eight bars, there is a return to the original *Meno mosso* material. The Tempo One section from measure 33 returns again at measure 49, and then at bar 56, there is a *Da Capo al Fine*, and the movement ends in G major at measure 24. In this movement, Cowell expanded upon a typical Jig by adding a contrasting slower section in a minor key. He added further interest to this contrasting section by including brief sections in the original *Vivace* tempo.

Cowell captures the spirit of an Irish jig, skillfully adapting the traditional elements of a jig into the sonata genre. The integration of a jig into the sonata genre is accomplished by layering melodies in canon, exchanging melody/accompaniment roles between the instruments,

75. Godwin, "The Music of Henry Cowell," 296.

and expanding the jig form through the addition of contrasting sections. The first statement of the melody in the violin is quickly joined in canon by the piano (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Cowell Sonata Movement 4, Measures 1-3

When that same theme returns, the roles are reversed and the pianist introduces the theme and the violinist follows (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Cowell Sonata Movement 4, Measures 13-15

The E minor section opens with the melody played in the right hand of the piano part and the countermelody in the violin part. When this material returns, the roles are reversed, and the violin plays the melody with the countermelody in the right hand of the piano.

Cowell brought an Irish jig into the sonata genre through the layering effect created by the use of canon and countermelody, and the equal partnership that results from alternating piano and violin roles.

Finale

The fifth movement, “Finale,” is marked *Vivace* and is the most unusual and unpredictable movement of the piece. It is the most technically challenging movement for the violinist. Measures 1-15 are characterized by driving sixteenth-notes that are either passed back and forth between the two instruments, or played in unison. At measure 11, the piano part abandons the sixteenth-notes for quarter-note triplets. At first glance, this change in rhythmic texture seems arbitrary; however, it is a paraphrase from measure 42 of the second movement, with minor differences in slurring and voicing (Figure 12). A lyrical and sweeping melody enters at measure 16, marked *Poco Meno Mosso*. This theme is a more obvious paraphrase of the “Hymn” melody from the first movement (Figures 13 and 14).



Figure 12. Cowell Sonata Movement 2, Measures 42-43 and Movement 3, Measures 11-12



Figure 13. Cowell Sonata Movement 1, Measures 11-16



Figure 14. Cowell Sonata Movement 5, Measures 16-20

This material continues to be the main focus until the upbeat to measure 51, when the A section of the “Ballade” movement emerges. Materials from both the “Ballade” and “Hymn” movements continue to be interwoven through the remainder of the final movement of the piece.

Near the end of the “Finale,” the piano part uses extended techniques for the first time in the Sonata. This section is the only time there are specific pedal indications in the work. The pianist must stand up while their foot remains on the pedal, placing one hand into the piano to depress specific strings to dampen them, while the other hand plays the indicated notes on the keyboard. This technique simulates the sound of *pizzicato* on a string instrument, and is paired with the violin’s first use of *pizzicato*. This moment is striking not only because of the unusual sound, but also due to its placement within the work, during a quiet moment of repose and reflection.

Cowell used the same motive to open “In Fuging Style,” “Jig,” and “Finale.” The motive consists of a rising fifth followed by a descending third (Figure 14). This motive opens all three movements and occurs several times throughout, although in the “Jig,” the motive is presented in major. The motive is not easily recognized as a repetition due to differences in meter, register, tempo, and character. Rather, it serves as a subtle connection between the movements.



Figure 15. Cowell Sonata Movement 2, Measure 1



Figure 16. Cowell Sonata Movement 4, Measure 1

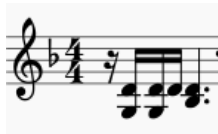


Figure 17. Cowell Sonata Movement 5, Measure 1.

The Violin Sonata marked an important new step for Cowell, as his first work to employ: the hymn and fugging tune pair as outer movements, and the jig and ballade as middle movements. Writing about Cowell's music from the mid 1940's to the late 1950's, author Hugo Weisgall states, "For pure musical charm and spontaneity, it would be hard to improve upon the *comallye* ballad tunes, the Irish-American dance tunes, and various pieces or movements that appear during this time. The jig has since become firmly entrenched as the Cowell *scherzo*; it is to Cowell what the waltz was to Tchaikovsky."⁷⁶

In addition to using folk-like tunes, another trait of the Violin Sonata, typical of Cowell's music from the 1940's, is the lack of a climactic ending.⁷⁷ The work ends plaintively, in *pianissimo*, with a direct quote from the end of the "Hymn" movement. The last harmony of both "Hymn" and "Finale" lack a chordal third, resulting in an ambiguous chord quality and an

76. Weisgall, "The Music of Henry Cowell."

77. *Ibid.*, 454.

incomplete sound. Cowell gave the work a cyclical quality by tying the rambunctious “Finale” back to the supplicatory Hymn.

The New Simplicity

In order to understand why Cowell embraced a simpler, folk-oriented style, more focused on tradition than experimentation, we must examine his personal circumstances as well as historic events. While Cowell was sincere in his tribute to Irish and American folk styles, there were political forces that may have prompted Cowell to seek simplicity instead of radicalism in his music during this period. With World War II ending in 1945, the same year that this piece was written, it stands to reason that audiences would be touched by music that provided a sense of national identity. Also, the United States was experiencing a heightened fear of communism, a phenomenon now referred to as the Second Red Scare.

The House Un-American Activities Committee, a committee of the House of Representatives, targeted many artists for questioning, including Aaron Copland.⁷⁸ Copland had been a frequent visitor to meetings of the Pierre Degeyter Club, a group of musicians who were communists or communist sympathizers. While Cowell was never a member of the communist party, he was deeply involved with the Pierre Degeyter Club. Furthermore, his former teacher and mentor, Charles Seeger, was a known communist sympathizer, and in 1929, Cowell was the first American composer and the second American performer to be invited to the Soviet Union for a concert tour.⁷⁹ While Cowell saw positive elements in musical life in the Soviet Union, he was “dangerously critical” of Soviet policy.⁸⁰ Despite Cowell’s level-headed attitudes towards

78. Sachs, *Henry Cowell*, 410.

79. *Ibid.*, 162.

80. *Ibid.*, 267.

the Soviet Union, his substantial involvement there and in communist activities in the United States made him a likely target for McCarthyist policy. Cowell was able to confirm his sense of patriotism, to prying eyes, with works rooted in early American simplicity.

In addition to the pressure from the political climate, Cowell had another shadow following him at this point in his life. He had been incarcerated in the San Quentin State Prison from 1936 to 1940, for violating Section 288 of the Penal Code of California, which was a law forbidding oral sex.⁸¹ The individual who accused him of the violation was a seventeen-year-old male. At the time the incident occurred, a seventeen-year-old was legally an adult.⁸² However, newspapers were quick to label Cowell as a child predator, and several of Cowell's friends abandoned him. When he was released from prison, only five years before writing the Violin Sonata, he had difficulty piecing his life back together. Cowell wrote about the effect of his incarceration, "Although I don't feel any embarrassment on account of the SQ [San Quentin] factor, yet it probably gives me still more timidity. It is certainly true now that people exaggerate the probable meaning of every minute thing I do or seem to suggest, and impute motives to my actions that I certainly do not knowingly have."⁸³ Given that Cowell felt scrutinized in this way, it was a calculated move on his part to use a hearty folk style with religious overtones in the Sonata that left no room for questioning of Cowell's orientation, masculinity, or patriotism.

On the surface, it might appear that Cowell compromised his innovative spirit and gave in to the political pressure by writing this work. It is seemingly more conservative than his earlier

81. Sachs., 276.

82. Ibid., 277.

83. Henry Cowell to Sidney Robertson, December 3, 1940, quoted in Sachs, 369.

modernist compositions. Even at the beginning of his career, however, Cowell never wrote exclusively in one particular style. Charles Seeger observed that one of the most unusual things about Cowell was that he used “commonplace materials in some compositions and new or unusual materials in others.”⁸⁴ Cowell himself later said that the titles he chose for works determined the style in which they were composed. According to biographer Joel Sachs, “There is no reason to believe that the simplified music Henry wrote after San Quentin was caused by discouragement in prison. Many factors, including the communist days, had convinced him that simplicity with depth was preferable to complexity.”⁸⁵ Cowell was not the only American modernist composer to experiment with folk music and greater simplicity at this time. Ruth Crawford and Charles Seeger both became involved in collecting folk music.

Cowell’s success at incorporating folk idioms into the Sonata for Violin and Piano was recognized widely by concert reviewers. Max Harrison wrote in the *London Times*, “This sonata is wild yet natural, and if homespun, is never merely folksy... Its modal lines weaving through square cut harmony and rhythm, look further back to the crude but sturdy fuguing tunes, hymns, ballades, and jigs of the New England Primitives.”⁸⁶ A reviewer for the *Daily Telegraph* called the work, “An extraordinary and original piece with roots in the unorthodox rural hymns of the previous century...”⁸⁷

Cowell’s Sonata for Violin and Piano is an innovative work that marks the beginning of a new period in Cowell’s compositional output. The work was the first of many in which Cowell

84. Sachs., 61.

85. Ibid., 323.

86. Max Harrison, “American Musical Traditions,” *The Times* (London), June 2, 1970.

87. A.E.P. “U.S. Violinist of Feeling” *Daily Telegraph* (London) June 2, 1970.

both repurposed the jig as a *scherzo*, and used hymn and fugal tune as movements in a larger form. In this piece, Cowell managed to be both experimental and traditional, by using folk genres in a new way. While Cowell may have been prompted to search for American roots by fear of anticommunist sentiment, as well as the need to showcase some rugged masculinity after being labeled a pedophile by the press, he remained true to his spirit of innovation in this work. The small section of extended technique included in the “Finale” is evidence that Cowell had not abandoned the radical experimentalism which garnered his place as an international sensation.

CHAPTER 3

CONNECTIONS

The lives of Henry Cowell and Roy Harris made several intersections as they were both part of the small body of highly successful American composers of their time. In the 1930's and 1940's, there were different schools of thought on the direction that American music should take. Cowell belonged to the school that is referred to as "ultra-modern" or "experimentalist," while Harris is often called a "nationalist." Cowell's close associates included composers Charles Ives, Charles Seeger, Edgard Varèse, and Percy Grainger. Harris was close with his teacher Arthur Farwell, and with Nicolas Slonimsky, but not with many other people. While Harris's approach to composition shared common traits with Copland and Virgil Thomson, among others, he did not develop strong connections with like-minded composers, and especially did not connect with composers who were in the other camp, including Cowell. Cowell, on the other hand, devoted much of his life to advocating for other composers through the New Music Society and Pan-American Association of Composers. This explains why Cowell wrote about Harris on two separate occasions, while Harris had nothing to say publicly about Cowell. In this chapter, we will examine Cowell's writings on Harris, and the intersections of the two men's lives.

The Pan-American Association of Composers

One intersection was with the Pan-American Association of Composers (PAAC), an organization of composers who were citizens of North and South American countries. The PAAC only lasted from 1928-1934, but its impact should not be underestimated. The first president of the association was Edgard Varèse, but Cowell became president shortly thereafter in 1929. These composers opposed the current movement of European Neoclassicism, viewing it

as stale.⁸⁸ Part of the mission statement of the PAAC, as announced in a pamphlet distributed after the group's first organizational meeting, was to "stimulate composers to make still greater effort toward creating a distinctive music of the Western Hemisphere."⁸⁹ The PAAC organized concerts in New York and Cuba, and conductor Nicolas Slonimsky brought music of PAAC members to Paris and Berlin. The fact that both Cowell and Harris were involved in the PAAC means that although their compositional styles were very different, they both were dedicated to the cause of furthering American music.

The Office of War Information

The United States Office of War Information (OWI) is another institution in which Cowell and Harris were both involved. The OWI used music for Allied propaganda during World War II. Radio programs of music were broadcast to Allied countries, as well as to Germany and other hostile nations. By broadcasting American art music, the music department at the OWI sought to combat German propaganda that painted the United States as an uncultured nation.⁹⁰ Additionally, the broadcasts aimed to bolster morale amongst the American public for the war effort, and music was used as a lure to attract listeners to stations that would then transmit political messages.⁹¹ Cowell worked for the OWI as Associate Music Editor from 1943-1945.⁹² This was Cowell's first significant employment after being released from prison.

88. Sachs, 155.

89. Deane L. Root, "The Pan American Association of Composers (1928-1934)," *Anuario Interamericano de Investigacion Musical* 8 (1972): 49–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/779819>.

90. Annegret Fauser, *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 87.

91. Sachs., 390.

92. Ibid, 389–93.

As an enthusiast and scholar of various kinds of world music, Cowell was ideally suited for his new job. Before Cowell was hired, the OWI had made several blunders in their broadcast selections. On one occasion, the OWI had broadcast “O Tannenbaum,” and the Germans used this as evidence that the United States did not have its own unique culture.⁹³ Clearly, it was imperative that music for broadcasting be selected carefully, after the possible implications of every choice were weighed.

When Cowell originally joined the OWI as Associate Music Editor, he oversaw the library of music for broadcasts to continental Europe.⁹⁴ Soon after, he began to select music for broadcasts to neutral nations, such as North African nations, Iran, and India. The goal of these broadcasts was to “present the United States as a cultivated, forward-looking, powerful, and democratic nation.”⁹⁵ In order to attract listeners to OWI radio stations so that they would hear propaganda broadcasts, music was selected that appealed to the population of where the broadcast was transmitted. When selecting music for nations where the population would not appreciate European classical music, Cowell used his global music expertise to skillfully create programs suitable for the intended audience. Cowell negotiated with a recording company in Brooklyn to get them to produce North African indigenous music for OWI, because the pre-war record making industry was centered in hostile Berlin, and a record-making facility in Greece that was set up for the Allies was destroyed in the war.⁹⁶ At the request of the State Department,

93. Sachs, 390.

94. Ibid., 390.

95. Fauser, *Sounds of War*, 85.

96. Sachs., 391.

Cowell produced an exercise sound track for the army of the Shah of Iran. Cowell's study of Iranian folk music enabled him to compose short pieces for string quartet and organ that would be appreciated by the Iranian army. Cowell's connections, resourcefulness, and broad experience served him well. Despite his qualifications, however, Cowell was never promoted to the job of music director, and he resigned from the OWI in the spring of 1945.⁹⁷

Harris became the OWI Music Director in the spring of 1945; however, he lasted only a few months.⁹⁸ He chose to use his position at the OWI to broadcast many of his own compositions, and to "propagate American tastes."⁹⁹ Cowell's wife, Sidney R. Cowell, said that Harris acted "against all common sense: the operation was only intended to attract listeners... It was necessary to be inconspicuous and to have a very clear useful war aim..." Annegret Fauser points out that all of the composers who worked or consulted for the OWI were comfortable with the idea of using art music for propaganda.¹⁰⁰ However, Harris lacked the broad expertise and finesse of Cowell, and as the war was grinding to a halt, President Truman disbanded the OWI.

Cowell's Writings on Harris

In his 1930 article, "Three Native Composers," in *The New Freeman Magazine*, Cowell discussed Roy Harris along with Charles Ives and Carl Ruggles. By including Harris alongside these two pillars of American composition, Cowell gave Harris a significant vote of confidence. Cowell wrote about Harris again in 1932 and in both articles, treated Harris as a work-in-progress with considerable potential, and emphasized Harris's distinctly American voice.

97. Sachs, 393.

98. Fauser, *Sounds of War*, 84–85.

99. Sachs, 393.

100. Fauser, 92.

Cowell's first statement about Harris in his 1930 essay reads, "Roy Harris is still somewhat in the formative state. He has a personal approach bristling with originality and cowboy punch."¹⁰¹ In this statement, Cowell acknowledged Harris's musical naiveté and unique approach, and continued the tradition of branding Harris as rural and Western. Later in the article, Cowell discussed Harris's late beginning in music, and stated that every new piece Harris composed was an improvement on his last. One significant point Cowell made about Harris was that his compositions were decidedly American and not European. "His music is rough-and-ready, and he usually chooses a theme so square-cornered that any European would discard it as being impossible to develop. But to develop it is just exactly what Harris proceeds to do, with surprising dexterity, and the use of new devices of thematic expansion which give his music much of its unique savor. The music has a pronounced Western American breeziness."¹⁰²

Cowell went on to explain the common misconception of Harris's music held by other modernist composers: "he is considered a conservative by the moderns; yet his music is modern in feeling, and upon a less superficial examination one finds that it really abounds in new elements which account for this feeling of newness, and that one has merely been duped into thinking that the materials are only those of the past." Cowell believed that although Harris's music was significant and new, Harris's traditional harmonic language caused his innovations to be overlooked.

Cowell edited a collection of essays published in a book entitled, *American Composers on American Music*. The essays are divided into two categories: "Composers in Review of Other Composers," and "Composers in Discussion of General Tendencies." Of the nineteen essays on

101. Cowell, "Music: Three Native Composers," *The New Freeman* 1, no. 8 (1930): 184-86.

102. *Ibid.*, 186.

individual composers, Cowell wrote eight, including the essay on Harris, which was originally published in the April 1932 issue of a journal called *The Sackbut*. In the second section of the book, Cowell chose to include an article by Harris entitled, “Problems of American Composers.” Cowell’s inclusion of Harris in this collection suggests the level of respect that Cowell had for Harris.

CONCLUSION

Although Henry Cowell was a modernist and Roy Harris a nationalist, they each produced a violin sonata in the 1940's that was rooted in American folk music styles. These works are the product of a moment in history that elicited a similar response from these very different men. Perhaps the Cowell Violin Sonata has been overlooked in scholarly writing because unlike many of Cowell's works, it does not appear to break new ground and seems like a step backwards for such a bold composer. As discussed in Chapter Two, Cowell's Violin Sonata was a step in a new direction because it was the first of many works in which Cowell both incorporated the hymn and fugal tune genre into a large form, and repurposed the jig as a *scherzo*. In the Harris Violin Sonata, three of the composer's trademark compositional characteristics are included: autogenesis, folk tune adaption, and composite meters. These two violin sonatas are a snapshot of the shared values of two composers in 1940's America. Both composers wanted to sever the umbilical cord that still connected American composers to European compositions and the result was the creation of two violin sonatas that captured the American spirit.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Violinist Marianna Cutright Brickle holds a Bachelor of Music in Violin Performance from the University of Maryland, where she studied with David Salness, and worked with members of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Guarneri String Quartet. She earned her Master of Music degree in violin performance from Florida State University where she is currently pursuing a Doctor of Music degree as a graduate assistant to Corinne Stillwell. Marianna serves as faculty at the Thomasville Road Academy of the Arts in Tallahassee where she teaches private lessons to children, and is co-teacher of the Tallahassee Homeschool String Orchestra.

Marianna performs professionally in both the Tallahassee and Ocala Symphony Orchestras, and formerly played with the Fairfax Symphony in Virginia. She is an alumna of the National Orchestral Institute and the Brevard Music Center, as well as the Duxbury Music Festival in Massachusetts. In the summers of 2014 and 2015, Marianna was chosen to be a Marian Anderson String Quartet Teaching Fellow. As part of this fellowship, Marianna received intensive chamber music training from the Anderson String Quartet. In 2016, Marianna taught at the FSU String Orchestra Camp.

Marianna has had two residencies at Puerto Rico Baptist College, where she taught violin and piano lessons and presented concerts of sacred and classical music. Marianna and her husband, pianist David Brickle, present numerous recitals each year, and they participated in the world premiere of Nicole Chamberlain's *Flume*. Marianna enjoys programming lesser known American music alongside more traditional classics. She is the proud aunt of thirteen nieces and nephews, and enjoys gardening, hiking, and canoeing.