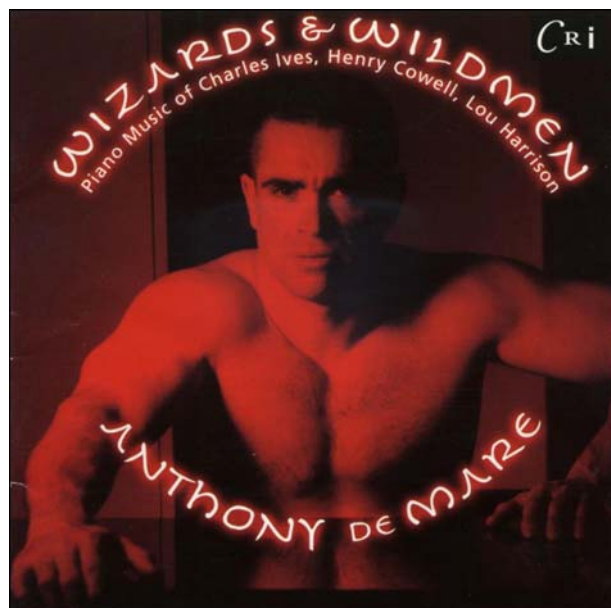


NWCR837

# Wizards & Wildmen

Piano Music of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison



## Henry Cowell

1. *Exultation* (1919) ..... (1:47)
2. *Aeolian Harp* (1923) ..... (2:25)
3. Charles Ives "The Alcotts" (1914) ..... (5:52)  
(from Sonata No.2 for Piano: "Concord, Mass.,"  
1840–60)

## Lou Harrison

- Third Piano Sonata (1938)\* ..... (10:33)
4. I. Slowing & singing ..... (3:45)
5. II. Fast & rugged ..... (3:45)
6. III. Very slow, very singing & solemn .... (3:03)
7. *Prelude for Grandpiano* (to Henry  
Cowell)\* (1937) ..... (7:36)

## Henry Cowell

8. *The Lilt of the Reel* (1925) ..... (2:00)
9. *Tiger* (1928) ..... (3:04)

## Charles Ives

- Three Improvisations* (1938) ..... (3:21)
10. I. .... (1:23)
11. II. .... (1:09)
12. III. .... (0:49)
13. *Study No.22* (c.1909) ..... (1:46)

## Lou Harrison

14. *Homage to Milhaud* (1948)\* ..... (0:36)
- New York Waltzes* (1944–51) ..... (3:34)
15. I. Waltz in C (1945) ..... (0:53)
16. II. Hesitation Waltz (1951) ..... (1:22)
17. III. Waltz in A (1944) ..... (1:19)
18. *Largo Ostinato* (1937)\* ..... (4:51)

## Henry Cowell

19. *Dynamic Motion* (1916) ..... (3:03)  
*Five Encores to Dynamic Motion*
20. *What's This?* (1917) ..... (0:39)
21. *Amiable Conversation* (1917) ..... (0:53)
22. *Advertisement* (1917) ..... (1:33)
23. *Antinomy* (1917) ..... (3:46)
24. *Time Table* (1917) ..... (3:45)

## Charles Ives

25. *The Celestial Railroad* (c.1921–23) ..... (7:26)

## Lou Harrison

26. *May Rain* (1941) ..... (2:42)
27. *Saraband* (1937) ..... (4:44)

## Henry Cowell

28. *The Banshee* (1925) ..... (2:41)  
Anthony de Mare, piano

\*Premiere recordings

Total playing time: 78:37

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## Notes

On a cold February morning in 1947 the twenty-nine-year-old **Lou Harrison** (1917–2003) walked along East 74th Street in Manhattan for a lunch appointment with **Charles Ives** (1874–1954). It was to be their first meeting. Harrison recalls walking somewhat expectantly up the brownstone staircase of Ives's building and finding Ives at the top, with eyes ablaze, madly whirling his cane in the air and shouting "My old friend! My old friend!"

Ives, then seventy-three, his health prone to fluctuation, was well known as a man of high eccentricity and impish humor. He was also a recluse who, after decades of life as a New York businessman (at the helm of the immensely successful Ives and Myrick life insurance company) now only rarely ventured into the city from his home in Connecticut. By this time, Harrison had been involved with Ives's music for more

than a decade. He had edited many of Ives's nearly-indecipherable manuscripts, had performed and written about his compositions, and a year previously had conducted the premiere of the Symphony No.3, the occasion that led to Ives being awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Ives had good reason to cherish the prospect of meeting his "old friend." In a letter to Harrison of November 1944 he had written: "With men of courage & independence like you, who are not afraid to think for themselves and to stand up & say what they believe in regardless, better times will come."

Harrison had been introduced to Ives's music by the man who had done more than any other individual to bring it to public attention in the first place: **Henry Cowell** (1897–1965), the Californian composer, pianist, publisher, teacher, writer, and propagandist for the newest sorts of American music. In the

spring of 1935, while a student at San Francisco State College, Harrison enrolled in Cowell's course "Music of the Peoples of the World," offered through the University of California Extension in San Francisco, and shortly thereafter approached Cowell for composition lessons. Cowell would utterly transform the young Harrison's world, introducing him to music and compositional techniques from around the world as well as those in his own backyard—the work of the American "ultra-moderns," of which Cowell was a tireless proponent. Harrison first wrote to Ives, at Cowell's suggestion, in March 1936, asking for copies of Ives's works for possible performance at student recitals at San Francisco State. Eventually Ives dispatched a large crate of photostat scores of his music with the admonition not to spend time on it "if it bothers the players too much." Harrison played the piano sonatas and immersed himself in the study of Ives's extraordinary output.

Cowell's own friendship with Ives had come about in a curious way. Although the two men could have met in New York at various times from the autumn of 1916 onward, their paths resolutely failed to cross for many years. Ives, as is well known, composed his visionary and iconoclastic music in nearly total isolation from his fellow composers in America, very few of whom knew of his existence during his most productive years (the early 1890s to the mid-1920s). Cowell would have been aware of Ives from the time of the self-publication of Ives's *Concord Sonata* and *114 Songs* in the early 1920s: but many musicians who received Ives's publications were at first dismissive (including, to their subsequent mortification, Carl Ruggles and Charles Seeger, both of whom tried to persuade Cowell that Ives was a mere amateur and that it was not worth expending energy on "this crank"). However, Cowell was intrigued, and the New York premiere of two movements of Ives's *Symphony No. 4* in January 1927 prompted him to make contact with the reclusive composer. Thanks to their subsequent friendship—in which Cowell, who was more than twenty years younger, came to regard Ives as "like a father"—a new chapter in American music began.

Ives and Cowell, although kindred spirits musically, were quite unlike in upbringing and temperament. Ives, born into an old Yankee family, educated at Yale, a devout Christian and family man, was the epitome of New England respectability; the streak of madness that the locals of Danbury believed ran in the Ives family manifested itself in Charlie's crazy music. Cowell, the son of unconventional, separated parents, a free spirit and essentially an autodidact, displayed an independent turn of mind in both his music and his lifestyle (he was a homosexual). These differences aside, both men were generous and altruistic by nature. Cowell's unceasing activities as promoter and publisher brought many other lone spirits together and demonstrated the possibility of a new kind of music in America; but his central forum—*New Music Quarterly*, the magazine of modern scores which he founded in 1927—quickly became unthinkable without financial support from Ives, who kept it afloat for most of its life.

Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and Lou Harrison thus belong together by virtue of a complex network of personal and musical connections. All three were rebels and innovators who today are revered as emblems of the radical spirit in American music. When their music was new all three were dismissed as mavericks or eccentrics, or damned with faint praise as "pioneers"—labels that emphasize only one aspect of their work and obscure an equally important one: the seriousness of their commitment to making a new sort of American music true to their own vision and experience.

This disc reminds us that all three men were pianists, and the music recorded here was written in the first instance for their

own performance. However, each of the three composers had a distinct relationship to the piano. After his youth Ives rarely played in public; the piano became the instrument at which he composed and tried out ideas. (He was, nonetheless, a highly gifted performer: the collected recordings of Ives at the piano, spanning the years 1933–43, can be heard on CRI 810.) Cowell, in contrast, attracted a great deal of notoriety as a performer of his own piano music: newspaper critics in San Francisco, New York, London, Berlin, and Vienna made great copy from this small and exuberantly energetic man with his strange tone-cluster music (tone-clusters, heard in most of the Cowell pieces on this disc, are large chords of adjacent notes played either conventionally by the fingers or, for larger clusters, by the fist, the palm of the hand, or the whole forearm). Harrison, throughout his composing life, has been attracted to early keyboards such as the harpsichord or clavichord as much as to the modern piano; the piano is only one instrumental resource among many from around the world for which he has composed, and occupies a place of no special importance in his large output.

The works of Ives recorded here display the astonishing breadth of his musical imagination. "The Alcotts" is the third movement of his *Concord Sonata*. The music is intended, the composer tells us, as a "sketch" of Orchard House (the Alcott family home), the old elms overspreading it, the "mosses of the old manse" and the hickories of Walden not far away. It captures the sound of the family piano as Beth Alcott plays at Beethoven's Fifth, Scottish airs, and rural hymns. At the thunderous climax of the movement the Beethoven motif is sounded in ringing chords as "the Concord bards pound away at the immensities." Like most of Ives's finest music "The Alcotts" has a complex genesis, deriving in part from an abandoned sketch for an *Alcotts Overture* from 1904 and taking its final form many years later (one manuscript bears the date "November 28, 1914").

*The Celestial Railroad* (c.1921–23) is one of Ives's last works for piano. It grew out of the already-completed (and published) "Hawthorne," the second movement of the *Concord Sonata*. As with much of his music, Ives did not consider the Sonata to be a finished work even following its publication in 1920; the music kept suggesting further developments and extensions, like an abandoned but still-growing plant putting out unexpected shoots and new leaves. The original manuscript of *The Celestial Railroad*, as Ives's biographer Jan Swafford has described it, consists of cut-out fragments from the printed score of "Hawthorne" pasted onto music paper, sometimes with "revisions" scrawled over them, and linked together by stretches of newly-composed music. The resulting work contains some of his most difficult piano writing: Ives came to regard it as a try-out for the "Comedy" movement of his *Symphony No. 4*. On a programmatic level, *The Celestial Railroad* is a musical embodiment of the short story of that name by Nathaniel Hawthorne. A man falls asleep and dreams of a fantastic train that carries its passengers to the Celestial City. At the prompting of a curious companion, Mr. Smooth-it-away, the narrator boards the train the moment before it sets out on its journey. The train passes many horrific scenes on its way, stops at temptation-filled towns such as Vanity Fair, and finally reaches its destination on the bank of the river Jordan, where a ferry awaits to take the passengers across the river to the Celestial City. Once they have set sail the narrator discovers with a jolt that Mr. Smooth-it-away, transformed back to his true demonic form, has remained back on shore: realizing that he has been deceived, the narrator in a panic leaps into the water and swims for his life. The shock of the cold water awakens him, and the nightmare is over. Ives's piano "fantasy" follows these events in sequence, with one bit of poetic license: at the

end, as Thomas Brodhead has observed in his critical edition of the work, the narrator wakens to the sound of the Fourth of July celebrations at Concord.

The piano works that Ives called “studies” are studies in compositional techniques as much as pianistic virtuosity. Study No. 22, dating from around 1909, is a complex exploration of canons and mirror inversions of the melodic lines. It begins quietly, gets worked up, and simmers down again with a final passage “as a remark after the row!” (as Ives writes near the end of the score).

The *Three Improvisations* emerged as part of a recording session Ives undertook in New York in May 1938. They are spontaneous utterances, haunting, fragmentary, quite different in feeling from the heavily reworked surfaces characteristic of most of his music. The pianist and Ives scholar John Kirkpatrick noted that the first of the *Improvisations* uses “a phrase that sounds as if it might be part of the lost *Autumn Landscapes from Pine Mountain* (1904)”; that the second “suggests perhaps one of the lost [piano] Studies”; and that the third “has chords somewhat like those in the *Waltz-Rondo*.” The *Three Improvisations* were painstakingly transcribed from Ives’s recordings by Gail and James Dapogny.

Henry Cowell’s early piano music has worn better than many of its first critics suspected. It retains today a freshness and a spirit of devil-may-care exploration that thrillingly manifests what Cowell scholar Steven Johnson has called its composer’s “invention mentality.” *Dynamic Motion*, from 1916, is Cowell’s musical response to his first impressions of the New York subway. A piece that, in its composer’s words, “concerns itself with lines and volumes of sound and their juxtaposition,” *Dynamic Motion* shifts restlessly between brief tone-cluster figures and melodic fragments. The largest clusters of the piece, played with both forearms simultaneously, create an immense resonance; that, together with the aggressively rhythmic repeated chords and the nervous, disjointed melodic fragments, convey the energy of city life. The piece (especially in Cowell’s high-adrenaline performances) proved too much for some of its audiences: one New York critic wrote of a Cowell recital in 1922 that at the end of *Dynamic Motion* “three women lay in a dead faint in the aisle and no less than ten men had refreshed themselves from the left hip.”

Cowell produced five pieces in 1917 that he called “encores” to *Dynamic Motion* (rather curiously, as these are all self-sufficient works, two of which are longer than *Dynamic Motion* itself). The suitably enigmatic *What’s This?* is anyone’s guess. *Amiable Conversation* is a musical recreation of a friendly dispute the composer overheard in a Chinese laundry in San Francisco between “a low-voiced and a high-voiced Chinese.” The piece is bitonal in conception: a pentatonic melody in the bass using the black notes of the piano is set against white-note clusters played by the right arm; this alternates with a white-note melody in the treble set against black-note clusters played by the left arm. The melodies become ever more truncated, reflecting Cowell’s recollection that the dispute “got much more animated as it went along.” *Advertisement* brings us back to the world of New York, this time to the flashing lights of Times Square: there is a section that may be repeated as many times as the player likes, to emphasize the repetitiveness of the advertising signs. *Antinomy*, as befits its title, is a more sober piece—in philosophical jargon, antinomy is the contradiction existing between two apparently indubitable propositions. The diatonic main theme of the piece is borrowed from Cowell’s unfinished setting of Longfellow’s *Golden Legend*, written at the age of eleven or twelve. *Time Table* is a somber piece that seems to convey a sense of resignation in ending up in much the same place and frame of mind as one began.

*Exultation*, *The Lilt of the Reel*, *Aeolian Harp* and *The Banshee* all reflect aspects of Cowell’s Irish heritage. *Exultation* is a walking tune, but in a rhythm of three (rather than the more likely two or four). Cowell explained that the Irish consider it absurd to walk to a tune that tires one leg more than the other: in a rhythm of three the strong beats are evenly divided between the two legs. *The Lilt of the Reel* is an early example of Cowell’s love of the Celtic-style melodies that would come to play an increasingly prominent role in his later music. *Aeolian Harp* and *The Banshee* introduce still further pianistic innovations—typically for Cowell, in pursuit of a vivid extramusical image. In *Aeolian Harp* the player presses chords down silently on the keyboard with the left hand and strums the strings inside the piano with the right, creating otherworldly glissandi that resolve into the sound of the chord held by the left hand. This ghostly strumming alternates with passages where the piano strings are plucked, pizzicato-like, and their resonance caught by the sustaining pedal. In these technically unprecedented and imaginative ways Cowell recreates the sound of the Aeolian harp, the instrument beloved of the Romantic poets that hangs on a tree and is “played” by the wind. *The Banshee* goes one step further: the player forsakes the keyboard altogether, stands at the crook of the piano, and strums, scrapes, and plucks the piano strings directly (an assistant holds the sustaining pedal down throughout). The uncanny world of cries and echoes that results invokes the female spirit of Irish folklore whose wailing warns of impending death (the Irish *bean sídhe* literally means “the woman of the fairy mound”). The remaining Cowell work on this disc is *Tiger*, dating from 1928 and inspired by the famous poem of William Blake (“Tyger, tyger, burning bright...”): the extreme violence of the sonorities in this piece shows Cowell’s tone-cluster music at the limits of its idiom.

Notwithstanding his many achievements in other musical domains, it is for his piano music that Cowell has remained best known. The piano music of Lou Harrison, in contrast, remains one of the least-known corners of his output, and five of the seven works on this disc are first recordings. *Largo Ostinato* is music of quiet grandeur: originally written in January 1937, Harrison revised and orchestrated it as the third movement of his Third Symphony in 1982. (In that sense—but only that—it resembles Ives’s *The Celestial Railroad*, likewise later reworked as a symphonic movement).

The *Prelude for Grandpiano* (to Henry Cowell) and the *Saraband* also date from 1937 and are early examples of Harrison’s ultramodern idiom. They are among his first published works, having appeared in Cowell’s *New Music Quarterly* in the summer of 1938. The *Prelude* is an attractive mixture of extravagant keyboard display and enigmatic passages exploiting Cowell’s techniques of playing inside the piano. The *Saraband* utilizes a compositional procedure derived from the music of Ruggles—that of avoiding repetitions of the same pitch until seven or eight other pitches have intervened, resulting in a high degree of chromaticism. (One of the early listeners to the *Prelude* and *Saraband* was Arnold Schoenberg, for whose seminar Harrison played them in 1943. Harrison recalls that when he had finished Schoenberg looked up at the other members of the seminar and said, “Why don’t you bring me music like this?” “I was very embarrassed,” he adds.)

The Third Piano Sonata (1938, edited 1970) develops further some of the compositional procedures of the *Prelude* and *Saraband*, specifically the idea of “interval controls,” the principle of limiting the range of intervals used both melodically and harmonically. At the opening of the Sonata, for example, the melody that emerges in the right hand is built from only the intervals of the minor second, major third, and

minor seventh, while the chordal accompaniment in the left hand uses only superimpositions of major seconds and/or perfect fifths. The three movements display the range of the young Harrison's imagination: the Sonata is an imposing work, one in which the composer seems closest, musically, to the worlds of Ives or Ruggles.

*May Rain*, composed in October 1941, is a setting of words by the Californian poet Elsa Gidlow. Described by the philosopher Alan Watts in his autobiography as "reserved and gentle, with the beauty of a lithe and very self-respecting cat," Gidlow wrote poetry that combines a reverence for the beauty of nature with a hint of the erotic. Harrison knew her well in San Francisco in the early 1940s and subsequently. In his setting of "May Rain" the singer is accompanied (or, as in this recording, accompanies himself) by prepared piano and gong, using only a few notes to cast a spell that perfectly matches the incantatory quality of the text.

This disc also introduces music from the lightest part of Harrison's output: the *New York Waltzes* (written in 1945, 1951, and 1944 respectively) and the *Homage to Milhaud* (from September 1948). The waltzes, besides showing their composer's distinct gift for melody, bring to mind the miniatures of Harrison's friend Virgil Thomson; while *Homage to Milhaud*, possibly the shortest piece in his output, is the first of several tributes to the French composer who, like Harrison himself, taught at Mills College in Oakland for many years (Harrison would later honour Milhaud again by naming a gamelan, built by himself and William Colvig, after him). The many and diverse sides of Harrison's compositional output are often a celebration of and homage to the many "old friends" he has known in a long lifetime of music-making.

—Bob Gilmore

Recognized throughout the world for his dedication to the music of our time, pianist **Anthony de Mare** has been described as "a wonder every listener must hear to believe" (*Fanfare Magazine*). The *New York Times* has described his talents as "protean" and the *Herald-Times* characterized his handling of the piano as "ingenious." Combining virtuosic playing, imaginative programming, and his abilities as a trained actor, he creates theatrical worlds out of musical

works that communicate to a broad range of audiences. Having performed with Meredith Monk and Company, his programs often feature interdisciplinary and text-based works. With an expansive repertoire ranging from traditional to modern to theatrical, he has premiered, recorded, and had works written for him by such noted composers as Frederic Rzewski, Aaron Jay Kernis, Meredith Monk, John Zorn, Donald Martino, Michael Gordon, Chester Biscardi, Randall Woolf, and Jerome Kitzke, among others. Recent recordings such as *Pianos and Voices* (works by John Cage and Meredith Monk, Koch International), *Oblivi3n* (works by Astor Piazzolla and Joaqu3n Nin with cellist Maya Beiser, Koch International) and *Frederic Rzewski—Anthony de Mare* (O.O. discs, featuring *De Profundis*, written for him) have been received with much critical acclaim. He has also recorded for Mode, Wergo, Gasparo, XI, and Centaur. His other CRI recordings are music of Chester Biscardi (CD 686) and Paul Moravec (CD 641). For his recording of Biscardi's *Incitation to Desire* in the CRI Collection *Gay American Composers* (CD 721), he received a nomination from the Classical GLAMA (Gay Lesbian American Music Awards) in 1998.

Mr. de Mare began his performing career under the auspices of Young Concert Artists. His commitment to contemporary music was further acknowledged by First Prize at both the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition (The Netherlands) and the International Competition of Contemporary Piano Music (France) as well as several major grants from the NEA. He has generated great excitement with performances at the International Bergen and Ultima Festivals in Norway, WNYC's *New Sounds Live*, Mardi Gras Festival in Sydney, ISCM World Music Days, Huddersfield and Almeida Festivals in England, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and "Music in the Morning" and Banff Festivals in Canada. He received further recognition for his work as curator and performer for "Coming Together," a sixtieth birthday celebration for Frederic Rzewski in NYC. As concerto soloist he has performed with the San Francisco Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Essen Philharmonic, Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Little Orchestra Society of New York, among others.

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## Production Notes

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