

Format call for proposals lectorate 'Music, Education and Society' 2022

1. Name, role and department, institution, e-mail address and phone number

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2. Research topic/title

Harry Partch' Diamond Marimba as a collaborative tool

3. Motivation for doing research and choosing your topic

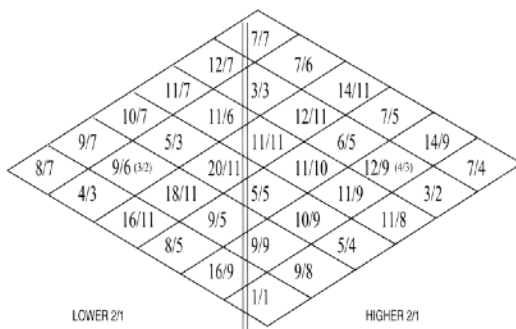
As a composer I often design my own instruments. This practice led to various experiments in modifying existing instruments and designing and/or building new ones (amongst others in last year's lectorate). One of the great inspirations for this practice is composer and instrument builder Harry Partch. A well-known name in contemporary music, even though his music (theory) is hardly heard live. This is something I want to change.

Since a couple of years I give music theory lessons for the sonologists, amongst others explaining overtones and their use in Just Intonation. A topic that is, albeit from a different perspective, also part of the second year curriculum for the composition department. When the ratios, lattices, tonalities/utonalities, harmonics/subharmonics, calculations in cents and hertz go into depth and become more complex, the connection with the sounding result can get lost easily. This changes when the music of Harry Partch is shown and explained. I think this revelation can be even stronger when the physical instrument(s) can be heard.

Thereby I hope this instrument can be a connecting object between the percussion department, the composition department, the sonology department, the Ensemble Academy and the art of sound department.

4. Description of the project (including rough time line)

During his life Partch wrote numerous pieces for a growing orchestra of custom build instruments. All instruments were designed to fit a (just intonation) tuning system inspired by *the sensation of tone* by Hermann von Helmholtz. Many of the instruments were based on the 11-limit tonality diamond. This basis is omnipresent in his music theory but often obscured in the instrumental layout. The diamond marimba is however a big exception. The music theory is physically present in the shape of the instrument.



I want to build this instrument and investigate it with various departments within the KC. My primary intention in the context of this research is not to rebuild instruments designed by Partch to perform his music per se. I hope the instrument can give various students an understanding of the theoretical foundation and spark collaboration.

When discussing the idea with my colleagues I received very enthusiastic responses. Gabriel Paiuk wrote me that “the Diamond Marimba - in both pedagogical and compositional circumstances - would be a valuable asset to delve deeper into the perceptual implications of tuning strategies. The instrument could become a resource to be investigated and used in both theory and compositional lessons as well as in performative environments.” Peter Adriaansz underlined this and told me a growing number of students are working with Just Intonation. “Due to its construction the instrument reflects limits and lattices and all that needs to be known for an in depth understanding of ratios. The sound being physical and not synthetic is of importance. It would be magnificent if the KC would have a Partch instrumentarium of its own in the future, with the diamond marimba as a prelude”.

The first step will be building the instrument (jan/feb 2022). In the dreamed scenario I would build the keys of the instrument from the staircase armrests of the old building in order to take the physical legacy of the Juliana van Stolberglaan into Amare. Mounted on wheels, so it can travel through the new building.

The second step would be the creation of a work for and with the Ensemble Academy (mar/apr 2022). Marlon Titre and Caterina Bevegini remarked that “this could become a long term project, spread in time, which represent a way for students to tune into research and collaborative creation processes”. Within the Ensemble Academy they imagine educational paths with their students and one or more composers. It enlarges possibilities and artistic outcomes, which also means professional integration and development of the students. I have the honor to kick this off with a mini solo-concerto for percussionist Porter Ellerman to be performed on the Spring Festival in 2022.

The last step would be a series of lectures made for various departments. Varying from music theory and music history to materiality in sound production. I would love to engage two students (from sonology and composition) afterwards to write new works for the instrument and two percussion students to perform it - all in close collaboration with the Art of Sound department. Writing, performing and recording the instrument will hopefully spark a renewed interest in this unique composer and his musical heritage and can above all be a gateway to widening internal artistic collaborations.

5. If applicable, explain how the research contributes to:

I hope I can inspire every student I teach the same way Partch’s instruments inspired me when I heard them for the first time. I have build a Diamond Marimba before for the Amsterdam based Scordatura ensemble and I would love to bring its potential to the KC by building it, write for it hoping it aggregates a whole new chapter in the conjunction of various departments. Investigating the unknown (in this case a tuning theory *and* an instrument) as a composer, recording engineer or performer allows collaboration as a playground - it would be an honor to provoke exactly that.

The results will however also inspire new generations of students and allow an interesting exchange with the U.S. based institutes where the original instruments are stored and ensembles and theorists studying Partch’ musical legacy.

6. Needed expert support

Even though this support is not indispensable a connection with Thomas Meixner (Ensemble MusicFabrik) and Charles Corey (University of Washington in Seattle) would be very helpful. I am sure this is possible via the contacts of ensemble Scordatura and/or Paul Jeukendrup.

7. Outcomes, format of dissemination and intended audience

The outcome of this research is a new instrument, a series of lectures, a new work for the instrument+ensemble and two solo works written and recorded by students. The audience varies from students from the five described departments to visitors of the Spring Festival. The world of Harry Partch aficionados is small but well connected, it would be great to introduce the KC this way.

8. If applicable: links to artistic work and/or research

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlkzI40bQPA4>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z99VlWR_n78&t=2460s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmvDeQixk5c&t=11s>

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/arend-strootman#tab-1>

<http://www.docartes.be/nl/personen/aart-strootman-1>