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## Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

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**Saturday, August 14, 2010, 5:00-6:00 p.m. (*The second Saturday this month!*)**

**Henry Cowell** (1897-1965). *Concerto Piccolo* (1942). Stefan Litwin, piano, Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, Michael Stern. Col Legno WWE 20064. Tr 16-18. 13:07

**Cowell**. *Irish Suite* (1925-29). 1. The Banshee, 2. The Leprechaun, 3. The Fairy Bells. Cheryl Seltzer, string piano, Continuum, Joel Sachs. Naxos 559192. Tr 19-21. 16:39

**Cowell**. *Ongaku for Orchestra* (1957). The Louisville Orchestra, Robert S. Whitney. First Edition FECD-0003. Tr 2-3. 14:06

The name of Henry Cowell may be unfamiliar to many classical music listeners, but Cowell is one of the biggest influences on modern American music, inspiring composers as disparate as John Cage, George Gershwin, Burt Bacharach, and generations down to this day. His own music isn't heard that often, but on this month's *Discoveries* we'll listen to three fascinating pieces out of his gargantuan and stylistically surprising catalog. We'll also talk to musicologist Gary Galván, who will share some of the facets of Cowell's life and music that made him the important figure that he is.

Henry Cowell was the author of an indispensable textbook for modern composers, *New Musical Resources*. He was the biographer of Charles Ives, the publisher of a new music journal, a formidable pianist, the inventor of playing techniques, the designer of instruments, and the composer of almost 1,000 works.

He never went to school as a child. His mother, a former schoolteacher, saw to his education, and among the musical talents appearing at an early age was virtuosity on the piano. As a teenager he experimented with different ways to play the instrument, and Cowell became the first composer to write pieces based on a fist-and-forearm tone-cluster technique. When he concertized in Europe, exhibiting this radical music before astonished audiences, Béla Bartók asked him if he could use these methods in his own music.

The *Concerto Piccolo* (small concerto) for piano is a later work but incorporates these youthful forays into sound. While they certainly grab our attention, they are not as jarring as we might anticipate. Rather, Cowell builds up textures that are both lyrical and powerful, and accompanies the piano with an often simple orchestral voice.

Cowell's other non-traditional use of the piano was to play inside of it. In his *Irish Suite* the pianist strums and hits the strings, sometimes silently depressing the keys to accentuate certain notes. Cowell called this a "string piano," but it's the same instrument. He composed this for solo piano and then arranged it for piano with orchestra, which is the version we'll hear.

Keenly interested in music from around the world, Cowell toured Asia in the late '50s with his wife Sidney, an expert in the burgeoning field of ethnomusicology. Out of this came *Ongaku for Orchestra*, based on the sounds of Japanese court music. Because of many works like this, and because he loved to use indigenous instruments from non-Western cultures, we might say that Cowell invented what is now called world music.

Even the folk movement can thank Henry Cowell. He introduced the two composers Charles Seeger and Ruth Crawford to each other; they married, and produced that American music icon, Pete Seeger.

The music on this program is just a brief look at the dynamo of influence Cowell was. Perhaps the always-observant John Cage said it best. Cage knew a thing or two about turning the musical world on its ear, but he called Henry Cowell the "open sesame for new music in America."

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Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).