

Book reviews

Henry Cowell, Bohemian. Michael Hicks. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. ix, 204 pp. ISBN 0-252-02751-5. \$29.95.

Michael Hicks's new book is a welcome addition to the ever-expanding bibliography on Henry Cowell. Hicks's reputation as a careful, thorough, and fair-minded scholar is borne out in a work that enriches our understanding of the roots of Cowell's inventive (and often eccentric) music. Particularly welcome is the "thick history" he provides at numerous junctures along the way. We are treated to political, social, cultural, biographical, literary, and even geographical explorations on topics such as the writings of Harry Cowell and Clarissa Dixon (Cowell's parents) and their attitudes toward education, on the environment of communities such as Menlo Park and Stanford in the early twentieth century, on the Forest Theater in Carmel, on the Halcyon community near Pismo Beach, and many others, including portraits of people within and outside of music who influenced Cowell's development—Charles Seeger, Charles Ives, Leo Ornstein, Jaime de Angulo, Lewis Terman, John and Russell Varian, Ellen Veblen, Sam Seward, and others. Cowell's theoretical ideas (such as those in *New Musical Resources*) are discussed clearly and accurately, if not in depth. Hicks has cast his net widely and used his findings to embellish his tale with rich and colorful descriptions that make for fascinating reading. The writing style is straightforward and refreshingly free of jargon; the book is accessible to both specialists and general audiences.

Henry Cowell, Bohemian is a relatively short book: 149 pages of text plus five appendices consisting of a 1924 review of Cowell's tone clusters, a description of the meeting of Cowell and John Varian, an essay by Cowell on the healing properties of musical pitches, Cowell's statement in his defense after his arrest, and Hicks's reflections on Cowell's choice of titles. The lack of a works list is understandable, given the annotated catalogue by Lichtenwanger, but the lack of a bibliography is not—frustrating omission for the reader who encounters a short title in an endnote and must search back through

previous notes to locate the full reference.

The book does not pretend to cover all periods of Cowell's life in equal depth. Hicks states in his introduction that his is "essentially a study of Cowell's life and work through the mid-1920s" (p. 4), a limitation governed both by the nature of the music (Cowell's most adventurous works were written in his early years) and by the availability of research materials (the rich collection of documents at the New York Public Library was closed to scholars until June 2000). Hicks specifies no ending date for his study, which might logically be 1936, when Cowell went to prison, or, better, 1940, when he was released. He does cover the period 1925–1940 (in about 25 pages) and touches briefly on the last quarter-century of Cowell's life, during which Cowell wrote "over 350 compositions" (p. 145). I do not object to the emphasis on Cowell's pre-prison years, but I would have found it useful if the title of the book and the individual chapters made clear the parameters of the study by the addition of inclusive dates. Perhaps Hicks will consider devoting the same attention to Cowell's post-prison years as he has given to the earlier period, whether in another book or in a series of articles.

The work is unified by Hicks's theory that the bohemian ideals of Cowell's parents and the communities in which he lived encouraged artistic and philosophical independence and nourished Cowell's tendency toward individualism. Early in the book, Hicks defines California bohemianism as "an eclectic and often elitist subculture that tried to mix leftist politics, mysticism, scientific experimentation, and multiculturalism" (p. 3). He returns to this theme periodically, citing Cowell's "glorification of boundary crossing," a "refusal to be constrained by conventional limits" (p. 117), and a resistance to a consistent ideology. The details of Hicks's thick history support his theory well and elucidate our understanding of Cowell's musical inventiveness and his imaginative (although sometimes arcane) theoretical concepts. Hicks also comments that Cowell's imprisonment (1936–1940) firmly "uprooted him" from his bohemian past (p. 143).

In several instances, Hicks builds on his own writings, particularly his articles on Cowell's arrest and imprisonment and on tone clusters.¹ His slant on the arrest is rather different from that in his 1991 article—and less sympathetic to Cowell. In the article, Hicks notes Cowell's resistance to blackmail (which ultimately led to the

1. "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," *Journal of the American Musicologi-*

arrest), emphasizes his self-sacrifice in pleading guilty to spare the young men the weight of a trial, states that the youngest of Cowell's partners was sixteen, and asserts that the county juvenile officer "misled the court" on several matters. In the book, the blackmail is not mentioned, a prior warning in 1922 is stressed, and Hicks states categorically that "by the 1930s Cowell . . . apparently entered into sexual relationships only with minors—boys between the ages of 12 and 17. . . . He had crossed the line from bohemian libertinism into something he knew was criminal" (p. 128). The facts presented are not substantially different, but the interpretation of them is. In view of Hicks's record of careful scholarship, we must conclude that he either reevaluated the data or discovered new documents that changed his perception of this most crucial event in Cowell's life. (Did the death of Sidney Cowell in 1995 influence the candor with which Hicks could—or was willing to—address this sensitive topic?)

Hicks's discussion of tone clusters—without doubt the most important of Cowell's extended piano techniques—is thoughtful and enlightening. The theoretical basis for these clusters and other extended performance techniques is explored in perceptive detail, but the profound impact of Cowell's music and theories on the next generation of composers is mentioned only briefly.

The book includes occasional analysis of individual pieces. I would have welcomed expansion in this area and a greater number of musical examples. Cowell's *Quartet Romantic*, for instance, is discussed in one short paragraph; the reader who is not familiar with the work is left with an imperfect understanding of the complex rhythmic theory Cowell was attempting to demonstrate.

Hicks is well versed in the extant literature on Cowell. His failure to note several recent publications no doubt reflects the time lag in the publication process. Dick Higgins's anthology of writings by Cowell, for instance, includes excerpts from the unpublished manuscript on "The Nature of Melody," but was presumably not available to Hicks as he completed his own book.²

cal Society 44 (Spring 1991), 92–119; and "Cowell's Clusters," *Musical Quarterly* 77 (Fall 1993), 428–458.

2. *Essential Cowell: Selected Writings on Music*, ed. Dick Higgins (New York: McPherson and Company, 2001). My own article, "Henry Cowell and Modern Dance: The Genesis of Elastic Form," *American Music* 20 (Spring 2002), 1–24, also appeared too late for Hicks to consult.

Hicks's evaluation of Cowell and his music mixes praise with criticism. His concluding remarks reveal his ambivalence toward his subject:

In what is perhaps his greatest triumph, Cowell was able to create the enduring yet irresolute legend of Henry Cowell, American composer. It was a legend in which the dissonance between truth and image could linger forever unresolved. . . . The greatest and most imponderable legacy of Henry Cowell is the very puzzle of himself that he left: who he was, how he worked, what he thought and, most of all, felt. . . . The only thing certain about him is how he wished to be remembered. In the end . . . he showed himself clever and powerful enough to grant that wish to himself (p. 149).

We have Hicks to thank for casting new light on the "puzzle" of Henry Cowell's earlier years: he has given us a finely researched, well-written study of the forces shaping Cowell's musical thought and creative energies. Hopefully he will continue to expand on this work in the future and give us further insights into this fascinating and eclectic personality.

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Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898–1936. Carol A. Hess. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xiii, 347 pp. ISBN 0-226-33098-9. \$50.

The number of important studies of Spanish and Latin American music published in the last several decades has increased dramatically. This recently invigorated situation builds up on a substantial body of work by an earlier generation of musicologists: Higiní Anglès, José Subirá, José López Calo, Gilbert Chase, Robert Stevenson, and others. It also is due in large measure to the growth of musicology as an academic discipline in Spain as well as to the growing interest in Spanish and Latin American music among non-Spanish-speaking writers. So much significant research is indeed heartening, especially since Spanish and Latin American musical histories have been viewed as peripheral or unimportant to European or North American musicology in the past. Carol Hess's superb book, *Manuel de Falla and Modernism in Spain, 1898–1936*, persuasively explodes that unenlightened, misguided view. Hess's book joins major studies of nineteenth- and twen-

