

**Johanna Magdalena Beyer** was born in Leipzig on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1888. She moved to New York City in 1923 and by 1929 had completed two degrees from Mannes School of Music. She first encountered Henry Cowell in 1933 when she visited his course, "Contemporary American Music," at The New School for Social Research. From then on, she continued to be an ever-present and significant, yet overlooked composer of the American ultramodernist movement until her death from ALS in 1944. Her 56 known compositions display mastery of ultramodernist techniques: dissonant counterpoint, tempo melody (metric modulation), formalism, etc. Additionally, they are some of the earliest examples of percussion chamber music, music for "electrical" instruments, and minimalist treatment of material. In a statement for a portrait concert of Beyer in 1988 at the Greenwich House Music School (the first concert devoted to solely her work), music critic Kyle Gann pointedly wrote, "Almost forgotten now, Johanna Magdalena Beyer was the only woman involved in electronic music in 1930's New York. She worked with Henry Cowell, and experimented with tempo modulation, rhythmic processes, and new electronic instruments as early as or before male counterparts like John Cage."

In September 1936, a few months after Cowell was arrested on a so-called "morals" charge and sentenced to one to fifteen years in San Quentin State Prison, Beyer moved from Sunnyside, Queens where she had spent the previous 9 years to 40 Jane Street in Greenwich Village. It is here, in Fall 1937, that she composed, "CYRNAB." John Kennedy and Larry Polansky, composers and Beyer scholars, propose that the title is constructed from the initials of the composer and Cowell, HenRY Cowell/JohanNA Beyer. Reading excerpts from the 115 letters Beyer wrote to Cowell, it is clear that the nature of their relationship was nebulous, often existing simultaneously on multiple layers: teacher - student, employer - employee, idolization, friendship, and unrequited love (unreciprocated by Cowell). It is impossible and, therefore, quite useless to formally speculate what, if anything, Beyer was trying to express through composing this piece.

I felt an enormous sense of pressure, as well as awe, copying Beyer's manuscript into Finale, my process for making a conductor's score and parts for tonight's world premiere. Many times, I visited the future in my mind's eye and saw a young person copying my archaic pdf's into brain-implemented scores (of the year 2093). In this clairvoyant vision, I, or more specifically my ghost, screams into the abyss of the ethereal world, alerting the young engraver that that C natural they've inputted is actually a C sharp and consequently the entire chord is ruined and the entire piece has been defaced. On the other hand, my spirit is fulfilled at the prospect of having a forgotten and overlooked composition premiered. As I sat in the subdued and supervised archival division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, I strained to hear Johanna's voice calling out to me. All I heard was the HVAC system, the neurons in my brain, and the blood in my heart. Tracing the graceful script on the vellum-like paper with my fingers, I felt her voice in the score. I considered what music was: the notes on the page or the vibrations in the air? I'm constantly reminding myself to not confuse the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself (or in this case, the sheet music informing performance for the music itself). **CYRNAB** has, for all intents and purposes, remained unfinished until tonight.

It has been an honor and a fulfilling experience to have helped facilitate this premiere of a nearly forgotten work by fellow Mannes and New School alumnus, Johanna Magdalena Beyer. Presently, there is a limit to the ability of the classical music world to remedy the past. Even consistently performing all 56 of her known compositions will not erase the erasure. (The score and parts made for tonight's premiere will be uploaded to [FROG PEAK MUSIC](http://www.frogpeak.org/)'s database of Beyer's work - <http://www.frogpeak.org/>). We can, however, utilize this moment to reflect on our current practices and inform our decisions and actions going forward.

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[www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt130jtbh](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt130jtbh).