



The New York Public Library
Music Division

Guide to the

Letters from Henry Cowell to Lilly Popper

1936 Sept. 12-1937 Sept 12

JPB 99-5

Summary

Creator: Cowell, Henry, 1897-1965

Title: Letters from Henry Cowell to Lilly Popper

Date: 1936 Sept. 12-1937 Sept 12

Size: 13 items

Source: NN, NN, WaOLN

Abstract: Henry Cowell was a noted American composer, pianist, music educator, and founder of the publication *New Music* and the New Music Society of California. Lilly (or Lily) Popper was Henry Cowell's colleague in a school of music. 13 TLS written from San Quentin Prison where Henry Cowell was serving a sentence for a morals charge, later pardoned. He discusses prison life, work in the jute mill, difficulties of continuing music composition in a restricted setting, authorship of a book on melody, concerts for the other prisoners, teaching in the prison's education department, study of Spanish and Japanese languages, letters he has received from other composers and friends, concern for the school in his absence and recommendations for studies and administrative matters there, and his gratitude for efforts made on his behalf. In the final letter he has learned that his sentence will be 15 years, of which he must serve at least 4.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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Creator History

Henry Cowell was a noted American composer, pianist, music educator, and founder of the publication *New Music* and the New Music Society of California. Lilly (or Lily) Popper was Henry Cowell's colleague in a school of music.

Scope and Content Note

13 TLS written from San Quentin Prison where Henry Cowell was serving a sentence for a morals charge, later pardoned. He discusses prison life, work in the jute mill, difficulties of continuing music composition in a restricted setting, authorship of a book on melody, concerts for the other prisoners, teaching in the prison's education department, study of Spanish and Japanese languages, letters he has received from other composers and friends, concern for the school in his absence and recommendations for studies and administrative matters there, and his gratitude for efforts made on his behalf. In the final letter he has learned that his sentence will be 15 years, of which he must serve at least 4.

Key Terms

Subjects

Composers -- United States -- Correspondence
Prisoners -- California -- San Quentin -- Correspondence

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Letters (correspondence)

Names

Cowell, Henry, 1897-1965
Popper, Lilly
American Music Collection
California State Prison at San Quentin