

Focus Day 2013

Above and Beyond: The Expanding Definitions of Percussion

Several centuries ago—around 1706, most likely—someone became the first person ever to be presented a snare drum part. Over time, the snare drum has become one of our most standard instruments, but that first performer had to answer a question that almost every percussionist has faced since: what do I do with this new unusual object?

Percussionists in the Western tradition have a unique role: rather than play one instrument, we are called upon to play the “everything else” that is not specifically associated with winds, strings, brass, or the piano. Each of the instruments that we think of as a standard part of the percussionist’s arsenal was once freshly exotic: the almglocken of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony, the tuned gongs of *Turandot*, the typewriter of *Parade*, the brake drums of *Double Music*, the amplified cactus of *Child of Tree*...

Our role has always been an expanding one, and the rate of this expansion increased dramatically in the twentieth century. Moreover, the percussionist’s tasks are not limited to learning how to hit strange new objects; contemporary literature for percussion also draws on elements of theatre, technology, and world music, and works that incorporate indeterminacy enlist the percussionist in the act of composition as well.

The Committee seeks applications that directly address and celebrate this expanding definition of percussion. Proposals should either 1) highlight significant historical advances in the expansion of the percussionist’s role, in terms of new instruments, techniques, compositional inspiration, or interdisciplinary craft, or 2) illustrate the state of the art today, offering new possibilities and directions for the continued expansion of Western percussion performance. **Proposals should clearly describe how the work in question relates to the overall Focus Day theme.**

As always, the Committee is interested in the participation of both emerging and established artists, and applications from performers, composers, scholars, and ensembles are encouraged. All proposals that meet the criteria and qualify for inclusion on Focus Day performances will be given complete and careful consideration. Please note that **all expenses, as well as the securing of instruments and funding sources, will be the sole responsibility of the artist(s) themselves. This includes all logistical and financial considerations associated with the performance.** Please prepare and submit your proposal with this consideration in mind.

Applications being accepted until Dec. 15, 2012 at www.pas.org

**For additional information, please contact:
Focus Day 2013 Host: Bill Sallak
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Focus Day 2012

“Thank You, John Cage,
For EVERYTHING”!



Presented by the
PAS New Music/Research Committee

“Thank You, John Cage, For EVERYTHING”!

“The liveliest section of the orchestra is the percussion section and the liveliest kind of orchestras is the percussion orchestra. The Percussive Arts Society is devoted to research, discovery and especially to music that hasn’t yet been written or heard. I’m all for it.”

—John Cage

In celebration of the 100 year anniversary of the birth of John Cage, the Percussive Arts Society and the PAS New Music/Research Committee are extremely excited to present **Focus Day 2012: Thank You, John Cage, for EVERYTHING!** Perhaps more than any other composer of the 20th century, Cage’s work initiated a real and radical shift in how we, as a culture, define music. I would add that Cage also redefined what it meant to be a composer, and perhaps, what it meant to be a human being. As Allen Otte titled his 2012 PASIC Preview article, “Everyone Who Knew Him Has a Story.” I am sure that many of those stories will be retold and shared at PASIC 2012.

For me, I will never forget meeting John Cage and hearing him speak in Ann Arbor, Michigan at PASIC 1984. He spoke in a tone so soft and gentle that he literally made an entire room hush so that they could decipher his every turn of phrase. He was simultaneously serious and playful. He made me think. He made me smile. He made me think again. From that moment on, I was hooked for life!

Since its founding, the mission of the New Music/Research Committee has been to present creative, innovative, and imaginative programming that exposes new compositional trends while maintaining connections to the historically significant composers and performers of our field who together shaped the contemporary art-form of new music for percussion. Focus Day 2012 defines this mission in every way. Some of the most significant artists and ensembles of our era will be presenting Cage’s major masterworks, as well as many of his more unfamiliar and seldom performed pieces. Focus Day 2012 will also feature percussion music written by composers who influenced Cage’s development, in addition to percussion music by other composers who were directly influenced by Cage’s compositions and philosophies. There will also be three scholarly sessions focusing on interpreting the music of John Cage, performing the music of John Cage, and working with John Cage.

On behalf of PAS and the entire New Music/Research Committee, I thank you for sharing your passion and respect for John Cage through your attendance at these monumental performances and presentations.

Welcome to PASIC 2012!

—Eugene Novotney, Chair, New Music Research Committee

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2012 Focus Day Host Committee

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P.A.S. New Music/Research Committee Chair

Eugene Novotney

John Cage: “Autobiographical Statement” (1990)

I once asked Aragon, the historian, how history was written. He said, “You have to invent it.” When I wish as now to tell of critical incidents, persons, and events that have influenced my life and work, the true answer is all of the incidents were critical, all of the people influenced me, everything that happened and that is still happening influences me.

My father was an inventor. He was able to find solutions for problems of various kinds, in the fields of electrical engineering, medicine, submarine travel, seeing through fog, and travel in space without the use of fuel. He told me that if someone says “can’t” that shows you what to do. He also told me that my mother was always right even when she was wrong.

My mother had a sense of society. She was the founder of the Lincoln Study Club, first in Detroit, then in Los Angeles. She became the Women’s Club editor for the Los Angeles Times. She was never happy. When after Dad’s death I said, “Why don’t you visit the family in Los Angeles? You’ll have a good time,” she replied, “Now, John, you know perfectly well I’ve never enjoyed having a good time.” When we would go for a Sunday drive, she’d always regret that we hadn’t brought so-and-so with us. Sometimes she would leave the house and say she was never coming back. Dad was patient, and always calmed my alarm by saying, “Don’t worry, she’ll be back in a little while.”

Neither of my parents went to college. When I did, I dropped out after two years. Thinking I was going to be a writer, I told Mother and Dad I should travel to Europe and have experiences rather than continue in school. I was shocked at college to see one hundred of my classmates in the library all reading copies of the same book. Instead of doing as they did, I went into the stacks and read the first book written by an author whose name began with Z. I received the highest grade in the class. That convinced me that the institution was not being run correctly. I left.

In Europe, after being kicked in the seat of my pants by José Pijoan for my study of flamboyant Gothic architecture and introduced by him to a modern architect who set me to work drawing Greek capitals, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian, I became interested in modern music and modern painting. One day I overheard the architect saying to some girl friends, “In order to be an architect, one must devote one’s life to architecture.” I then went to him and said I was leaving because I was interested in other things than architecture. At this time I was reading *Leaves of Grass* of Walt Whitman. Enthusiastic about America I wrote to Mother and Dad saying, “I am coming home.” Mother wrote back, “Don’t be a fool. Stay in Europe as long as possible. Soak up as much beauty as you can. You’ll probably never get there again.” I left Paris and began both painting and writing music, first in Mallorca. The music I wrote was composed in some mathematical way I no longer recall. It didn’t seem like music to me so that when I left Mallorca I left it

behind to lighten the weight of my baggage. In Sevilla on a street corner I noticed the multiplicity of simultaneous visual and audible events all going together in one’s experience and producing enjoyment. It was the beginning for me of theater and circus.

Later when I returned to California, in the Pacific Palisades, I wrote songs with texts by Gertrude Stein and choruses from *The Persians of Aeschylus*. I had studied Greek in high school. These compositions were improvised at the piano. The Stein songs are, so to speak, transcriptions from a repetitive language to a repetitive music. I met Richard Buhlig who was the first pianist to play the *Opus II* of Schoenberg. Though he was not a teacher of composition, he agreed to take charge of my writing of music. From him I went to Henry Cowell and at Cowell’s suggestion (based on my twenty-five tone compositions, which, though not serial, were chromatic and required the expression in a single voice of all twenty-five tones before any one of them was repeated) to Adolph Weiss in preparation for studies with Arnold Schoenberg. When I asked Schoenberg to teach me, he said, “You probably can’t afford my price.” I said, “Don’t mention it; I don’t have any money.” He said, “Will you devote your life to music?” This time I said “Yes.” He said he would teach me free of charge. I gave up painting and concentrated on music. After two years it became clear to both of us that I had no feeling for harmony. For Schoenberg, harmony was not just coloristic: it was structural. It was the means one used to distinguish one part of a composition from another. Therefore he said I’d never be able to write music. “Why not?” “You’ll come to a wall and won’t be able to get through.” “Then I’ll spend my life knocking my head against that wall.”

I became an assistant to Oskar Fischinger, the filmmaker, to prepare myself to write the music for one of his films. He happened to say one day, “Everything in the world has its own spirit which can be released by setting it into vibration.” I began hitting, rubbing everything, listening, and then writing percussion music, and playing it with friends. These compositions were made up of short motives expressed either as sound or as silence of the same length, motives that were arranged on the perimeter of a circle on which one could proceed forward or backward. I wrote without specifying the instruments, using our rehearsals to try out found or rented instruments. I didn’t rent many because I had little money. I did library research work for my father or for lawyers. I was married to Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff who was studying bookbinding with Hazel Dreis. Since we all lived in a big house my percussion music was played in the evening by the bookbinders. I invited Schoenberg to one of our performances. “I am not free.” “Can you come a week later?” “No, I am not free at any time.”

I found dancers, modern dancers, however, who were interested in my music and could put it to use. I was given a job at the Cornish School in Seattle. It was there that I discovered what I called micro-macrocosmic rhythmic structure. The large parts of a composition had the same proportion as the phrases of a single unit. Thus an entire piece had that number of measures that had a square root. This rhythmic structure could be expressed with any sounds, including noises, or it could be expressed

not as sound and silence but as stillness and movement in dance. It was my response to Schoenberg’s structural harmony. It was also at the Cornish School that I became aware of Zen Buddhism, which later, as part of oriental philosophy, took the place for me of psychoanalysis. I was disturbed both in my private life and in my public life as a composer. I could not accept the academic idea that the purpose of music was communication, because I noticed that when I conscientiously wrote something sad, people and critics were often apt to laugh. I determined to give up composition unless I could find a better reason for doing it than communication. I found this answer from Gira Sarabhai, an Indian singer and tabla player: The purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences. I also found in the writings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy that the responsibility of the artist is to imitate nature in her manner of operation. I became less disturbed and went back to work.

Before I left the Cornish School I made the prepared piano. I needed percussion instruments for music for a dance that had an African character by Syvilla Fort. But the theater in which she was to dance had no wings and there was no pit. There was only a small grand piano built in to the front and left of the audience. At the time I either wrote twelve-tone music for piano or I wrote percussion music. There was no room for the instruments. I couldn’t find an African twelve tone row. I finally realized I had to change the piano. I did so by placing objects between the strings. The piano was transformed into a percussion orchestra having the loudness, say, of a harpsichord.

It was also at the Cornish School, in a radio station there, that I made compositions using acoustic sounds mixed with amplified small sounds and recordings of sine waves. I began a series, *Imaginary Landscapes*.

I spent two years trying to establish a Center for Experimental Music, in a college or university or with corporate sponsorship. Though I found interest in my work I found no one willing to support it financially.

I joined the faculty of Moholy Nagy’s School of Design in Chicago. While there I was commissioned to write a sound effects music for a CBS Columbia Workshop Play. I was told by the sound effects engineer that anything I could imagine was possible. What I wrote, however, was impractical and too expensive; the work had to be rewritten for percussion orchestra, copied, and rehearsed in the few remaining days and nights before its broadcast. That was *The City Wears a Slouch Hat* by Kenneth Patchen. The response was enthusiastic in the West and Middle West. Xenia and I came to New York, but the response in the East had been less than enthusiastic. We had met Max Ernst in Chicago. We were staying with him and Peggy Guggenheim. We were penniless. No job was given to me for my composing of radio sound effects, which I had proposed. I began writing again for modern dancers and doing library research work for my father who was then with Mother in New Jersey. About this time I met my first virtuosi: Robert Fizdale and Arthur Gold. I wrote two large works for two prepared pianos. The criticism by Virgil Thomson was very favorable, both for their performance and for my composition. But there were only fifty people in the audience.

I lost a great deal of money that I didn’t have. I was obliged to beg for it, by letter and personally. I continued each year, however, to organize and present one or two programs of chamber music and one or two programs of Merce Cunningham’s choreography and dancing. And to make tours with him throughout the United States. And later with David Tudor, the pianist, to Europe. Tudor is now a composer and performer of electronic music. For many years he and I were the two musicians for Merce Cunningham. And then for many more we had the help of David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, or Takehisa Kosugi. I have in recent years, in order to carry out other projects (an opera in Frankfurt and the Norton Lectures at Harvard University), left the Cunningham Company. Its musicians now are Tudor, Kosugi, and Michael Pugliese, the percussionist.

Just recently I received a request for a text on the relation between Zen Buddhism and my work. Rather than rewriting it now I am inserting it here in this story. I call it From *Where’m’Now*. It repeats some of what is above and some of what is below.

When I was young and still writing an unstructured music, albeit methodical and not improvised, one of my teachers, Adolph Weiss, used to complain that no sooner had I started a piece than I brought it to an end. I introduced silence. I was a ground, so to speak, in which emptiness could grow.

At college I had given up high school thoughts about devoting my life to religion. But after dropping out and traveling to Europe I became interested in modern music and painting, listening-looking and making, finally devoting myself to writing music, which, twenty years later, becoming graphic, returned me now and then for visits to painting (prints, drawings, watercolors, the costumes and decors for *Europeras 1 & 2*).

In the late thirties I heard a lecture by Nancy Wilson Ross on Dada and Zen. I mention this in my forward to *Silence* then adding that I did not want my work blamed on Zen, though I felt that Zen changes in different times and places and what it has become here and now, I am not certain. Whatever it is it gives me delight and most recently by means of Stephen Addiss’ book *The Art of Zen*. I had the good fortune to attend Daisetz Suzuki’s classes in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism at Columbia University in the late forties. And I visited him twice in Japan. I have never practiced sitting cross-legged nor do I meditate. My work is what I do and always involves writing materials, chairs, and tables. Before I get to it, I do some exercises for my back and I water the plants, of which I have around two hundred.

In the late forties I found out by experiment (I went into the anechoic chamber at Harvard University) that silence is not acoustic. It is a change of mind, a turning around. I devoted my music to it. My work became an exploration of non-intention. To carry it out faithfully I have developed a complicated composing means using *I Ching* chance operations, making my responsibility that of asking questions instead of making choices.

The Buddhist texts to which I often return are the *Huang-Po Doctrine of Universal Mind* (in Chu Ch’an’s first translation, published by the

London Buddhist Society in 1947), *Neti Neti* by L. C. Beckett of which (as I say in the introduction to my Norton Lectures at Harvard) my life could be described as an illustration, and the *Ten Oxberding Pictures* (in the version that ends with the return to the village bearing gifts of a smiling and somewhat heavy monk, one who had experienced Nothingness). Apart from Buddhism and earlier I had read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Ramakrishna it was who said all religions are the same, like a lake to which people who are thirsty come from different directions, calling its water by different names. Furthermore this water has many different tastes. The taste of Zen for me comes from the admixture of humor, intransigence, and detachment. It makes me think of Marcel Duchamp, though for him we would have to add the erotic.

As part of the source material for my Norton lectures at Harvard I thought of Buddhist texts. I remembered hearing of an Indian philosopher who was very uncompromising. I asked Dick Higgins, “Who is the Malevich of Buddhist philosophy?” He laughed. *Reading Emptiness -- a Study in Religious Meaning* by Frederick J. Streng, I found out. He is Nagarjuna.

But since I finished writing the lectures before I found out, I included, instead of Nagarjuna, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the corpus, subjected to chance operations. And there is another good book, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*, by Chris Gudmundsen, which I shall be reading off and on into the future.

My music now makes use of time-brackets, sometimes flexible, sometimes not. There are no scores, no fixed relation of parts. Sometimes the parts are fully written out, sometimes not. The title of my Norton lectures is a reference to a brought-up-to-date version of *Composition in Retrospect*:

Method, Structure, Intention, Discipline, Notation, Indeterminacy, Interpenetration, Imitation, Devotion, Circumstances, Variable Structure, Nonunderstanding, Contingency, Inconsistency, Performance (I-VI).

When it is published, for commercial convenience, it will just be called *I-VI*.

I found in the largely German community at Black Mountain College a lack of experience of the music of Erik Satie. Therefore, teaching there one summer and having no pupils, I arranged a festival of Satie’s music, half-hour after-dinner concerts with introductory remarks. And in the center of the festival I placed a lecture that opposed Satie and Beethoven and found that Satie, not Beethoven, was right. Buckminster Fuller was the Baron Méduse in a performance of Satie’s *Le Piège de Méduse*. That summer Fuller put up his first dome, which immediately collapsed. He was delighted. “I only learn what to do when I have failures.” His remark made me think of Dad. That is what Dad would have said.

It was at Black Mountain College that I made what is sometimes said to be the first happening. The audience was seated in four isometric triangular sections, the apexes of which touched a small square performance area that they faced and that led through the aisles between them to the large performance area that surrounded them. Disparate activities, dancing by Merce Cunningham, the exhibition of paintings

and the playing of a Victrola by Robert Rauschenberg, the reading of his poetry by Charles Olsen or hers by M. C. Richards from the top of a ladder outside the audience, the piano playing of David Tudor, my own reading of a lecture that included silences from the top of another ladder outside the audience, all took place within chance-determined periods of time within the over-all time of my lecture. It was later that summer that I was delighted to find in America’s first synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that the congregation was seated in the same way, facing itself.

From Rhode Island I went on to Cambridge and in the anechoic chamber at Harvard University heard that silence was not the absence of sound but was the unintended operation of my nervous system and the circulation of my blood. It was this experience and the white paintings of Rauschenberg that led me to compose *4’33”*, which I had described in a lecture at Vassar College some years before when I was in the flush of my studies with Suzuki (*A Composer’s Confessions*, 1948), my silent piece.

In the early fifties with David Tudor and Louis and Bebe Barron I made several works on magnetic tape, works by Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown, and myself. Just as my notion of rhythmic structure followed Schoenberg’s structural harmony, and my silent piece followed Robert Rauschenberg’s white paintings, so my *Music of Changes*, composed by means of *I Ching* chance operations, followed Morton Feldman’s graph music, music written with numbers for any pitches, the pitches notated only as high, middle, or low. Not immediately, but a few years later, I was to move from structure to process, from music as an object having parts, to music without beginning, middle, or end, music as weather. In our collaborations Merce Cunningham’s choreographies are not supported by my musical accompaniments. Music and dance are independent but coexistent.

It was in the fifties that I left the city and went to the country. There I found Guy Nearing, who guided me in my study of mushrooms and other wild edible plants. With three other friends we founded the New York Mycological Society. Nearing helped us also with the lichen about which he had written and printed a book. When the weather was dry and the mushrooms weren’t growing we spent our time with the lichen.

In the sixties the publication of both my music and my writings began. Whatever I do in the society is made available for use. An experience I had in Hawaii turned my attention to the work of Buckminster Fuller and the work of Marshall McLuhan. Above the tunnel that connects the southern part of Oahu with the northern there are crenellations at the top of the mountain range as on a medieval castle. When I asked about them, I was told they had been used for self-protection while shooting poisoned arrows on the enemy below. Now both sides share the same utilities. Little more than a hundred years ago the island was a battlefield divided by a mountain range. Fuller’s world map shows that we live on a single island. Global Village (McLuhan), Spaceship Earth (Fuller). Make an equation between human needs and world resources (Fuller). I began my *Diary: How to Improve the World: You Will Only Make Matters Worse*. Mother said, “How dare you!”

I don’t know when it began. But at Edwin Denby’s loft on 21st Street,

not at the time but about the place, I wrote my first mesostic. It was a regular paragraph with the letters of his name capitalized. Since then I have written them as poems, the capitals going down the middle, to celebrate whatever, to support whatever, to fulfill requests, to initiate my thinking or my nonthinking (*Themes and Variations* is the first of a series of mesostic works: to find a way of writing that, though coming from ideas, is not about them but produces them). I have found a variety of ways of writing mesostics: Writings through a source: Rengas (a mix of a plurality of source mesostics), autokus, mesostics limited to the words of the mesostic itself, and “globally,” letting the words come from here and there through chance operations in a source text.

I was invited by Irwin Hollander to make lithographs. Actually it was an idea Alice Weston had (Duchamp had died. I had been asked to say something about him. Jasper Johns was also asked to do this. He said, “I don’t want to say anything about Marcel.”). I made *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel*: eight plexigrams and two lithographs. Whether this brought about the invitation or not, I do not know. I was invited by Kathan Brown to the Crown Point Press, then in Oakland, California, to make etchings. I accepted the invitation because years before I had not accepted one from Gira Sarabhai to walk with her in the Himalayas. I had something else to do. When I was free, she was not. The walk never took place. I have always regretted this. It was to have been on elephants. It would have been unforgettable...

Every year since then I have worked once or twice at the Crown Point Press. Etchings. Once Kathan Brown said, “You wouldn’t just sit down and draw.” Now I do: drawings around stones, stones placed on a grid at chance-determined points. These drawings have also made musical notation: *Renga*, Score and *Twenty-three Parts*, and *Ryoanji* (but drawing from left to right, halfway around a stone). Ray Kass, an artist who teaches watercolor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, became interested in my graphic work with chance operations. With his aid and that of students he enlisted I have made fifty-two watercolors. And those have led me to aquatints, brushes, acids, and their combination with fire, smoke, and stones with etchings.

These experiences led me in one instance to compose music in the way I had found to make a series of prints called *On the Surface*. I discovered that a horizontal line that determined graphic changes, to correspond, had to become a vertical line in the notation of music (*Thirty Pieces for Five Orchestras*). Time instead of space.

Invited by Heinz Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn with the assistance of Andrew Culver I made *Europemas 1 & 2* for the Frankfurt Opera. This carries the independence but coexistence of music and dance with which Cunningham and I were familiar, to all the elements of theater, including the lighting, program booklets, decors, properties, costumes, and stage action.

Eleven or twelve years ago I began the *Freeman Etudes* for violin solo. As with the *Etudes Australes* for piano solo I wanted to make the music as difficult as possible so that a performance would show that the impossible is not impossible and to write thirty-two of them. The

notes written so far for the *Etudes 17-32* show, however, that there are too many notes to play. I have for years thought they would have to be synthesized, which I did not want to do. Therefore the work remains unfinished. Early last summer (’88) Irvine Arditti played the first sixteen in fifty-six minutes and then late in November the same pieces in forty-six minutes. I asked why he played so fast. He said, “That’s what you say in the preface: play as fast as possible.” As a result I now know how to finish the *Freeman Etudes*, a work that I hope to accomplish this year or next. Where there are too many notes I will write the direction, “Play as many as possible.”

Thinking of orchestra not just as musicians but as people I have made different translations of people to people in different pieces. In *Etccetera* to being with the orchestra as soloists, letting them volunteer their services from time to time to any one of three conductors. In *Etccetera 2/4 Orchestras* to begin with four conductors, letting orchestra members from time to time leave the group and play as soloists. In *Atlas Eclipticalis* and *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* the conductor is not a governing agent but a utility, providing the time. In *Quartet* no more than four musicians play at a time, with four constantly changing. Each musician is a soloist. To bring to orchestral society the devotion to music that characterizes chamber music. To build a society one by one. To bring chamber music to the size of orchestra. *Music for ----*. So far I have written eighteen parts, any of which can be played together or omitted. Flexible time-brackets. Variable structure. A music, so to speak, that’s earthquake proof. Another series without an underlying idea is the group that began with *Two*, continued with *One, Five, Seven, Twenty-three, 101, Four, Two2, One2, Three, Fourteen, and Seven2*. For each of these works I look for something I haven’t yet found. My favorite music is the music I haven’t yet heard. I don’t hear the music I write. I write in order to hear the music I haven’t yet heard.

We are living in a period in which many people have changed their mind about what the use of music is or could be for them. Something that doesn’t speak or talk like a human being, that doesn’t know its definition in the dictionary or its theory in the schools, that expresses itself simply by the fact of its vibrations. People paying attention to vibratory activity, not in reaction to a fixed ideal performance, but each time attentively to how it happens to be this time, not necessarily two times the same. A music that transports the listener to the moment where he is.

Just the other day I received a request from Enzo Peruccio, a music editor in Torino. This is how I replied:

I have been asked to write a preface for this book, which is written in a language that I do not use for reading. This preface is therefore not to the book but to the subject of the book, percussion.

Percussion is completely open. It is not even open-ended. It has no end. It is not like the strings, the winds, the brass (I am thinking of the other sections of the orchestra), though when they fly the coop of harmony it can teach them a thing or two. If you are not hearing music,

percussion is exemplified by the very next sound you actually hear wherever you are, in or out of doors or city. Planet?

Take any part of this book and go to the end of it. You will find yourself thinking of the next step to be taken in that direction. Perhaps you will need new materials, new technologies. You have them. You are in the world of X, chaos, the new science.

The strings, the winds, the brass know more about music than they do about sound. To study noise they must go to the school of percussion. There they will discover silence, a way to change one's mind; and aspects of time that have not yet been put into practice. European musical history began the study (the iso-rhythmic motet) but it was put aside by the theory of harmony. Harmony through a percussion composer, Edgard Varèse, is being brought to a new open-ended life by Tenney, James Tenney. I called him last December after hearing his new work in Miami and said "If this is harmony, I take back everything I've ever said; I'm all for it." The spirit of percussion opens everything, even what was, so to speak, completely closed.

I could go on (two percussion instruments of the same kind are no more alike than two people who happen to have the same name) but I do not want to waste the reader's time. Open this book and all the doors wherever you find them. There is no end to life. And this book proves that music is part of it.

Note: "*An Autobiographical Statement*" was written by John Cage for the Inamori Foundation and delivered in Kyoto as a commemorative lecture in response to having received the Kyoto Prize in November 1989.

Zen and the Art of Noise

0:00 following Boulez on (the death of) Schoenberg: Cage is dead. To take a stand regarding Cage? As a performer, it is necessary, [ON] certainly; it is nonetheless an elusive problem, defying, for the moment, wisdom—don't you think? perhaps a search without the possibility of satisfaction. We are already a little bit into the first part of this memorial introduction in five parts, having the same structure as Cage's *First Construction (in metal)* from 1939, that rhythmic structure being 4 3 2 3 4. [OFF] What it introduces—a series of performances/presentations related to the centenary—is not structured, but collects the work-in-progress of many percussionists. Thus, being now even further into the first of five parts of this introduction, (1:00) you will need a chronometer in order to follow properly. You will also need some (mechanical?) sound source—a radio? a coffee grinder? something from *Child of Tree*? You can then return to the beginning and begin again.

Following Gertrude Stein: I listened and I was confused. I was confused and I listened. Is a work in progress: Everyone who knew him has a story. What's yours? It only goes to show, its easy to be surprised. [ON] (we are, by the way, following a realization of *VARITIONS II*, 1961, with our sound sources) A minestrone soup, macrobiotic and vegetarian, simmering in all of our practice rooms; a left-overs bread being kneaded in a rehearsal studio; the next found object growing fast in sawdust. I was confused and I listened. It only goes to show. (1:45)

2:00 We are now entering the second part of this introduction. When I think of John Cage's contributions, I think now of four words, four categories:

Inclusivity.

Plurality.

Connectivity.

Productivity. (2:30)

3:00 [OFF] [quickly, quietly] This indeterminate minestrone soup implies creative responses, don't you think? Collage, analysis, (de) construction, composition... in order to be useful: explanation through exemplification. Everyone who knew him has a story, and it only goes to show its easy to be surprised and creative soups and breads are made up of many ingredients and dashes of this and pinches of that and gestations and generations and storytellers tell stories and composers compose music and they know it. What's yours?

3:30. This will serve as the third part of the piece,

developed in conversation with composer Qu Xiao-song.

With a periodicity of about a century or so:

Bach, and humanity's relationship to God;

Beethoven, and our relationship to one another;

Cage, [ON] and our relationship to our total environment.

Planet Earth.

Not only Buckminster Fuller's spaceship, but in the meeting

of East and West and bringing all of the universe closer:

[OFF] The acceptance of a plurality of centers.

4:33. The fourth part. INCLUSIVITY of refused elements, always moving on to the next. From a bookbinder's slats of wood to a modern dancer's eclectic collection of simple ethnic and exotic percussion instruments, to the found objects of tin cans and brake drums to the sound effects of thunder sheets and test records of a radio studio to the dropping of a needle on those or then some other classic or jazzy LP to just the cartridge needle of that phonograph to a hand or a screw or a rubber duck or a bow hair in the piano; activity on the stage, in the hall, out of doors, accepting what turning on a radio brings in (a recording of Beethoven's 5th is not Beethoven's 5th), accepting what the surrounding environment brings in (the owl as I type this), finding what is in the environment to be brought in, a cactus, a truck passing a music school, fragments of European Opera, fragments of American Transcendentalism, of James Joyce and Irish Folk music, the text message beep on a cell phone at 8:59pm, of silence and chance and contingency, but also finally of taste and choice and technique and virtuosity; of work and usefulness, and a PLURALITY, not only of sources, but actually of centers.

6:00 [afap] WeHaveNowEnteredTheFifthAndFinalPartOfThisOfThisIntroduction(from the newspaper then—'93—at hand:) "About six weeks ago at the Mogadishu airport, an American Marine officer helping ferry in a small contingent of Pakistani U.N. troops was explaining how full-scale U.S. military force could—hypothetically—secure Somalia and disarm much of the population." CONNECTIVITY. Every sound to every sound; and to movement, visual art, poetry, literature, philosophy, politics, technology, people, the planet, and, as he would have said, that the complexity of these connections not be oversimplified by a relationship in one person's mind: awareness will increase as single-minded predisposed purposefulness decreases.

To be PRODUCTIVE, as he was, is to find in his work the encouragement to do one's own work. And, as with him, it is always about being able to change your mind...

For instance, as performers, to take a stand and not allow *AMORES* to become just another Mozartian gem, frozen in time... (for that matter, the man himself!). What could that mean? One thing it means is that his, being a body of work quite unlike any other in the history of performing arts in the West, requires of us a different approach, a different and always open and growing response. To understand and/or not understand, but to be open, and thus, by extension, to be willing to change your mind. To be informed, to pay attention. To enjoy what is elusive.

7:30 So: following not only Boulez on Schoenberg and Stein on Matisse, and Herrigel and Persig and Suzuki (both!) and Russolo... Then:

Cage, Silence (collected writings '37 - '61)

Cage, X (collected writings '79 - '82)

Kostelanetz, Conversing With Cage

Brooks, Choice and Change in Cage's recent Music

Pritchett, The Music of JC

Millar, Every Day Is A Good Day - The Visual Art of JC

Larson, Where The Heart Beats - JC and Zen Buddhism

[ON]

8:00

[OFF]

Allen Otte

June, 1993/September, 2012

29 Quotes From John Cage:

"It was at Harvard not quite forty years ago that I went into an anechoic [totally silent] chamber not expecting in that silent room to hear two sounds: one high, my nervous system in operation, one low, my blood in circulation. The reason I did not expect to hear those two sounds was that they were set into vibration without any intention on my part. That experience gave my life direction, the exploration of nonintention. No one else was doing that. I would do it for us. I did not know immediately what I was doing, nor, after all these years, have I found out much. I compose music. Yes, but how? I gave up making choices. In their place I put the asking of questions."

"I still believe what I wrote in 1939: 'Percussion music is revolution' ... new music, new society. I don't think, as some seem to be thinking, that the percussion should become like other sections of the orchestra, more expressive in their terms (overtone structure, frequency). I believe that the rest of the orchestra should become as noisy, poverty stricken and unemployed as the percussion section (or at least grant its acceptability in musical society). I do not mean anything hierarchical. I just mean accepting the fact that noises are sounds and that music is made with sounds."

"It was through the study of Buddhism that I became, it seems to me, less confused. I saw art as something that consisted of a communication from the artists to the audience but rather as an activity of sounds in which the artist found a way to let the sounds be themselves. And in their being themselves to open the minds of the people who made them or listened to them to other possibilities than they had previously considered. To widen their experience, particularly to undermine the making of value judgments."

"I think perhaps my own best piece, at least the one I like the most, is the silent piece (4'33", 1952). It has three movements and in all of the movements there are no sounds. I wanted my work to be free of my own likes and dislikes, because I think music should be free of the feelings and ideas of the composer. I have felt and hoped to have led other people to feel that the sounds of their environment constitute a music which is more interesting than the music which they would hear if they went into a concert hall."

"They say, 'you mean it's just sounds?' thinking that for something to just be a sound is to be useless, whereas I love sounds just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are. I don't want them to be psychological. I don't want a sound to pretend that it's a bucket or that it's president or that it's in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound."

"I was shocked at college to see one hundred of my classmates in the library all reading copies of the same book. Instead of doing as they did, I went into the stacks and read the first book written by an author whose name began with Z. I received the highest grade in the class. That convinced me that the institution was not being run correctly. I left."

"I certainly had no feeling for harmony, and Schoenberg thought that that would make it impossible for me to write music. He said, 'You'll come to a wall you won't be able to get through.' I said, 'Well then, I'll beat my head against that wall.' I quite literally began hitting things, and developed a music of percussion that involved noises."

"When you start working, everybody is in your studio - the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas - all are there. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you are lucky, even you leave."

"Which is more musical, a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school? Are the people inside the school musical and the ones outside unmusical? What if the ones inside can't hear very well, would that change my question?"

"One characteristic of percussion is that it's open to anything else than what it already has. The strings in the orchestra are not that way - they want to become more of what they are; but the percussion wants to become other than what it is."

"I remain a percussion composer whether I write for percussion instruments or not. That is, my work is never based, structurally or as an instance of process, on frequency, but rather on durational considerations."

"It is better to make a piece of music than to perform one, better to perform one than to listen to one, better to listen to one than to misuse it as a means of distraction, entertainment, or acquisition of culture."

"Thoreau and the Indians and I have said all along that the sounds all around us are equivalent to music. In India they say that music is continuous; it only stops when we turn away and stop paying attention."

"If you develop an ear for sounds that are musical it is like developing an ego. You begin to refuse sounds that are not musical and that way cut yourself off from a good deal of experience."

"The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I think it's not beautiful. And very shortly you discover that there is no reason."

“I’m out to blur the distinction between art and life, as I think Duchamp was. And between teacher and student. And between performer and audience, etcetera.”

“If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all.”

“Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.”

“Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.”

“The grand thing about the human mind is that it can turn its own tables and see meaninglessness as ultimate meaning.”

“The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature, in her manner of operation.”

“You see, I don’t hear music when I write it. I write in order to hear something I haven’t heard yet.”

“Whether I make them or not, there are always sounds to be heard and all of them are excellent.”

“To make art which, though coming from ideas, is not about ideas, but rather, produces them.”

“I can’t understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I’m frightened of the old ones.”

“Ideas are one thing and what happens is another.”

“When we separate music from life we get art.”

“We need not destroy the past. It is gone.”

“I have nothing to say, and I am saying it.”

WEDNESDAY EVENING FOCUS DAY CONCERT

Ballroom D . 8:00 p.m.
Wednesday, October 31, 2012

“BEGINNER’S MIND, PERCUSSIONIST’S MIND: JOHN CAGE AT 100”

PERCUSSION GROUP CINCINNATI
(Allen Otte, James Culley, & Rusty Burge)
WITH RED FISH BLUE FISH,
STEVEN SCHICK, AND BENJAMIN TOTH

Prelude:

Solo for Voice no. 15, from Song Books (1970) with BRANCHes (1976) and But What About The Noise Of Crumpling Paper Which He Used To Do In Order To Paint The Series Of “Papiers Froisses” Or Tearing Up Paper To Make “Papier Dechires?” Arp Was Stimulated By Water (sea, lake, and flowing waters like rivers), Forests (1985)

Amores (1943)

I solo, prepared piano
II trio, nine Chinese tom-toms and pod rattle
III trio, 7 blocks of blocks of wood
IV solo, prepared piano

Quartet (1935)

I

Six (1991)

Double Music (1941) [in collaboration with Lou Harrison]

Six (1991)

3rd Construction (1941)

INTERMISSION

Credo In US (1942), with Melody from Living Room Music (1940)

Inlets (1977)

Imaginary Landscape no.1 (1939)

Imaginary Landscape no.2 (1942)

Imaginary Landscape no.3 (1942)

BEGINNER’S MIND, PERCUSSIONIST’S MIND: JOHN CAGE AT 100

The half-century of John Cage’s attention to percussion could easily be viewed in light of his engagement with Zen; it’s a connection he sensed even before studying with Suzuki. Filmmaker Oskar Fischinger said to Cage one day: “Everything in the world has its own spirit which can be released by setting it into vibration.” Cage began “hitting, rubbing everything, listening, and then writing percussion music, and playing it with friends.” The *Quartet* 1935 is the very first direct result of the impact of this idea upon Cage; our idea here is to transform one possible realization of this unspecified-instrumentation score into another very different realization.

The needle-dropping which arrived at the classical records used in *Credo In US* began with the radio station test-tone calibration aids of the late 30’s. All the 78 rpm records and authentic period variable-speed turn-tables we are using tonight were collected for us some years ago by film historian Eric Levin of Milwaukee. Until Eric searched for and collected each of these items, one could only speculate as to exactly what the *Landscapes Nos. 1* and *3* sounded like to Cage; we now know exactly.

Though it was Daisetz Suzuki whose lectures Cage attended in the early fifties, it is the younger Shunryu Suzuki who is the author of the famous book, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. The basic Zen reference to acceptance, of every life being its own “center”, was immediately connected by Cage to the world of sound. Every percussion instrument collection is unique, every prepared piano is unique, every unpredictably gurgling conch shell is unique. To approach each sound we make on this program with a beginner’s mind felt like a most humble homage to pay to this philosopher-composer who made exquisitely beautiful music throughout his life.

—Allen Otte

“The Cage Aesthetic—Cage’s Colleagues, Students, and the Next Generation (Session 1)”

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 8:30 a.m.
Convention Center Ballroom D

Performed by: Central Michigan Univ. Percussion Ensemble directed by Andrew Spencer
Name of Selection: Fugue (1941) by Lou Harrison
Publisher: Music for Percussion, Inc.
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: 3:56

John Cage had a profound influence on the music of other composers, even during his earlier periods of composition. The relationship and lifelong friendship between Cage and Lou Harrison is well documented. Both composers studied with Arnold Schoenberg, both composers worked as dance accompanists, both composers were in Southern California during the first half of the 20th century, and both were associated with Mills College at one time or another.

Harrison and Cage met in the late 1930s and proceeded to collaborate on a series of percussion concerts. These concerts were dedicated to exploring the timbral possibilities that the new vision of percussion provided. Found and multi-cultural percussion instruments were mixed with those associated with western art music, resulting in a rich tapestry of sounds and textures.

Both composers were striving to contain their new timbral universe within fairly rigid formal structures. Cage’s use of specifically numbered phrase groups is well known in his *Imaginary Landscapes* and *Constructions*. Harrison also worked with specific formal organization of his new timbral universe. In *Fugue* Harrison presents the subject in the Thai Gongs. However, where tonal composers would then present the subject based on the dominant or subdominant of the key, Harrison presents it in a variety of tempi derived from rhythmic augmentation and diminution. Of particular note is Harrison’s use of palindrome within his fugue.

Performed by: Dr. Tomm Roland and the University of Nebraska, Omaha Percussion Ensemble
Name of Selection: Ostinato Pianissimo (1934) by Henry Cowell
Publisher: Theodore Presser
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: 3:00

Henry Cowell, another pioneer in the employment of new sonic resources, wrote *Ostinato Pianissimo* in 1934. Like Varese’s *Ionisation* it is dedicated to Nicolas Slonimsky. The work develops as a growing continuum of overlapping ostinato patterns (all within the pianissimo dynamic range), further elaborated by complex cross-accents during the

repetition of these patterns. Of special note is the xylophone solo, heard midway through the piece, with its groupings of even 16th-notes into off-beat patters of 3, 5, 7, and 9. The premiere was given in February 1943 in New York with John Cage conducting.

Performed by: Dr. Payton MacDonald
Name of selection: December 1952 (1952) by Earle Brown
Publisher: Associated Music Publishers
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: Indeterminate

December 1952 consists purely of horizontal and vertical lines varying in width, spread out over the page; it is a landmark piece in the history of graphic notation of music. The role of the performer is to interpret the score visually and translate the graphical information to music. In Brown’s notes on the work he even suggests that one consider this 2D space as 3D and imagine moving through it. (from Wikipedia)
—Payton MacDonald (www.paytonmacdonald.com)

Performed by: Christopher Davis
Name of selection: Woodsound and Others (2005) by Christian Wolff
Publisher: Edition Peters
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: 5:56

Christian Wolff was a teenager when he first met John Cage and became a member of the “New York School” of experimental composers, which included Morton Feldman and Earle Brown. Wolff is not nearly as well known as these other experimental composers, because he was not writing for percussion until the late 1980s.

Wolff creates indeterminacy in his music through allowing the performer flexibility and freedom leading up to and during a piece’s performance. He does this prior to the performance by allowing the performer to select which instruments they will use and during the performance by allowing the performer to select the striking implements, the path they take through the music, and by keeping the tempo free.

For *Woodsound and Others* (2005), Christian Wolff explains in the score, “Principally for mallet instrument(s) with a few other items, metal, skin, non-specifically pitched wood. Tempo or changing tempi are free.”

Performed by: Gene Koshinski and Tim Broscius
Name of Selection: Ceci N’est Pas Un Jouet (2009) by Gene Koshinski
Publisher: Self-published. Distributed by Percussion Source
Availability: Percussion Source
Duration: 5:00

Ceci N’est Pas Un Jouet (2009) is scored for two hand-cranked music boxes (playing any tune). The work shows how very complex music can be derived from simple materials. Here, the two different music box tunes intertwine to create a hybrid music much greater than either individual part. The score outlines musical episodes that break down the original tunes and allow for a new take on their rhythm, melody, harmony, and

texture. The score is a timeline of events (precisely 5 minutes) where performers simply vary the rate at which the music boxes are played. The work may be performed as a duet or as a solo with one performer operating both music boxes.

Performed by: Mike Truesdell
Name of Selection: Echolalia (2006) by Mark Applebaum
Publisher: Mark Applebaum
Availability: Composer
Duration: 10:00

Echolalia, derived from *Asylum*—a commission from the 2004 Vienna Modern Festival for solo percussion and nonet (9 superegos)—is a theatric manifestation of shared psychosis and dissociative identity disorder. A “subject” attempts a musical expression but suffers an apraxia that manifests itself in a completely different medium, as a series of 22 Dadaist rituals performed in rapid succession.

These may be divided into four principal action types: (1) Combining/Attaching; (2) Mixing/Syncretizing; (3) Separating/Atomizing; and (4) Treating/Deforming. The seemingly absurd series of actions are executed obsessively with a personal and resolute clarity, however esoteric and hermetic. The work ends, literally, on a conventional note.

Performed By: Dr. Brad Meyer
Name of Selection: “Koan: Having Never Written a Note for Percussion” (1971) by James Tenney
Publisher: Smith Publications
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: 7:30

James Tenney (1934-2006) was a prolific composer, performer, theorist, and music innovator. Early on in his life, Tenney was exposed to several prominent, pioneering composers including: Cage, Varèse, Partch, Ruggles, Kenneth Gaburo, and Lejaren Hiller. He experimented with ground-breaking technologies, sounds, tuning systems, and musical structures throughout his life, which led him to write two books: *META + HODOS: A Phenomenology of 20th-Century Musical Materials* and an *Approach to the Study of Form* (1961; Frog Peak, 1988) and *A History of ‘Consonance’ and ‘Dissonance’* (Excelsior, 1988). Later in life, Tenney taught at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, the California Institute of the Arts, and finally York University.

Having Never Written a Note for Percussion (1971) is one part of *Tenney’s Postal Pieces*, which is a collection of ten compositions written on postcards between 1965 and 1971 (Tenney, himself had the collection labeled as being composed between 1954 to 1971, but the earliest composition in the series, *Maximusic*, was written on June 16th, 1965). The score for *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*, which is dedicated to John Bergamo, consists of a rolled whole note with a fermata and the phrase “very long” in parentheses above it. Below the whole note is a dynamic marking of “pppp”, which crescendos to “ffff”, and then decrescendos back to “pppp.” No other indication or instructions are specified in the score.

The Process of Discovery (Session 2)

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 11:00 a.m.
Convention Center Ballroom D

Performed By: Christopher Shultis assisted by the University of New Mexico Percussion Ensemble directed by Scott Ney
Name of Selection: The Process of Discovery: Interpreting Child of Tree (1975) by John Cage
Publisher: Edition Peters
Availability: Commercially Available
Duration: 8:00

This is a lecture-performance in two parts. The first part considers some problems of interpretation in Cage’s music, especially as they relate to choice, chance and indeterminacy. I will shed light on the nature of those problems through never-before-seen correspondence between Cage and I as we discussed the piece at some length (by phone and mail) in 1988 and 1989. My performance of Cage’s *Child of Tree*, first presented at PASIC 1988, will be reprised here but following the lessons learned through that correspondence as well as more than twenty years of ongoing attention to the work. This part will also include a performance of *Branches* (1976) by the University of New Mexico Percussion Ensemble.

The second part of the talk is my own composition 64 Statements re and not re *Child of Tree*. In 1989, I was asked to give a lecture on *Child of Tree*, a piece that I was performing as part of a festival in Maryland honoring Cage on his 75th birthday. It was titled *64 Statements re and not re Child of Tree*, a play on text pieces by Cage that used a similar title structure, *36 Mesostics re and not re Marcel Duchamp* being but one example. The statements themselves are either about the piece (from the score or descriptions of my own about my version of it) or not about the piece. These latter texts are drawn from writers and/or writings that Cage himself noted as being important to him and his work. The statements are recorded (sixteen each) onto four CDs that are played simultaneously in the four corners of the hall. The specific examples heard as well as their placement on the four CDs are selected by chance. The placement of which CD goes in which player is determined by my drawing numbers out of a hat before each performance. Since I turn off one machine every four minutes, you never hear all 64 statements in any given performance and I never know which statements will be heard during the performance until it occurs. In a performance, I improvise at each of the four locations using instruments from my *Child of Tree* version beginning at the back of the hall (left to right) and ending at stage center where a spotlit cactus is located. The piece ends with my reading the text by James Joyce found in Cage’s *The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs* accompanied by the amplified cactus.

After my talk, Cage asked me if I’d ever considered performing *64 Statements* as a musical composition. And that’s what I’ve been doing ever since.

64 Statements re and not re Child of Tree can be found in my book

“Experimental Music and Writings 1988–1994,” which also includes the two keynote addresses I gave at PASIC New Music/Research Days in 1990 (Philadelphia) and 1992 (New Orleans). It is available through my publisher, the American Composers Alliance.

Scholarly Session (Session 3)

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 12:00 p.m.
Convention Center Room 16

Session By: David Revill

Title of Session: Performing Cage - Zen in Performance

In this presentation, problems specific to the performance of Cage’s percussion music—particularly the works subsequent to his adoption of chance methods in composing—will be examined, and some approaches proposed. Specific attention will be paid to issues associated with his use, in the later works, of controlled improvisation.

Chance composition works within an entirely different aesthetic, and that the performance approach should reflect that; it is not useful to rely on the interpretive habits which serve us well for music which springs from another aesthetic.

This leads to some thoughts on the Zen of gesture and performance that go beyond Cage’s pronouncements, and perhaps suggest some of the blind spots in his approach to spontaneity and improvisation. The link between Cage’s approach to percussion and to music in general will also be examined, and between spontaneity in musical performance, and in what we do every day of our lives: our Zen hidden in plain sight.

Trails Blazed – Navigating Through Cage’s Life (Session 4)

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 1:00 p.m.
Convention Center Ballroom D

Session By: Joseph Van Hassel

Name of Selection: John Cage - One4 (1990)

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: 6:59

Composed in 1990, John Cage’s *One4* has the distinction of being the last piece he wrote for solo percussion, as well as his only piece for solo drumset. Originally written for Fritz Hauser, an artist that seeks to expand the role of the drumset into a solo multiple percussion instrument, it is part of a larger series of works by Cage often referred to as the “number pieces.” All written near the end of his life, the number pieces utilized a compositional technique that Cage used to fulfill the numerous commissions he was receiving in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first

number in the title refers to the number of performers and the second number refers to the number of pieces that had been written in the series for that number of players. Therefore, this is the fourth number piece that Cage wrote for one player. The score to this piece consists of two columns, one for the left side of the body, and one for the right. In each of these columns are individual staves that contain a number, which refers to the instrument to be played. Each staff also contains two time brackets, which indicate the parameters between which each sound should begin and end. Cage leaves the exact placement of these sounds, as well as whether they are long or short, to the performer. Cage also leaves the choice of instruments to the performer. Along with the practical reason of fulfilling commissions, his method of composing these number pieces also reflects the general aesthetic of much of Cage’s compositional career. In his effort to remove the performer and composer’s ego from the finished product, he and his assistant Andrew Culver designed a computer program that would help create the scores. Furthermore, leaving the choice of instruments and when to play them up to the performer represents the Zen-like approach to composition that Cage had adopted in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The fact that the performer is only to make isolated single or sustained sounds within each time bracket, and that the majority of the work consists of silence, successfully serves to remove the performer’s ego from the piece.

For this particular performance, I determined which instruments to assign each given number through the employment of chance procedures using coin tosses and the I Ching. I have also made the decision to only use the traditional drum sticks and my hands/fingers to produce the sounds. I made this choice in order to create a tangible relationship for this otherwise unidiomatic work to the history of the drumset and its solo repertoire. Additionally, I did not want to have to rely on gimmicks to produce sounds, as that would draw attention to myself as the performer and therefore detract from the intended purpose of the piece.

Performed by: Aaron Butler

Name of Selection: Water Walk: for solo television performer (1959) by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available/ Tape available by rental

Duration: 3:00

Cage composed *Water Walk* in January 1959 and it was premiered in the same month while he was a contestant on the Italian game show, “Lascia O Raddoppia.” The most famous performance of the work occurred the following year on the CBS show “I’ve Got a Secret.” Before the performance the host, Gary Moore, warned “Inevitably, Mr. Cage, these are nice people, but some of them are going to laugh. Is that alright?” Cage responded, “I consider laughter preferable to tears.”

Performed by: Bent Frequency

Name of Selection: Variations I (1958) by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: Indeterminate

The first piece in the *Variations* series is dedicated to David Tudor and was a belated birthday present. The score consists of six transparent squares: one with 27 points of four different sizes, five with five lines each. The squares are to be combined in any way, with points representing sounds, and lines used as axes of various characteristics of these sounds: lowest frequency, simplest overtone structure, etc. Said characteristics are obtained by dropping perpendiculars from points and measuring these perpendiculars. The piece is to be performed by any number of performers on any kind and number of instruments. Bent Frequency will present a mixed chamber ensemble version of this work for percussion, saxophone, trumpet, viola, clarinet, and cello.

Performed by: John Lane, Andrew Burke, Jeremy Muller, Allen Otte, Bonnie Whiting Smith and Brandon Bell

Name of Selection: 10’59.625” for Six Percussionists (1956) by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: 14:00

Written in 1956, *27’10.554”* for a Percussionist is one of the first compositions for solo percussionist. In the score, Cage indicates wood, metal, skin, and “all other” sounds (whistles, electronics, etc...), but the music is composed in an unusual way: Cage traced imperfections of the paper on which he wrote the piece. Where there was an imperfection, he placed a dot. Those dots are translated as attacks and interpreted temporally by their placement on a time line (each page of the score is one minute). Dynamic relationships are also indicated by the dot’s placement on the page, ranging from extremely loud to extremely soft. Sometimes the dots are so dense that it is impossible to play live, leaving the performer with a problem to solve. A solution is to record some of the sounds and play some sounds live. This provides the opportunity for bringing in, quite literally, “all other” sounds into the sonic landscape: vocalizations, car horns, thunderstorms, glass, various animal sounds, movie/television/cartoon sounds, whistles, sirens, and all manner of electronic sounds. Cage encouraged excerpted and layered performances of the pieces from this period, which he called “The Ten Thousand Things.” Following this idea, we have created a simultaneous performance featuring six soloists. The entire 27’10.554” length is divided up between the soloists, who perform segments interspersed with chance derived silences. This process enables the entire work to be performed in 10’59.625”.

Performed by: Cage Percussion Players (Thad Anderson, Owen Weaver, and line upon line percussion)

Name of Selection: Imaginary Landscape No. 2 [March No. 1] (1942)

by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: 6:23

On May 7th, 1942 a new work by John Cage titled *Fourth Construction* was premiered by Lou Harrison and friends at the Holoway Playhouse in San Francisco. Soon after its debut, the work was retitled *Imaginary Landscape No. 2* (March No. 1) joining two existing pieces within that series (and replacing a withdrawn work under the same title). Because of the so-called *Fourth Construction’s* perceived split personality (*Construction* or *Imaginary Landscape?*), there are many unanswered questions surrounding academic and performance aspects of this work.

Imaginary Landscape No. 2 was composed while Cage was in Chicago. He had access to a radio studio while there and composed a few works with the use of that equipment (including original music for the radio play *A City Wears a Slouch Hat*). In addition to acoustic and found percussion instruments such as tin cans, ratchet, bass drum, metal wastebasket, and water gong, an amplified coil of wire and electronic buzzers are utilized throughout. Music critic Art Lange explains that, “*Imaginary Landscape No. 2* can be a frightening experience, chaotic and violent. There is an almost palpable tension in the seemingly non-synchronous percussion parts (though these are actually plotted along mathematical lines). The trumpeting conch horn and rhythmic urgency suggests the ritual frenzy of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, though the huge bomb-like explosions take this to a higher, more horrific level of sacrifice.”

Like the majority of Cage’s compositions from this period, *Imaginary Landscape No. 2* uses a micro-macrocosmic formula to help generate formal structure. The composition’s general rhythmic structure is 3 + 4 + 2 + 3 + 5, which creates seventeen bar units. “The opening section (three seventeen-measure units) begins with an almost frightening polyrhythmically dense clamor.” Like in previous works that utilize this type of format, each of these three opening seventeen-measure units are broken down into phrases that match the rhythmic structure sequence. The second unit consists entirely of material for the solo tin can cadenza. The third section is tutti between all five players and consists of samples of material originally heard in the first unit. This section is soft and offers important contrast to the cacophony of the opening section. Continuing with macrocosmic structure, this segment consists of two seventeen-measure units. The opening statement returns once again for the fourth section (three seventeen-measure units). This transitions to the final section, which abandons the macrostructure altogether.

Working With Cage (Session 5)

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 3:00 p.m.
Convention Center Ballroom D

Allen Otte and Bonnie Whiting Smith: Working with Cage

Our presentation encompasses both meanings of the title “Working With Cage”: literally working with Cage (Otte’s long history with him: stories and information from time spent on older pieces as well as the creation of new ones), but even more importantly, an intensely creative and faithful engagement with his scores. The 50-minute session includes performances of an excerpt of *51’15.657” for a speaking percussionist* (27’10.554” for a percussionist + 45’ for a speaker); a version of the piece Cage wrote for Percussion Group Cincinnati in the mid-80’s (*Music for Three*) becomes *Music for Four (by Two)* (conceived as an exploration of simultaneity in performance); and Otte’s *connecting Egypt to madison...* for prepared piano, frame drums and text (created from several of Cage’s pieces). The focus is detailed discussion of realizations of three substantive works with real performances issues to solve: challenging notations and latent possibilities in Cage’s work.

Repertoire:

Connecting Egypt to Madison through Columbus OH, Cage, and the History of the American Labor Movement (2011)
..... Allen Otte
[text: mesostic found/generated by AO, with Music for Marcel Duchamp (1947) and a realization—for Middle Eastern frame drums—of Variations II (1961)]

10’26.802” for a Speaking Percussionist
(realized 2010, BWS) John Cage
[from 45’ for a Speaker (1954) and [10’59.625”] for a Percussionist (1956)]

Music for Four (by Two) (1984) John Cage

26 of 50 (1944) John Cage
[text: e.e. cummings, music an excerpt from Forever and Sunsmell]

A note on the publisher: All of Cage’s scores are published by C.F. Peters. In this performance, we have made creative realizations of several layers of these scores.

Showcase Concert (Session 6)

Thursday, November 1, 2012, 5:00 p.m.
Convention Center Ballroom D

Performed by: University of North Texas Percussion Players and University of North Texas Modern Dance Ensemble

Name of Selection: Dance Music for Elfrid Ide (1940) by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: 15:00

John Cage’s compositions for percussion in the years from 1939 to 1942 are now staples of twentieth-century percussion repertoire and include such frequently performed works as the three *Constructions for percussion* (1939–1941), *Living Room Music*, (1940), *Double Music* (composed with Lou Harrison, 1941), *Imaginary Landscapes 2 and 3* (1942) and *Credo in US* (1942). One is therefore astonished that that the *Dance Music for Elfrid Ide* of 1940, a 15-minute percussion work in three movements for three to six players, has remained unknown even to Cage scholars until its recent accidental discovery in the Mills College Archives.

The compositional background of this work remains somewhat cloudy. While serving on the Dance Faculty at Mills (in the summers of 1940 and 1942), Cage wrote the music to accompany the graduation thesis of the talented graduate student and dance instructor Elfrid Ide. The dance received its first and likely only performance at Mills College on May 20, 1941 as part of Ide’s Thesis Dance Concert.

Christopher Deane (UNT Percussion Players director) and Teresa Cooper (UNT Modern Dance Ensemble choreographer) have collaborated on a number of dance and percussion projects, including a Focus Day performance at the 2003 PASIC in Louisville, KY performing *Three Dance Movements* by Karel Husa.

Performed by: Nexus

Name of Selection: The City Wears a Slouch Hat (1942) by John Cage

Publisher: Edition Peters

Availability: Commercially Available

Duration: 35:00

The City Wears a Slouch Hat, a score for the radio play by Kenneth Patchen, is Cage’s only venture into the genre of an explicit musical setting of dramatic text. It was composed free of a specific composition method, and reveals that Cage was indeed gifted with what might be called old-fashioned musical instinct.

The work was originally broadcast on May 31, 1942, on the Columbia Broadcasting System’s “Columbia Workshop” series, originating from Chicago’s WBBM. Cage had moved to Chicago in 1941, and was at the time experimenting with electronics in radio studios and hoping to establish a center for experimental music. He sought out and received

a commission from CBS Radio for their radio play series, sensing it as a natural medium where he might erase the distinction between sound “effects” and music. The original choice for scriptwriter was Henry Miller, who suggested that one of his novels, then considered to be pornographic, might be adapted. Cage did not find the material particularly suitable for radio (though we might today wonder what kind of score Cage would have produced for a Miller script), and turned instead to Kenneth Patchen, who then produced *The City Wears a Slouch Hat*.

With a script in hand, Cage proceeded with a score that was solely for sound effects, both live and recorded. Returning to the studio for recording a week before broadcast, the WBBM engineer informed Cage that his score would be impossible to realize in the amount of time that they had. Cage then feverishly rewrote his 30-minute score over four days and nights for a “sound orchestra” of percussion ensemble and sound effects. His wife Xenia, to whom the work is dedicated, copied parts as he finished sections.

A Chicago Sun preview story from the day of the performance includes several photographs of instruments and John Cage conducting an ensemble of five amateur percussionists (among them Xenia, who played the most difficult part). The ensemble was described as a “sound orchestra” and includes the following instruments: tin cans, muted gongs, woodblocks, alarm bells, oxen bells, temple gongs, water gong, tam tam, bass drum, Chinese tom tom, bongos, cowbells, maracas, claves, marimbula, Chinese and Turkish cymbals, steel coil, washboard, ratchet, pod rattle, whistles, automobile horn, foghorn, metronome, steel pipes, music stands, thundersheet, string piano, and a number of live and recorded sound effects including a telephone, buzzer, automobile, airplane, rain, wind, variable frequencies, baby cries, and the ocean.

Kenneth Patchen’s rather surreal script chronicles the wanderings of a mysterious and rootless drifter named “The Voice” as he encounters various characters and scenarios in the urban landscape. “The Voice” exhibits clairvoyant power on more than one occasion, casually dismisses the mundanity of everyday life, and pulls from his memory quotations of Sixteenth Century poetry by Christopher Marlowe and John Donne. Yet we can’t be sure of the stability of his wisdom: his manner evokes the contemporary homeless person who rejects the functions of society while clinging to a painful love of life. The play ends with “The Voice” having found a friend and some peace on a rock in the ocean, an island apart from the noise of the city.

Despite the last-minute changes Cage made in the orchestration of the score, the result wonderfully reinforces the atmosphere and mood of each scene. Both by design and the inertia of the percussion movement he was then championing, his orchestration for “sound orchestra” ameliorates the difference between “sound effects” and “music.” By 1942, Cage had composed much of his work for percussion ensemble and had for several years led concerts and tours of percussion music. *The City Wears a Slouch Hat* includes some of his most beautiful and unusual percussion writing, and with the inclusion of the magnificent sounds of the string piano, reveals Cage’s gift for the orchestration of percussion timbre. There is also the unmistakable influence of colleagues such as Lou Harrison and William Russell (compare Cage’s nightclub scene music with Russell’s *Three Cuban Pieces*). While the score of *The City Wears a Slouch Hat* is in

the service of a script, it is nonetheless Cage’s longest and most ambitious work from the tremendous group of percussion compositions he wrote in this period.

The City Wears a Slouch Hat was over the years known to have existed, but was considered “lost” except for extant tape recordings of the original broadcast and a bootleg vinyl LP of the performance issued on a small German label. Cage had presented the finished score to CBS and retained only his very hectic drafts and the parts which Xenia had hastily copied. In 1990, the finished manuscript was found in the storage of The New York Library of the Performing Arts, amidst a collection of radio play scores donated to the library by CBS. This was compared with both the original broadcast tape and Cage’s original manuscript sketch and performance parts for Essential Music’s resurrection of the work in a live performance at New York’s RAPP Arts Center on October 23, 1990. Cage attended and enjoyed this performance, and while he showed curiosity and bemusement with Essential Music’s efforts, he entrusted the decision-making process of the restoration to them.

Essential Music’s live performance restored small amounts of material in Cage’s original score and parts that were cut from the 1942 broadcast and subsequent CBS manuscript because of the 30-minute broadcast limitation. There are many places in the manuscript where Cage inserted vamps or repeats in order to coordinate with dialogue endings, and where musical material was clearly calibrated to the duration of text recitation. There are other places, however, where Cage had composed material that would have clearly been more expansive if there was not a time restriction—it is in these places where Essential Music’s performance restored Cage’s desired slower tempos as well as transitional music cut from the broadcast. A lingering question, however, is the omission of an entire scene near the end of Patchen’s play, set in a movie house. Whether Cage cut this scene because of his harried re-write, or because it would cause his score to again exceed the broadcast timing, is a mystery. In any case, there was never any orchestration of Patchen’s movie house scene.

Far from being a curiosity, *The City Wears a Slouch Hat* adds another dimension to John Cage’s role in the liberation of sound. The work forges a union of Cage’s evolving aesthetic of sound with the broadcast medium of radio, a medium which he later used in many works as an instrument itself. And Kenneth Patchen’s text explicitly offers what has become a non-verbal message in Cage’s body of work: that amidst the roar of the city and sea, “we need more love in the world.” Note by John Kennedy.