



The Richard B. Fisher Center
for the Performing Arts at Bard College *presents*

PROGRAMS IN CELEBRATION OF
JOHN CAGE
AT BARD COLLEGE: A SYMPOSIUM

The Richard B. Fisher Center for
the Performing Arts at Bard College

Chair Jeanne Donovan Fisher
President Leon Botstein

Presents

Programs in Celebration of

***John Cage at Bard College:
A Symposium***

Sosnoff Theater

October 30 at **7:30 pm**

October 31 at **8:00 pm**

Presented by The John Cage Trust at Bard College, The Bard College Conservatory of Music, Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Institute for Writing and Thinking

Additional support for this program has been generously provided by the Advisory Board of The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College and the Friends of the Fisher Center.

October 30

John Cage: Chamber Music

Performed by students and faculty of The Bard College Conservatory of Music and the Music Program at Bard College

In the lobby of the Sosnoff Theater, prior to the concert

Inlets (Improvisation II) for four conch shells and the sound of burning pinecones (1977)

David Bloom
Benjamin Pesetsky
Lukáš Olejník
Conor Brown

Five Dances for String Quartet (arr. by Eric Salzman, 1996–97)

Fangyue He, violin
Yue Sun, violin
Leah Gastler, viola
Laura Hendrickson, cello

Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard (1950)

Erica Kiesewetter, violin
Blair McMillen, piano

Three Songs for Voice and Piano (text by Gertrude Stein) (1933)

“Twenty years after”

“If it was to be”

“At East and ingredients”

Megan Taylor, soprano
Christina Lalog, piano

The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs (1942)

A Flower (1950)

Nowth upon Nacht (1984)

Ilana Zarankin, soprano
Liang-yu Wang, piano

Radio Music (1956)

Intermission

String Quartet in Four Parts (1950)

Yuan Ma, violin
Agnieszka Peszko, violin
Lin Wang, viola
Qizhen Liu, cello

Eight Whiskus for solo violin (1985)

Erica Kiesewetter, violin

Nocturne for violin and piano (1947)

Erica Kiesewetter, violin
Blair McMillen, piano

Two (1987)

Jo Brand, flute
Blair McMillen, piano

The Beatles 1962–1970 (1990)

Frank Corliss, live piano
Sungha Lee, live piano
Liang-yu Wang, taped piano
Christina Lalog, taped piano
Michael Bukhman, taped piano

Special thanks to David Bloom for his assistance in programming this evening’s concert.

Running time is approximately 1 hour and 55 minutes, with one intermission.

October 31

John Cage: Percussion!

Performed by Nexus Bob Becker
 Bill Cahn
 Russell Hartenberger
 Garry Kvistad

with special guests Frank Corliss
 Jason Treuting

(Note: all works composed by John Cage unless otherwise noted)

Amores for prepared piano and three percussion players (1943)

Credo in US for four performers (1942)

Chess Pieces (1944) (arr. for percussion ensemble by Brian Nozzy, 2009)

Dance Music for Elfrid Ide for six percussionists (1940)

Intermission

The Invisible Proverb for percussion (2002) by Russell Hartenberger

1. Okarche
2. Drumtalker
3. Darkwater
4. Sky Ghost

Third Construction for percussion quartet (1941)

This concert is dedicated to the memory of Merce Cunningham (1919–2009).

Running time is approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes, with one intermission.

The use of recording equipment or the taking of photographs during the performances is strictly prohibited.

Notes on the Program: John Cage's Chamber Music

by Brian Brandt

These concerts present a wonderful cross section of John Cage's periods of development and style. The oldest works in the program, *Three Songs for Voice and Piano* (1933), are set to texts by Gertrude Stein, which were likely chosen for their musical quality. The 21-year old Cage clearly was not to follow in the Romantic song tradition; in their sparseness, these miniatures already look forward toward his more mature style.

The Wonderful Widow of Eighteen Springs (1942), set to a text by James Joyce from Cage's beloved *Finnegans Wake*, incorporates the composer's revolutionary developments in percussion. In this mysterious piece, the singer's non-vibrato, chant-like music is accompanied by a pianist-percussionist who never touches the keyboard but rather taps the rhythms on the closed piano lid. Similar techniques are employed in *A Flower* (1950), wherein the singer performs a wordless vocalise, following Cage's somewhat mysterious instructions to sing "like a pigeon" and "like a wild duck."

Eric Salzman had the idea that some of the works for prepared piano—all of which were originally written for dance—would sound interesting if played on strings utilizing extended techniques in place of the usual prepared sounds. The *Five Dances for String Quartet* (1996–97) comprise portions of *Our Spring Will Come* (1943), *Dream* (1948), *Totem Ancestor* (1943), *In a Landscape* (1948), and *A Room* (1943).

The *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1950) is a pivotal work in Cage's oeuvre. During this time, Cage was searching for a new aesthetic and style. Attending D. T. Suzuki's lectures on Zen Buddhism while delving into the work of such authors as the Indian art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy and the medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart, as well as the music of Erik Satie, Cage came to feel that music should serve a spiritual purpose, which might allow his audience to "forget themselves, enraptured, and so gain themselves." Throughout the late 1940s, as his goals became more spiritual, his music became more modest. After completing the first movement

of the *String Quartet*, he wrote to his parents: “This piece is like the opening of another door; the possibilities implied are unlimited.” The work’s muted, non-vibrato chords were chosen for their sonorous quality. The four movements represent the seasons: opening with summer and proceeding, as the music becomes increasingly slower, through fall to winter, the latter indicated as “nearly stationary.” An increase in tempo for the final movement suggests the renewed vigor of spring.

Composed in 1950, shortly after he completed the *String Quartet*, the *Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard* follow many of the same compositional techniques. (Cage actually referred to the *Six Melodies* as a postscript to the *String Quartet*.) The violinist is to play with a minimum amount of weight on the bow and, as is now the norm for Cage, sans vibrato. One has to wonder what kind of career Cage might have achieved had his compositional path progressed along the lines of these idiosyncratically beautiful and genuinely accessible works.

But this was not to be. In the early 1950s, Cage met Pierre Boulez and Morton Feldman, and he received a copy of the *I Ching* (the Chinese book of changes) from his student Christian Wolff. Using the *I Ching*, Cage sought to free the sounds from his will. A period of radical experimentation with chance was to begin.

Radio Music (1956), for one to eight radios, represents an extreme liberation. Each player’s parts indicate specific AM-band frequencies to tune to, along with silences and amplitudes. Dependent entirely on what is on the radio when each player lands on the specified frequency—it could in fact be static or even silence—the performer (and the audience) must accept what is there. This clearly comes from a simpler time, when the composer had no reason to be concerned about either the dangers of lawsuits due to copyright infringement or the now prevailing rules regarding of “fair use.”

In *Inlets* (1977), the performers use amplified conch shells that are partially filled with water, tipping them to produce somewhat uncontrolled gurgling sounds. Cage enjoyed the idea of “contingency” here—the players were necessary in their movement of the shells, but had no control over what, if anything, might be heard as a

result. The sounds of the conch shells is at times accompanied by the sound of burning pinecones, and, near the end, a single tone blown from a single conch shell.

Nowth Upon Nacht (1984) is also scored for voice and closed piano, again to a text from *Finnegans Wake*, rapidly declaimed. Cage wrote this piece in memory of Cathy Berberian, the avant-garde diva who championed so much of new music’s vocal works, becoming widely known for her premiere performance of Cage’s virtuosic *Aria* (1958). Berberian was, for a time, married to the celebrated Italian composer Luciano Berio.

Eight Whiskus for solo violin (1985), the title a conjoining of the words “Whistlin’ is did,” was arranged from the original version for voice by Malcolm Goldstein. Cage collaborated by indicating bow articulation, pressure, and positions on the strings as well as harmonics, vibrato, and other techniques.

Two (1987), the first of Cage’s so-called “number pieces,” marks the beginning of Cage’s late style, wherein his works were almost exclusively composed using time brackets. The work has a fixed duration; each player is given a score with a timeline, with the notes/chords placed within brackets of time. The performer can choose to play the notes at any point within the specified time bracket. The result is a work that, while identifiable from one performance to another, can never be the same twice. *Two* also began Cage’s system of titling his later works based on the number of instruments specified (here, two). In the case of a subsequent work written for the same number of instruments, a superscript would be added, i.e. *Two*² (1989).

The Beatles 1962–1970 was written in 1990 for pianist Aki Takahashi’s “Hyper-Beatles” CD collection, for which she invited numerous composers to interpret Beatles songs. It consists of six layered piano parts in time brackets derived from various Beatles tunes, which may be played by one to six pianists, live and recorded. The tempos throughout are left to the performers.

Brian Brandt is the director of Mode Records in New York City. His company is in the process of recording all of John Cage’s works.

Notes on the Program: John Cage's Percussion Music

Amores

Composed by John Cage, 1943

John Cage studied with and was influenced by the American composer Henry Cowell (1897–1965). During the late 1930s, it was Cage's recollection of Cowell pounding his fist on the piano strings in his own *The Banshee* (1925) that led him to compose his first piece for prepared piano—for Syvilla Fort's dance *Bacchanale*—in 1938. In 1943, as World War II raged on, Cage, who found the conflict both huge and hideous, wrote, "Logically I thought that anything that is small and intimate, and has some love in it, is beautiful. Therefore I wrote a piece for prepared piano, which is very quiet. It is called *Amores*, and it is about my conviction that love is something that we can consider beautiful. But then shortly I discovered that I was being divorced . . . So what is beautiful? So what's art?" *Amores* premiered on February 7, 1943, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. After attending a performance of *Amores* in 1944, Lou Harrison wrote, "Cage's music strikes perhaps the last note in the romantic era; it reaches a maximum of personalization in every one of its elements. He has mastered a curious and convincing form of rhapsodic rhythm, intimate and free; what might be called baroque rhythm." Movements I and IV are scored for prepared piano, in which the performer places objects in the strings, resulting in a sound similar to a percussion ensemble of gongs, woodblocks, and rattles. Movement II calls for nine tom-toms and a pod rattle, while movement III is for seven blocks of wood.

—Garry Kvistad

Credo in US

Composed by John Cage, 1942

Credo in US is music for a dance made by Merce Cunningham and Jean Erdman. It is scored for piano and two percussionists playing muted gongs, tin cans, an electric buzzer, and tom-toms. Another performer plays a radio tuned to a classical music

station. This piece was intended as a kind of satire on Americans' belief that recorded music is culture ("credo" is that belief, and "in US" signifies both the U.S. and "us"). Cage wrote a "cowboy" tune, a blues number, and a boogie-woogie riff, and included extended vamps that feature Cunningham reciting various texts. Of all his early works for percussion instruments, Cage said his favorites were *Credo in US* and *Third Construction*, and indeed both live happily on in concert halls around the world.

—Robin Engelman

Chess Pieces

Composed by John Cage, 1944

Chess Pieces is the name Cage gave to a painting he created in 1944 for an exhibition called *The Images of Chess* organized by Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City. When the exhibition closed, a private collector purchased *Chess Pieces*, and, over time, the work was either considered lost or largely overlooked by Cage scholars. *Chess Pieces* is a 19-by-19-inch square painting in ink and gouache on Masonite, its 64 squares filled with music written in Cage's hand in black and white ink. Its 22 systems read from left to right, as do Cage's prepared piano scores from the same period. No documentation exists of this music ever having been played, nor are instrumentation, tempi, or dynamics indicated. In 2005, *Chess Pieces* went on public display for the first time in more than 60 years when the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, New York, mounted an exhibition entitled *The Image of Chess Revisited*. The pianist Margaret Leng Tan transcribed the music and recorded it (for Mode Records) to be played during this show. As Tan said: ". . . for the first time the public could experience *Chess Pieces* as art and music simultaneously." At Nexus's request, percussionist Brian Nozny has transcribed and arranged Tan's piano transcription for percussion quintet.

Cage's interest in chess began when he met Marcel Duchamp in New York City in 1944. Duchamp introduced Cage to the game and became his teacher, and the two played off and on until Duchamp's death in 1968. Cage once wrote: "I began using chess and the hunting of mushrooms as a balance to my involvement with chance.

They are both situations in which chance cannot be used. They are both life-and-death matters of winning and losing. One prefers to live.”

—Robin Engelman

Dance Music for Elfrid Ide

Composed by John Cage, 1940

Cage’s numerous compositions for percussion composed between 1939 and 1942 are now standard repertoire and include his three *Constructions*, the third of which has been frequently performed by Nexus. But fans of Cage’s music were pleasantly surprised to learn of the recent discovery of a 15-minute work, largely unknown even to Cage scholars, entitled *Dance Music for Elfrid Ide* (composed in 1940, the same year as the *Second Construction*). The discovery was made by Laura Kuhn, executive director of the John Cage Trust at Bard College, while conducting research at Mills College. Written for dancer Elfrid Ide (1917–93), daughter of New England composer Chester Ide (1878–1944), the work was probably performed at her thesis dance concert given on May 20, 1941, at Mills. She called her choreography *Wheel of Circumstance*, and titled her three movements “Quest,” “The Rift Between,” and “Song in Counterpoint.” Cage served on the dance faculty at Mills during the summers of 1940 and 1941. While in that position, he had ample latitude to experiment with compositional forms and whimsical instrumentation. The use of toy piano in this work, for example, predates Cage’s now classic *Suite for Toy Piano* (1948). Other instruments used include squawkers, whistles, ratchet, handclaps, a whisk, cowbells, slitblocks, drums, cymbals, gongs, claves, and a slapstick. One can only imagine what Chester Ide, a composer of American art song, would have thought of his daughter’s thesis recital, assuming he attended.

—Garry Kvistad

The Invisible Proverb

Composed by Russell Hartenberger, 2002

The Invisible Proverb uses elements of talking-drum styles and the rhythm patterns of West African drumming ensembles. Movements 1 and 3, “Okarche” and “Darkwater,” use Atenteben flute melodies from Ghana and elements of the horn ensembles of Central Africa. The fourth movement, “Sky Ghost,” is based on material from the song “Small Sky” by Toru Takemitsu. The music represents the drummer Okarche’s mythical search for the meaning of a drum proverb that supposedly holds magical powers.

—Russell Hartenberger

Third Construction

Composed by John Cage, 1941

Although this piece was written 68 years ago, it is as fresh and popular as the day it was first performed at the California Club Auditorium in San Francisco by an ensemble conducted by Cage himself, including Xenia Cage (then Cage’s wife, to whom the work is dedicated, “for our anniversary”), Doris Dennison, Lou Harrison, and Margaret Jansen. Some of its features that are common to many compositions of the “classical” era of percussion chamber music include complex polyrhythms and an eclectic instrumentation, here including Indonesian angklung rattle, Latin American cowbells, claves, maraca, African log drum, Chinese cymbal and tom-toms, Hawaiian pouweili sticks, Caribbean pod rattle, conch shell, tambourine, thumbtack rattle, ratchet, 20 tin cans, and lion’s roars!

—Garry Kvistad

Who's Who

John Cage (1919–92)

John Cage was born in Los Angeles, where he studied composition with Richard Buhlig, Henry Cowell, Adolph Weiss, and Arnold Schoenberg. In 1938 he began working as a dance accompanist and a teacher at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle, Washington. It was there that he met the dancer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009), with whom he would have a lifelong working relationship. Together they were responsible for a number of radical innovations in music and dance composition, such as the use of chance operations and the independence of dance and music. Cage served as music adviser for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from its inception in 1953 until shortly before his death in New York City on August 12, 1992.

In the 1940s, Cage moved to New York and joined a group of avant-garde artists, including painters Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. During this period, Cage became interested in Eastern religions, particularly Zen Buddhism, and while his compositions continued his use of carefully segmented time, he also began to fill them with materials derived by chance processes (the rolling of dice, the use of the *I Ching*, et al). In perhaps the ultimate statement of this aesthetic, he wrote *4'33"*, a piece of total silence on the part of the performer into which the random sounds of the world are invited to enter. In 1952, at Black Mountain College, Cage presented a theatrical event considered by many to have been the first "happening." In 1958, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Emile de Antonio organized a 25-year retrospective concert of his music at New York's Town Hall.

Cage was the recipient of many awards and honors during his lifetime, beginning in 1949 with a Guggenheim Fellowship and an award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters for having extended the boundaries of music through his work with percussion orchestra and his systematic elaboration of the prepared piano. He was awarded membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1978) and the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1989); named *Commandeur de*

l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Legion d'Honneur (1982) and laureate of the Kyoto Prize given by the Inamori Foundation (1989); and recipient of an honorary doctorate in performing arts at the California Institute of the Arts (1986). Cage was the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University for the 1988–89 academic year. The 1991 Zurich June Festival was devoted to his work, alongside that of his collaborator in spirit, James Joyce.

Cage authored many books, among them *Silence, A Year from Monday, M, Empty Words*, and *X* (all published by Wesleyan University Press). His *I-VI* (Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, published by both Harvard and Wesleyan University Presses), includes transcripts of the question-and-answer sessions with students that followed each lecture, and a recording of Cage reading one of his six lectures. *Conversing with Cage*, a book-length composition of excerpts from interviews compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, was published in 1988 by Limelight Editions. Cage's music is published by the Henmar Press of C. F. Peters Corporation and has been recorded on numerous labels. Since 1958, many of Cage's scores have been exhibited in galleries and museums. He was also active later in his life as a visual artist. A series of 52 watercolors, the *New River Watercolors*, executed by Cage at the Mountain Lake Workshop at the Miles C. Horton Center at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, was shown at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., in 1990. *Cage/Cunningham*, a feature-length documentary film directed by Elliot Caplan, was produced in 1991 by the Cunningham Dance Foundation, partly funded by PBS.

The John Cage Trust

Laura Kuhn, *Executive Director*

Emily Martin, *Office Manager*

Rebecca Johnson, *Administrator*

When John Cage died, in August of 1992, his significant holdings passed to the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, his longtime friend and collaborator. The John Cage Trust was legally formed shortly thereafter, with a board of directors consisting of Cunningham; Anne d'Harnoncourt, director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; David Vaughan, archivist at the Cunningham Dance Foundation; and Laura Kuhn, who had been Cage's assistant since 1986, and who continues to serve as the Trust's

founding executive director. The primary functions of the Trust are to control, monitor, and administer rights and licenses to Cage's published and unpublished work, and to create and encourage educational experiences, enhance public access, and enliven global awareness of Cage's work through new recordings, performances, workshops, festivals, and more.

The John Cage Trust at Bard College is now a resident organization at Bard College, where all of its materials are housed and maintained. The John Cage Trust at Bard College provides access to these holdings through courses, workshops, and concerts, and develops new programs around this extraordinary resource. Dr. Laura Kuhn, in addition to maintaining and operating The John Cage Trust at Bard College, holds the position of John Cage Professor of Performance Arts at Bard College and teaches courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Nexus

The first, entirely improvised NEXUS concert in 1971 marked the formation of a group that would touch and entertain people of all levels of musical learning, and in all genres of percussion music. Bob Becker, Bill Cahn, Robin Engelman, Russell Hartenberger, and Garry Kvistad, each a virtuoso in his own right, bring elements of their knowledge and character to a distinct and powerful whole. Together they stand out in the contemporary music scene for the innovation and diversity of their programs, their impressive history of collaborations and commissions, their revival of 1920s novelty ragtime xylophone music, and their influential improvisatory ideas. Nexus's firm commitment to music education and a steady output of quality CD recordings and compositions continues to enhance the role of percussion in the 21st century.

Nexus wishes to thank the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for their generous support. Nexus also thanks Pearl Corporation and Adams Musical Instruments for their support worldwide.

Frank Corliss

Before coming to The Bard College Conservatory of Music, where he is on the piano faculty and also directs the Postgraduate Piano Fellowship, Frank Corliss was for

many years the director of music at the Walnut Hill School and a staff pianist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. A frequent performer in the Boston Symphony Prelude Concert series, he also performs throughout the United States as a chamber musician and collaborative pianist. In addition to his duties at the BSO and Walnut Hill, Corliss has worked as a musical assistant for Yo-Yo Ma and has assisted Ma in the musical preparation of many new works for performance and recording, including concertos by Elliot Carter, Richard Danielpour, Tan Dun, John Harbison, Leon Kirchner, Peter Lieberson, Christopher Rouse, and John Williams. Corliss can be heard on Yo-Yo Ma's Grammy-winning Sony disc *Soul of the Tango*, as well as the Koch International disc of music by Elliot Carter for chorus and piano with the John Oliver Chorale.

Jason Treuting

In addition to his work with So Percussion, Jason Treuting performs in the duo Alligator Eats Fish with guitarist Grey McMurray. He also improvises with composer/performer Cenk Ergun and in a duo setting with composer/guitarist Steve Mackey. His compositions are featured on So's album *Amid the Noise* from Cantaloupe Music. Treuting received a bachelor of music degree at the Eastman School of Music, where he studied percussion with John Beck and drum set and improvisation with Ralph Alessi, Michael Cain, and Steve Gadd. He received a master's degree in music, along with an Artist Diploma, from Yale University, where he studied percussion with Robert Van Sice. He has also traveled to Japan to study marimba with Keiko Abe, and to Bali to study gamelan with Pac I Nyoman Suadin.

The Bard College Conservatory of Music

Robert Martin, *Director*

Melvin Chen, *Associate Director*

Building on its distinguished history in the arts and education, Bard College launched The Bard College Conservatory of Music in 2005. The Conservatory's undergraduate program is guided by the principle that musicians should be broadly educated in the liberal arts and sciences to achieve their greatest potential. While training and studying for the bachelor of music degree, Conservatory students also pursue a bachelor of arts degree. The Graduate Vocal Arts Program is a two-year

master of music degree conceived by artistic director Dawn Upshaw and head of program Kayo Iwama. The course work extends from standard repertory to new music, alongside training in acting, core seminars that provide historical and cultural perspectives, analytical tools, and performance skills for vocal and operatic performance at the highest levels.

Institute for Writing and Thinking

The Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT) offers professional development in writing to secondary and college teachers in all academic discipline. IWT's mission is to improve the teaching of writing and to enliven and enrich teaching and learning across the curriculum through writing. Through experiential, intellectually engaging, and collaborative workshops (one-day, two-day, and weeklong), teachers learn how to make writing central to their classrooms.

We honor the late Richard B. Fisher for his generosity and leadership in building and supporting this superb center that bears his name by offering outstanding arts experiences. We recognize and thank the following individuals, corporations, and foundations that share Dick's and our belief in presenting and creating art for the enrichment of society. Help us sustain the Fisher Center and ensure that the performing arts are a part of our lives. We encourage and need you to join our growing list of donors. (The list reflects donations received in the last 12 months.)

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