

SONATAS AND INTERLUDES

FRIDAY 17 MAY 2024 7PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

	Duration
John CAGE (1912-1992) <i>Sonatas & Interludes</i>	
for prepared piano (1946-48)	
<i>Sonata I</i>	3'
Timothy Young (ANAM Faculty, Head of Piano) piano#	
<i>Sonatas II, III, IV</i>	7'
Reuben Johnson (QLD) piano*	
<i>Interlude 1</i>	3.5'
<i>Sonatas V, VI</i>	4.5'
Francis Atkins (NSW) piano*	
<i>Sonata VII, VIII</i>	5.5'
<i>Interlude 2</i>	4'
Po Goh (VIC) piano*	
<i>Interlude 3</i>	2.5'
<i>Sonata IX, X</i>	9'
Ronan Apcar (NSW) piano*	
<i>Sonata XI, XII</i>	7'
<i>Interlude 4</i>	3'
Timothy O'Malley (VIC) piano*	
<i>Sonata XIII, XIV & XV</i>	10.5'
Matthew Garvie (NSW) piano*	
<i>Sonata XVI</i>	5'
Timothy Young (ANAM Resident Faculty, Head of Piano) piano#	

Approximate duration: 80 minutes (no interval)

Cage was a prolific writer and speaker and was infamous for idiosyncratic guest lectures. Between the movements of this work, musicians will recite extracts of his writings, anecdotes, and Zen parables. Sources include his published collection of writing, *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), and his *Autobiographical Statement* (1990).

* ANAM musician whose training is supported by an ANAM Syndicate

Timothy Young's ANAM Faculty position is generously supported by the Orthwein Foundation

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PROGRAM NOTES

METAMORPHOSIS: PREPARING A NEW SONATA

Written by Alex Owens (ANAM Librarian, Robert Salzer Foundation Library)
& Paavali Jumppanen (Artistic Director)

"I am going toward violence rather than tenderness, hell rather than heaven, ugly rather than beautiful, impure rather than pure—because by doing these things they become transformed, and we become transformed."

—John Cage, interview with Calvin Tomkins (1976).

The development of the concert grand piano has been one of refinement: cast iron frames to hold the tension of longer strings, greater agility through a responsive action, and a purer sound with doubled or tripled strings. Though each piano has its own character, the sound you would usually hear from this piano is as close to those you would hear from grand pianos around the world, whether Steinway, Bösendorfer or Fazioli. Within eighty-eight keys, there is a world of sounds and colours; reliable, beautiful, homogenised.

How does one write beautiful music for a beautiful instrument in the wake of a world gone mad? With Europe in ruins, a genocide on a scale unseen in European history being uncovered, and the spectre of nuclear warfare a catastrophic reality, twentieth century composers needed broader palettes to encompass the devastation they grappled with. Where Pierre Boulez and other European composers sought this new sound through extended techniques and growing complexity, John Cage and his American contemporaries instead turned more towards chance. Increased globalisation, combined with an aversion to pre-war nationalism, resulted in a constant cross-pollination of ideas. Nevertheless, a common factor was the search for new sounds – *violent* sounds.

Henry Cowell, who Cage admired and once termed "the open sesame of new music in America", was an early innovator in the expansion of the piano's sound, from using the forearm to play large clusters to strumming the piano's strings (*Aeolian Harp*, featuring in tomorrow's concert *Arithmetic of Sound*) – setting the path towards using the entire instrument to create sound, such as in works by Helmut Lachenmann (as heard last month with Claudia Chan at ANAM). But it is Cage who is credited for first *preparing* the piano, altering the very sounds of each note to transform the piano's uniformity into a multifaceted landscape of timbres.

Cage began an article penned in 1939 with the proclamation: "Percussion music is revolution." In the late 1930's, Cage was working as a dance accompanist at the Cornish School of the Arts in Seattle, after a short time accompanying dance at UCLA. He seized the possibilities of percussion to move away from the harmony-obsessed Romantic idiom, instead making this music "an integral part of the dance". However, the spaces in which the dancers would perform were often not designed with percussion ensembles in mind, and in 1938, Cage found himself in a hall too small for the ensemble needed. Using the piano in the space, Cage placed screws, bolts and felt on and around the strings, altering and muting the strings and creating percussive sounds. This experiment became *Bacchanale* (1940), and kicked off more than a decade of works featuring preparations.

Sonatas and Interludes (1946-8) is regarded as a landmark of his catalogue, a collection of nineteen short works for a meticulously prepared piano. The diagram (provided as a printed insert to this program) details the alterations required on 49 notes, shifting some notes to become tinnier or muted, and completely stopping the sounds to create drum and tambourine-like colours on others. This palate of sounds becomes richer with Cage's specifications on which strings of a note certain preparations affect: each note on a piano has up to three strings, and if the *una corda* (soft) pedal is depressed, the hammers shift so that one less string is struck, and the sound of the note is changed.

The work was composed over two years, with an early form of chance: improvisation. On composing the material, Cage likened the process to choosing "shells as one walks along a beach". The structures were organised within the piece, with sonatas using repetitive and simple structures, and interludes being more organically through-composed.

The structure of the collection lends itself to meditation, with listeners drawn to the *klangfarbenmelodie* nature of the work. Coined by Arnold Schoenberg (who taught Cage in 1934), the German compound word translates to "sound-colour-melody": using tone colour as a device of melodic variation. With the alteration provided by the prepared piano, simple melodic lines become complicated by the variation of colour in each prepared note, and chords notated in the right hand more frequently consist of a percussive collection of unpitched sounds rather than the expected triad. Despite this, tonality is not banished and becomes clear in Sonata X and beyond, where the non-prepared notes gesture towards a B minor harmonic motion.

Shortly before beginning the *Sonatas and Interludes*, Cage met Indian musician Gita Sarabhai, and the two spent six months teaching each other their musical traditions. At the conclusion of their time together, Sarabhai gave Cage a copy of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This sparked a lifelong journey and fascination with spirituality (eventually shifting further east to Zen Buddhism), which bleeds into his musical output in a trend towards tranquillity and enlightenment, or its sonic equivalent.

Cage had previously battled with the concept of affect and the disjunction between his intentions and the audience's perception. Give Schubert and Stravinsky the same melody, which may in a minor key be theorised as 'sad' or 'melancholy', and the two would orchestrate them in vastly different ways, generating their own interpretations, which then would go on to have their own personal interpretations by the audience. In a 1990 statement, Cage said:

"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"

The answer to continue writing, 'the reason beyond communication', came from his study with Sarabhai. *Sonatas and Interludes* aims to express the Hindi aesthetics learned from Sarabhai, wherein 'white' emotions (heroic, erotic, mirthful, wonderous) and 'black' (fear, anger, sorrow, disgust) all tend towards tranquillity. Which sonatas correspond to which emotion has never been detailed by Cage, and is left up to the listener to discern.

"Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third. What can they have to do with one another?"
—Cage (1955)

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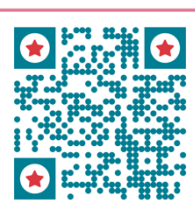
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TONE	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	TONE
				SCREW	2-3	1 1/4*				A
				MED. BOLT	2-3	1 3/8*				G
				SCREW	2-3	1 5/8*				F
				SCREW	2-3	1 13/16*				E
				SCREW	2-3	1 3/4*				E ^b
				SM. BOLT	2-3	2*				D
				SCREW	2-3	1 1/16*				C*
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	2 3/16*				C
				SCREW	2-3	2 1/2*				B
				SCREW	2-3	1 7/8*				B ^b
				MED. BOLT	2-3	2 3/8*				A
				SCREW	2-3	2 1/4*				A ^b
				SCREW	2-3	3 3/4*				G
				SCREW	2-3	2 15/16*				F*
	SCREW	1-2	3 1/4*	FURN. BOLT + 2 NUTS	2-3	2 1/8*	SCREW + 2 NUTS	2-3	3 1/4*	F
				SCREW	2-3	1 13/16*				E
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	1 7/8				E ^b
				SCREW	2-3	1 5/16				C*
				SCREW	2-3	1 1/16				C
				MED. BOLT	2-3	3 3/4				B
				SCREW	2-3	4 7/16				A
	ROBBER	1-2-3	4 1/2	FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	1 1/4				G*
				SCREW	2-3	1 3/4				F*
				SCREW	2-3	2 5/16				F
	ROBBER	1-2-3	5 3/4							E ^b
	ROBBER	1-2-3	6 1/2	FURN. BOLT + NUT	2-3	6 7/8				E
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	2 9/16				D
	ROBBER	1-2-3	3 5/8							D ^b
				BOLT	2-3	7/8				C
				BOLT	2-3	2				B
	SCREW	1-2	10	SCREW	2-3	1	ROBBER	1-2-3	8 1/4	B ^b
	(PLASTIC (See G))	1-2-3	2 5/16				ROBBER	1-2-3	4 1/2	G*
	PLASTIC (OVER L UNDER 2-3)	1-2-3	2 7/8				ROBBER	1-2-3	10 7/8	G
	(PLASTIC (See D))	1-2-3	4 1/4				ROBBER	1-2-3	5 7/16	D*
	PLASTIC (OVER L UNDER 2-3)	1-2-3	4 1/8				ROBBER	1-2-3	9 3/4	D
	BOLT	1-2	15 1/2	BOLT	2-3	1 1/16	ROBBER	1-2-3	14 1/8	D ^b
	BOLT	1-2	14 1/2	BOLT	2-3	7/8	ROBBER	1-2-3	6 1/2	C
	BOLT	1-2	14 3/4	BOLT	2-3	9/16	ROBBER	1-2-3	14	B
	ROBBER	1-2-3	9 1/2	MED. BOLT	2-3	10 1/8				B ^b
	SCREW	1-2	5 7/8	LG. BOLT	2-3	5 7/8	SCREW + NUTS	1-2	1	A
	BOLT	1-2	7 1/8	MED. BOLT	2-3	2 1/4	ROBBER	1-2-3	4 1/8	A ^b
	LONG BOLT	1-2	8 3/4	LG BOLT	2-3	3 1/4				G
				BOLT	2-3	1 1/16				D
8va. 6cs	SCREW + ROBBER	1-2	4 7/16							D
16va. 6cs	EBASER (OVER D UNDER C* E ^b)	1	6 3/4							D

(DAMPER TO BRIDGE = 4 1/16", ADJUST ACCORDING)

* MEASURE FROM BRIDGE.

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Acknowledgements correct from 1 September 2022 to 22 March 2024

