

The Museum of Modern Art

JOHN CAGE

John Cage was born in Los Angeles on September 5, 1912. He attended Pomona College in Claremont, California, for two years, and spent the next year traveling in Europe, where he pursued independent studies in music, art, and architecture. Returning to Los Angeles in 1934, Cage studied counterpoint with Arnold Schoenberg and took courses in theory at UCLA. In the late thirties, in Seattle and San Francisco, he began to perform his own compositions; in 1941, moving to Chicago, he taught new music at the Chicago Institute of Design.

In 1942 he arrived in New York, which has remained his base. That year he received his first commission, for a dance piece choreographed by a young soloist with Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham. Their continuing collaboration has altered the directions of both modern music and dance. The following year, Cage conducted his first concert in New York at The Museum of Modern Art, in a program that for the first time brought him major public attention.

In the forties and fifties, Cage continued his activities in composition and his work with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He spent several summers teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, taught experimental music at the New School for Social Research in New York, and traveled with Cunningham and pianist-composer David Tudor throughout Europe and the United States.

In 1949 Cage received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Academy of Arts and Letters. At this time, he began to study Eastern philosophies, focusing on Zen Buddhism and including an intensive study of the I Ching, the Chinese book of changes. His studies resulted in a new system of composition, in which elements of chance were introduced into the process of

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creation or performance. Although few musicians or critics understood what Cage was attempting, he continued his collaborations with musicians Tudor, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Earle Brown, with whom he founded the Project of Music for Magnetic Tape. He also exchanged ideas with the visual artists Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns.

In a 1954 concert tour of Europe, Cage and Tudor performed at the Donaueschingen Festival in Germany. Reaction to their music was largely hostile, but soon afterwards European composers themselves began discussing and experimenting with chance music. A retrospective concert of Cage's music was given at New York's Town Hall in 1958. Once again, the reception was mixed, but a three-disc album of the concert made it possible for critics to evaluate Cage's development in a more informed way than before.

Over the last twenty-five years, Cage has received numerous commissions, designing pieces for performance in conventional concert halls, dance theaters, and outdoor environments. He has also received many honors. His sixtieth birthday was marked by a concert in 1972 at the New School, and by another at Lincoln Center the following year. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1978, and in 1981 was one of eight New Yorkers (and the only musician) to be given the Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture. In 1982 the French government awarded him the Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. To commemorate his seventieth birthday, the New Music America festival, Chicago, was dedicated to Cage, and a major exhibition, "John Cage: Scores and Prints," was presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

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