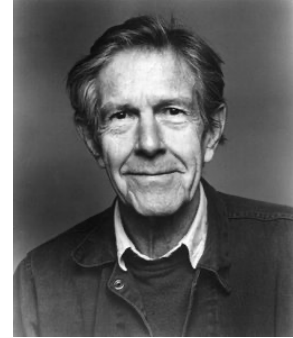


DEVALS

JOHN CAGE

John Milton Cage Jr was an American composer, poet, painter, and mycologist.

Born 5 September 1912 in Los Angeles, CA; died 12 August 1992 in New York City.



His first contact with music was through the piano lessons he took as a child. Later, in 1930, bored with an education based on repetition and uniformity, he set sail for Europe looking for new experiences. Returning to California the following year, he began studying composition with Richard Buhlig and Henry Cowell, and then undertook private lessons with Adolph Weiss. In 1935 he married Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff, from whom he separated ten years later. From 1934 to 1936 he studied analysis, composition, harmony, and counterpoint with Arnold Schoenberg, which gave him occasion to understand how little inclined to harmonic thinking he was. From 1938 to 1940, he worked at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, where he met Merce Cunningham, who would become his companion and collaborator. It was during this period that he wrote his manifesto on music, "The Future of Music: Credo" invented the water gong and the prepared piano, and composed *Imaginary Landscape No.1* (1939), one of the first works of music to use electronics.

The 1940s marked a turning point for Cage after these early, formative years in which voice and percussion were his instruments of choice. In New York, he participated in a concert at the MoMA during which his composition *Amores* (1943) was premiered; he met Indian musician Gita Sarabhai and began reading the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Meister Eckhart. In 1948, he completed *Sonatas and interludes*, the fruit of several years' worth of experimentation with prepared piano. In 1949, he returned to Paris, where he worked on the music of Erik Satie and encountered such composers as Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Schaeffer, and Pierre Boulez. He and Boulez maintained an extensive correspondence that lasted until 1954.

Returning to New York in 1950, Cage became involved in what would come to be known as the New York School, which included Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff, joined by Earle Brown in 1952. His friendships with painters in this circle, particularly Robert Rauschenberg, were also significant during this time, as may be observed in his silent piece *4'33''* (1952). His *Music of Changes* (1951) and *Untitled Event* (1952) marked the birth of the musical happening. *Water music* (1952) explores unconventional notation. The Merce Cunningham Dance Company was founded in 1953, with Cage as its musical director, a position he would hold until his death. His collaboration with Cunningham was one in which music and dance coexisted equally, without relationships of dominance and subordination between them. During this time, Cage also attended lectures on Zen Buddhism by Daisetz T. Suzuki and began working chance operations and free choice into his music: he first used the I Ching in the third movement of *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1957-1958).

His lecture “Composition as Process” at the Darmstadt Summer Course in 1958, and his indeterminate music, including Variations I, sparked widespread debate among the European avant-garde. In 1961, he published *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, and by 1962 his understanding of music as theatre was beginning to take shape, with the premiere of *0'00''* (4'33'' n° 2). Variations V and VII, *Musicircus* (1967), *HPSCHD* with Lejaren Hiller, the electronic music/chess performance *Reunion* (1968) with Marcel Duchamp and Teeny Duchamp, were all major events in the evolution of multimedia and environmental sound art. *Song Books*, published in 1970, was a collection of a wide variety of compositional processes and types of notation with texts by Cage and authors he admired such as Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, and, most prominently, Henry David Thoreau. The social aspect of his work began to emerge in the project *Freeman Etudes for violin* (1980; 1990).

John Cage's career as a visual artist began with an exhibit of his scores in 1958 at the Stable Gallery; despite regular appearances in the visual arts world, it was only with the etchings created at Crown Point Press on invitation from Kathan Brown that this practice became a central one for Cage. At the time of his death, he had produced some 900 etchings, watercolors, and drawings. In these works – as in the mesostics he began writing after composing *Empty Words* in 1976 – Cage worked along the same principles as he did in his music, as may be observed in *Where R=Ryoanji* (1983-1992), for example. Between 1987 and 1991, he composed *Europas I-V*, and between 1987 and 1992, the cycle *Number Pieces*, where he made use of what he called “time-bracket notation.” In this period, Cage explored forms of automatic or computer-assisted writing based on programs created by his assistant Andrew Culver. He received many major awards and honors in the last years of his life, including the Kyoto Prize (1989) – a life devoted to experimentation and freedom.

John Cage died in New York City on 12 August 1992.