

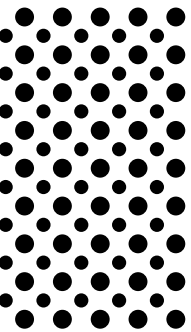
Marcin Borchardt

Awangarda muzyki końca XX wieku

przewodnik dla początkujących
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wydawnictwo
w podwórku



Marcin Borchardt

The Avant-Garde Music at the End of the 20th Century

The Beginners' Guide
Volume 1

The Book

“Wydawnictwo w Podwórku” publishing house presents the first volume of Marcin Borchardt’s monograph **The Avant-Garde of the music at the End of the 20th century. The beginners’ guide.**”

Written in a form of a popularising guide, Marcin Borchardt's book certifies revolutionary changes in thinking about music; changes that took place after WWII. In the first part, written in three monograph sections, the author focuses on four subjects: inventiveness and John Cage's experiments, musique concrète and Pierre Schaeffer's struggles with the do-re-me canon and the history of the early electronic music, especially the matter of mechanisation, electrification, mathematisation of music from Pythagoras to the beginnings of the 70's of the 20th century, as well as presentation of the profiles of four minimalists (La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass) whose compositions conquered the American music at the end of the last century. Every chapter is accompanied by a consolidated “Guide” through the most important compositions and recordings of particular artists. The book aims to promote new music and to fill the gap in literature regarding publications popularising modern avant-garde in music both in its philharmonic and underground editions.

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John Cage. Chance



Part One: John Cage. Chance (extracts)

At the turn of the 40's and the 50's, John Cage's music was attempted to be discredited, marginalised and ridiculed. Especially unsympathetic were "all-knowing," usually conservative, classically orientated music critiques and philharmonic musicians, organically reluctant to any form of experiment. [...]. Despite criticism, Cage quickly became one of intellectual pillars of the artists' society of New York. He started to blend in the circle of the so called New York School: painters, abstract expressionists (Willem de Koonig, Mercedes Matter, Philip Guston, Ibram Lassaw, Franz Kline, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko) and poets (Josh Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara). Constant intellectual and aesthetic ferment, generated by the artists searching for new forms of their own expression which had a fundamental impact on his creations.

Music should be indeterminate, or determined by chance.

From the moment Cage rents a loft in lower Manhattan, though generally the whole 6th floor of an old abandoned retail tenement house Bozza Mansion, his flat-workshop with a view on the Statue of Liberty attracts young artists like a magnet. Permanent residents are Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Earle Brown and Christian Wolff. The last of which gets free composition lessons from Cage. All of them are linked by a belief that "sounds should be allowed to be themselves." In The Artists' Club, in Greenwich Village—a meetings and loud late parties venue popular among the painters of the New York School—Cage gives two famous lectures: *Lecture on Nothing* (1949) and *Lecture on Something* (1950). Both are inspired by Zen philosophy and have a characteristic rhythmic structure, affiliated with a musical composition where pauses are a fundamental element. The proportions between silence and a word are random. At the Columbia University, Cage attends a series of lectures by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, apparently the biggest authority in Zen, Buddhist philosophy professor at the Otani University in Kyoto.

Cage experiences intellectual revelation and begins the search for his own methods of opening to the world. However, he's not interested in a discipline of a routine meditation—sitting down, breathing: "I am self-disciplined. I spent nearly whole day sitting down, you know, and writing." Cage wants to free himself from the artistic imperative that urges an artist to express himself via art. He wants to eliminate the deep rooted in people's minds dualistic perception of the

world: you-I, subject-object, truth-false, entirety-element and the influence of consciousness and sub consciousness in the process of artistic creation. In Zen philosophy, Cage finds the justification of what he's been looking for intuitively. Music is affirmation of reality and the creation process—one of the forms of human unity with Nature. A composer knows he has to accept and not control sounds. He has to eliminate the author's ego from music. The question is—how does one achieve it?

Christian Wolff gives Cage an old Chinese Book of Changes (I Ching), which inspires him to the extent that from now on Cage leaves every decision regarding the composing process to pure coincidence. I Ching, a flip of a coin, Tarot cards or blemishes on paper—the magic of coincidence creates a lot of possibilities. Fundamental works are being created one after another: *Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1950–51), *Music of Changes* (1951), *Imaginary Landscape No. 4 and No. 5* (1951–52) as well as the series *Music for Piano* (1952). In the letter to Pierre Boulez he writes: "I have the feeling of just beginning to compose for the first time."

My work became an exploration of non-intention.

In the early 50's, Cage's friend, composer Lou Harrison introduces him to a couple of actors and directors: Julian Beck and Judith Malina (then in the mid-twenties), who run Living Theatre in a former factory in the centre of Greenwich Village, a theatre stage alternative to Broadway. The effect of their collaboration is a number of musical, ballet and theatrical shows, which also involve Cunningham, Feldman and Tudor. Influenced by Antonin Artaud's *Theatre and its Double* (*Le Théâtre et son double*, 1938) Cage contemplates methods of introducing visual elements to his music. A theatre show—according to the French poet, actor and theatre theoretician—is not to meet the mimesis postulate, is not to mirror reality, but is to create its own. All elements of a show should be treated autonomously, none of them is subordinate to the narrative thread. The sound, gesture, music, light, movement, words, screams—all of this can work simultaneously. The action doesn't have to take place in the centre, on the stage, but everywhere, including the audience, among the spectators. The actors can play themselves and do whatever they want and for however long they want, including—just like Cage wants it—time intervals determined by fate. Besides, there's no script and no rehearsals.

On August 12, 1952 in a canteen of Black Mountain College, the composer presents *Water Music*. It's a composition of a par-theatrical character, written for

a pianist whose task is not only to play the instrument but also other activities, such as lighting a cigarette, turning the radio on, pouring water from one vessel to another—everything in specific timing. The set accompanying the event: rich scenography, dance, movie projections, recitation—years later will be described as the first happening in the art history.

Art's obscured the difference between art and life. Now let life obscure the difference between life and art.

A few days later, on Friday, August 29, 1952, at exactly 8:15pm, in Maverick Concert Hall, Woodstock a historic event takes place. Woodstock Artists Association invites sponsors and friends to a contemporary music concert. The programme is to consist of piano compositions by Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Earle Brown and Pierre Boulez. The pianist, David Tudor closes and opens the piano lid 3 times, not touching the keyboard during the premiere performance of Cage's new composition. It's called "4'33" and is written for a "silent piano." It's a composition that is NOT played! For the critiques and the audience the joke is rotten. Someone from the auditorium calls "Good people of Woodstock, banish them from the town!" Wolff's mother, Helen, who came to the concert with her friends, is embarrassed by being invited to "something like this." Many composer's friends admit that "this time John went too far." Since then, this day, when mentioned, will always be described as provocation, happening or symbolic act of the end of music.

People began whispering to one another, and some people began to walk out. They didn't laugh—they were irritated when they realized nothing was going to happen, and they haven't forgotten it 30 years later: they're still angry.

The Guide

Extract from "Silence"

John Cage 4'33"

Floating Earth 1991 (FCD 004, CD)

I. Emptiness was discovered (or created) by an ancient anatomist Democritus of Adbera (c. 460-c. 370 BC). Cage has always known that silence doesn't exist and is only an abstract concept. Visiting the anechoic chamber at Harvard University he had a chance to empirically verify this thesis. Even if we're completely isolated from any acoustic experience, we still hear two kinds of noises generated by our organism. The one generated by circulatory system is characterised by low frequency, unlike the high tones generated by nervous system. We're just a step from a conclusion that all sounds should be equally important to a contemporary composer; those conscious and orderly—music, and those ones beyond our control—all forms of noise.

Researchers' opinions are divided. Some state that the genesis of the 4'33" (1952) idea the futuristic manifesto of Luigi Russolo *The Art of Noise* (*L'arte dei rumori*, March 11, 1913), in which a radical postulate to free all noises and other "unwanted" sounds appears. Others state that its roots might reach decadence of the Parisian "fin de siècle." The favourite place of the bohemian artists was Le Chat Noir (The Black Cat) in Montmartre, where young Erik Satie used to play the piano. "On some Friday, the 13th in 1882, I was woken up earlier than usually by a ray of Sun breaking through the curtains of my window. There was an idea at the end of that ray and it settled in my head. It was bothering me all morning. It seemed very simple. Here it is—to create a drawings exhibition by people who can't draw." Inspired by this idea, Jules Levy, a Parisian writer from a poetic group Hydropathes, decided to make it a real. "Friends got to work and the drawings were ready in a blink of an eye." The exhibition was organised on Champs Elysées during a charity fair for gas explosion victims. Provocation was received as a funny antithesis of the Art Salon and gave

a strong impulse to the pre-Dadaistic art formation Arts Incoherent (Les Arts Incohérents, 1882– 1896), who elevated absurd to the level of art and went a few years ahead of artistic manifestos of Dadaists, surrealists and other “-ists.” On October 1, 1882, in Levy’s flat another vernissage takes place. A poet and a dramaturge Paul Bilhaud presents a completely black canvas *The Fight of the Blacks in a Cave at Night (Combat de nègres dans une cave, pendant la nuit, 1882)*. The exhibition is a massive success. Over 2 thousand people visit it a day. As a response to his colleague’s painting, Alphonse Allais—a humourist from The Black Cat and Arts Incoherent hangs on his wall a white piece of bristol entitled *The First Communion of Anaemic Girls in Snowy Weather (Première communion de jeunes filles chlorotiques par un temps de neige, 1883)*. A few years later, as an April Fool’s joke the same Erik Satie’s friend will publish a photo album containing only monochromatic pictures in various colours, affixed with absurd titles (*Album primo-avrilesque, 1896*). Allais is also the author of *The Funeral March For the Deaf (Marche Funèbre composée pour les Funérailles d’un grand homme sourd, 1884)*, which score shows a stave with no notes on it. Cage’s lost original score of 4’33” looked pretty much the same. Allais only named the tempo of the “composition”—*lento rigolando*, and added postscripts regarding the way it should be played. Of course, it was a joke, unlike the 4’33” which Cage treated deadly seriously.

II. In music, John Cage was looking for the same possibilities Robert Rauschenberg expected from painting—filling “the gap between life and art.” In 1951 the artist prepared a series of paintings for his individual exhibition. Almost white canvas of various textures were lit the way the viewer would see a projection of his own shadow. This seemingly trivial manifestation allowed the art to contact physical reality. Cage was looking for his own method of effacing all barriers and differences between them.

By the end of the 40’s, Cage had an idea “to compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and selling it to Muzak Co.,” which specialised in providing “background music” for hotels, offices, institutions, shops and restaurants. The composition was to last 3, maximum

4,5 minutes. Exactly as long as a standard 'tinned composition'. His composition-provocation known under the working title "Silent Prayer" (1949) has never been executed in this form. Cage delayed its publishing a few years, because—as he admitted in his conversation with William Duckworth—he was anxious: "I knew that it would be taken as a joke and renunciation of work, whereas I also knew that if it was done it would be the highest form of work. Or this form of work: an art without work. I doubt whether many people understand it yet."

On August 29, 1952, in Woodstock, a pianist David Tudor played a premiere performance of 4'33". The score of the composition was written down for the first time. What's interesting, it consists of the only in its author's life typical note with remarks on how to perform it. Individual parts of the composition are marked with Roman numerals and the word TACET (Latin *taceo*—to be silent), which in the western world's music is a synonym for "silence." The instrumentalist, the performer of the composition is asked this way to stay silent. The premiere and most famous public performance of 4'33" consisted of three parts, as its author planned. The first part lasted for 30 seconds, the second one for 2 minutes and 43 seconds and the third one for 1 minute and 20 second. These proportions were not the most important. In that time, the pianist closed and opened the piano's lid 3 times. Thanks to that manifestation, the sounds were "peeled away" not only from the instrument, but also from what we understand as "music." The sound of rain outside and the sounds of confused audience became music. The composition was written for "the silent piano," although according to the author's intention, it can be equally successfully played by other instrumentalists, a band or an orchestra and it can loosely last as long as required. The concert, as we know, bounced with wide coverage. Cage emphasised many times that 4'33" was the most important composition in his life.

III. To any rationalist, a completely absurd record released by the Floating Earth label ideally matches Cage's concept. The recording took place at Henry Wood Hall in London, in March 1991. Accor-

dingly to the plan, the pianist Wayne Marshall is NOT playing the piano for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. The composition was divided into 3 parts, although in slightly different proportions: 1—1.46, 2—1.25, 3—1.22. At the end of the third part “something” is audible. There’s no music on the record. It’s around us when we play it. 50 years after its premiere, 4’33” caused a lot of controversies yet again. In 2002 the publisher of Cage’s work, C. F. Peters Corporation, accused of plagiarism a well known British composer and music producer Mike Batt. On The Planets’ “Classical Graffiti” album, which was a great hit and a number one on British charts, a silent composition appeared called “A One Minute Silence” signed with the names of Batt and Cage. Explanations regarding inspiration by the famous original didn’t work. The parties, however, reach an extrajudicial agreement, and the press, quoting anonymous sources mentioned a six-digit compensation. Depending on individual point of view, 4’33” might be interpreted in hundreds of ways. It might be the music history’s unprecedented act of the author’s independence or a genius conceptual piece of work. One thing is certain to me: this is the greatest and best known for countless everyday performances “hits” in Cage’s creation.

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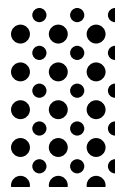
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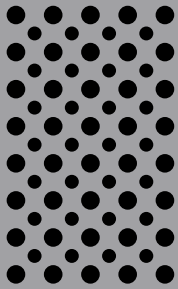
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John Cage

Philip Glass

Steve Reich

Terry Riley

Pierre Schaeffer

Karlheinz Stockhausen

Edgard Varèse

La Monte Young

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