

John Cage (1912–)

Two Pieces for Piano:

Sonatas and Interludes (1946–48): Sonata no. 5 *Music of Changes (1951): movement 4, section 1*

Sonatas and Interludes—a cycle of sixteen sonatas and four interludes—is Cage's longest and most substantial work for prepared piano, a medium that he began to explore in the late 1930s. In music of this type, the sound of the piano is transformed by mutes placed between the strings of certain notes. Within each piece in this cycle of works, the pitches and other sounds are intuitively selected—"chosen as one chooses shells while walking along a beach," the composer writes. The form of the sonatas, which is independent of their content of sounds and pitches, consists of durational patterns in which the lengths of subsections create simple numerical ratios with one another. In Sonata no. 5, for example, the binary form is divided (by double bars) into sections whose total number of half-note values is 18/18/18/18/9, that is, 2/2/2/2/1. It is necessary for this sonata to be studied in connection with a recording, since the preparation of the instrument produces sounds that deviate from their notated appearance.

Music of Changes is written for conventional piano. It consists of four large movements, each in numerous sections. The form—like that of Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes*—is determined by a succession of durations. But the configuration of pitches and rests that fills these durational spans is chosen by procedures of chance, thus banishing—at least in part—the composer's taste and intuition. The work becomes, in Cage's words, "an activity characterized by process [which is] essentially purposeless."

Cage's chance procedures require many notational peculiarities. Each measure contains four beats at the metronomic speed shown above the staff. But the performer cannot rely upon traditional counting. Instead, a note or figure begins at the point at which it

is notated from left to right in the measure. For example, a note placed midway in the measure is to be played when half of the time devoted to that measure has elapsed. The fractions above and below groups of notes or rests tell which part of the beat is occupied by that figure or rest. A cross is placed at the point in a measure at which a sustained note or pedal is to be released.

Bibliography

- Music of the Twentieth Century*, Chapters 11 and 13.
Cage, John. "Changes" and "To Describe the Process of Composition Used in *Music of Changes* and *Imaginary Landscape* no. 4." In *Silence*, pp. 18–34 and 57–59. Middletown, Conn., 1961.
Griffiths, Paul. *Cage*. Oxford Studies of Composers (18), pp. 19–29. London, New York, Melbourne, 1981.

Discography

- [Sonata no. 5]. Maro Ajemian, piano. Dial 19–20 (1951); reissued, Composers Recordings CRI 199 (ca. 1965).
Sound Forms for Piano. Robert Miller, piano. New World W 203 (1976).
Joshua Pierce, piano. Tomato Records TOM 2 1001 (1977).
Contemporary Piano Music. Klára Kormendi, piano. Hungaroton SLPX 12569 (1985).
[*Music of Changes*, movements 3–4]. David Tudor, piano. New World NW 214 (1978).

SONATA V
— John Cage —

♩ = 92

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

56

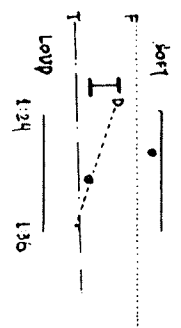
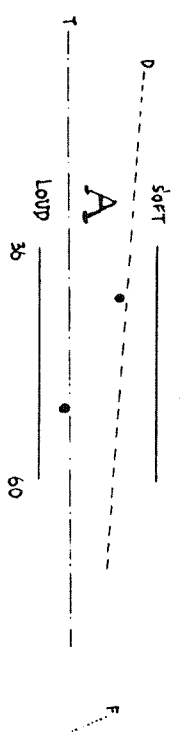
Detailed description: This is a handwritten musical score for 'Sonata V' by John Cage. The score is written on seven systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 92. The music is in 2/4 time. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as 'p' and 'pp'. Measure numbers 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 are indicated at the end of their respective systems. The score concludes with a double bar line and the number 56 at the bottom center of the page.

F..... LOWEST FREQ.
 D----- SKEWED DNR.
 T----- LEAST OPTIMUM STRUCT.
 INTERIOR PIANO CONSTRUCTION

Auxiliary sounds

For Paul Tisler and
 Anita Deschamps : Port Port, N.Y. J.C. 9/57

1st sound



3.

COPYRIGHT © 1960 BY HENMAR PRESS INC., 373 PARK AVE. 50., NEW YORK 16, N.Y.