**Establishing a historically informed performance practice of John Cage’s *4’33’’***

Any amateur could seemingly perform Cage’s *4’33’’*, but the composer himself claimed that most people misunderstood the piece. How was the piece performed in the 50s, and how are we today to understand the half-century old practice? Comparing four different performances and the attitudes that the performers’ had as they played the piece – all endorsed by Cage – one may be confused whether we are even dealing with the same piece. Even so, there is a least common denominator, namely that the focal point is turned from sound structures towards experience, or from object to process.

It is obvious with a composer as philosophically inclined as Cage, that we must understand his aesthetics in order to correctly formulate an adequate performance practice. Doing so, we run the risk of misunderstanding this practice if we take Cage’s utterances, his own performances, and the performances he supervised at face value, namely that we understand them as sound structures or actions to imitate. Reading his aesthetic works in light of his practice, we arrive at that what we must mimic are the *attitudes* with which Cage met music, not the *outcome* of the attitudes (the actual sound structures).

Cage said that the common misunderstanding of *4’33’’* came from understanding it with *something* instead of with *nothing* as a basis. Sound structures are identifiable and finite entities (something). The attitude which is common to the four performances under scrutiny comprises that one can neither anticipate musical events nor acknowledge any categories that music can be subsumed into. The attitude must furthermore be constantly changed as it would otherwise be a repetition and become familiar to the performer.

As *4’33’’* is the nucleus of Cage’s oeuvre, it pinpoints a number of relevant aspects of how to understand and perform almost any post-*4’33’’* piece by Cage with *nothing* taken as a basis.

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