

## = Sonatas and Interludes =

Sonatas and Interludes is a collection of twenty pieces for prepared piano by American avant-garde composer John Cage ( 1912 ? 1992 ). It was composed in 1946 ? 48 , shortly after Cage 's introduction to Indian philosophy and the teachings of art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy , both of which became major influences on the composer 's later work . Significantly more complex than his other works for prepared piano , Sonatas and Interludes is generally recognized as one of Cage 's finest achievements .

The cycle consists of sixteen sonatas ( thirteen of which are cast in binary form , the remaining three in ternary form ) and four more freely structured interludes . The aim of the pieces is to express the eight permanent emotions of the *rasa* Indian tradition . In Sonatas and Interludes , Cage elevated his technique of rhythmic proportions to a new level of complexity . In each sonata a short sequence of natural numbers and fractions defines the structure of the work and that of its parts , informing structures as localized as individual melodic lines .

## = History of composition =

Cage underwent an artistic crisis in the early 1940s . His compositions were rarely accepted by the public , and he grew more and more disillusioned with the idea of art as communication . He later gave an account of the reasons : " Frequently I misunderstood what another composer was saying simply because I had little understanding of his language . And I found other people misunderstanding what I myself was saying when I was saying something pointed and direct " . At the beginning of 1946 , Cage met Gita Sarabhai , an Indian musician who came to the United States concerned about Western influence on the music of her country . Sarabhai wanted to spend several months in the US , studying Western music . She took lessons in counterpoint and contemporary music with Cage , who offered to teach her for free if she taught him about Indian music in return . Sarabhai agreed and through her Cage became acquainted with Indian music and philosophy . The purpose of music , according to Sarabhai 's teacher in India , was " to sober and quiet the mind , thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences " , and this definition became one of the cornerstones of Cage 's view on music and art in general .

At around the same time , Cage began studying the writings of the Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy . Among the ideas that influenced Cage was the description of the *rasa* aesthetic and of its eight " permanent emotions " . These emotions are divided into two groups : four white ( humor , wonder , erotic , and heroic ? " accepting one 's experience " , in Cage 's words ) and four black ( anger , fear , disgust , and sorrow ) . They are the first eight of the *navarasas* or *navarasas* ( " nine emotions " ) , and they have a common tendency towards the ninth of the *navarasas* : tranquility . Cage never specified which of the pieces relate to which emotions , or whether there even exists such direct correspondence between them . He mentioned , though , that the " pieces with bell @-@ like sounds suggest Europe and others with a drum @-@ like resonance suggest the East " . ( A short excerpt from Sonata II , which is clearly inspired by Eastern music : listen . ) Cage also stated that Sonata XVI , the last of the cycle ( listen ) , is " clearly European . It was the signature of a composer from the West . "

Cage started working on the cycle in February 1946 , while living in New York City . The idea of a collection of short pieces was apparently prompted by the poet Edwin Denby , who had remarked that short pieces " can have in them just as much as long pieces can " . The choice of materials and the technique of piano preparation in Sonatas and Interludes were largely dependent on improvisation : Cage later wrote that the cycle was composed " by playing the piano , listening to differences [ and ] making a choice " . On several accounts he offered a poetic metaphor for this process , comparing it with collecting shells while walking along a beach . Work on the project was interrupted in early 1947 , when Cage made a break to compose *The Seasons* , a ballet in one act also inspired by ideas from Indian philosophy . Immediately after *The Seasons* Cage returned to Sonatas and Interludes , and by March 1948 it was completed .

Cage dedicated Sonatas and Interludes to Maro Ajemian , a pianist and friend . Ajemian performed

the work many times since 1949 , including one of the first performances of the complete cycle on January 12 , 1949 , in Carnegie Hall . On many other occasions in the late 1940s and early 1950s , Cage performed it himself . Critical reaction was uneven , but mostly positive , and the success of Sonatas and Interludes led to a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation , which Cage received in 1949 , allowing him to make a six @-@ month trip to Europe . There he met Olivier Messiaen , who helped organize a performance of the work for his students in Paris on June 7 , 1949 ; and he befriended Pierre Boulez , who became an early admirer of the work and wrote a lecture about it for the June 17 , 1949 performance at the salon of Suzanne Tézenas in Paris . While still living in Paris , Cage began writing String Quartet in Four Parts , yet another work influenced by Indian philosophy .

= = Analysis = =

= = = Piano preparation = = =

In the text accompanying the first recording of Sonatas and Interludes , Cage specifically stated that the use of preparations is not a criticism of the instrument , but a simple practical measure . Cage started composing for prepared piano in 1940 , when he wrote a piece called Bacchanale for a dance by Syvilla Fort , and by 1946 had already composed a large number of works for the instrument . However , in Sonatas and Interludes the preparation is very complex , more so than in any of the earlier pieces . Forty @-@ five notes are prepared , mostly using screws and various types of bolts , but also with fifteen pieces of rubber , four pieces of plastic , several nuts and one eraser . It takes about two or three hours to prepare a piano for performance . Despite the detailed instructions , any preparation is bound to be different from any other , and Cage himself suggested that there is no strict plan to adhere to : " if you enjoy playing the Sonatas and Interludes then do it so that it seems right to you " .

For the most part Cage avoids using lower registers of the piano , and much of the music 's melodic foreground lies in the soprano range . Of the forty @-@ five prepared notes , only three belong to the three lowest octaves below F # 3 : D3 , D2 and D1 . Furthermore , D2 is prepared in such a way that the resulting sound has the frequency of a D4 ( resulting in two variants of D4 available , one more prepared than the other ) . The portion of the keyboard above F # 3 is divided into roughly three registers : low , middle , and high . The low register has the heaviest preparation , and the high register the lightest . Different methods are used : certain notes produce sounds that retain the original frequency and a pianistic character ; others become drum @-@ like sounds , detuned versions of the original notes , or metallic , rattling sounds that have no sense of the fundamental frequency at all . The use of the soft pedal , which makes the hammers strike only two of the three strings of each note ( or one , for notes with only two strings ) , complicates the matter further . For example , the note C5 is a metallic sound with no fundamental discernible when the soft pedal is depressed , but it sounds fairly normal if the pedal is released . It appears that Cage was fully aware of the implications of this : certain sonatas feature interplay between two versions of one note , others place special emphasis on particular notes , and still others are very dependent on particular note combinations .

= = = Structure = = =

The cycle comprises sixteen sonatas and four interludes , arranged symmetrically . Four groups of four sonatas each are separated by interludes in the following way :

Sonatas I ? IV Interlude 1 Sonatas V ? VIII

Interludes 2 ? 3

Sonatas IX ? XII Interlude 4 Sonatas XIII ? XVI

Cage refers to his pieces as sonata in the sense that these works are cast in the form that early classical keyboard sonatas ( such as those of Scarlatti ) were : AABB . The works are not cast in the

later sonata form which is far more elaborate . The only exceptions are sonatas IX ? XI , which feature three sections : prelude , interlude , and postlude . Sonatas XIV ? XV follow the AABB scheme but are paired and given the joint title Gemini ? after the work of Richard Lippold , referring to a sculpture by Lippold . The interludes , on the other hand , do not have a unifying scheme . The first two are free @-@ form movements , whereas interludes 3 and 4 have a four @-@ section structure with repeats for each section .

The main technique Cage used for composition is that of nested proportions : an arbitrary sequence of numbers defines the structure of a piece on both the macroscopic and the microscopic level , so that the larger parts of each piece are in the same relation to the whole as the smaller parts are to a single unit of it . For instance , the proportion for Sonata III is 1 , 1 , 3 ¼ , 3 ¼ ( in whole notes ) , and a unit here is equal to 8 ½ bars ( the end of a unit is marked with a double barline in the score , unless it coincides with the end of a section ) . The structure of this sonata is AABB . Section A consists of a single unit , composed according to the given proportion : correlation on the microscopic level . A is repeated , and AA forms the first part of the proportion on the macroscopic level : 1 , 1 . B consists of three units and an appendix of ¼ of a unit . B is also repeated , and BB gives the second half of the proportion : 3 ¼ , 3 ¼ . Therefore , AABB has proportions 1 , 1 , 3 ¼ , 3 ¼ : correlation on the macroscopic level . The musical phrases within each unit are also governed by the same proportion . See Example 2 for a graph of the structure of Sonata III .

The proportions were chosen arbitrarily in all but the last four pieces in the cycle : sonatas XIII and XVI use symmetrical proportions , and sonatas XIV and XV share the 2 , 2 , 3 , 3 proportion . This symmetry , and the adherence of all four sonatas to the ten @-@ bar unit , were explained by Cage as an expression of tranquility . The complexity of proportions prompted Cage to use asymmetric musical phrases and somewhat frequent changes of time signature to achieve both microscopic and macroscopic correlation . For example , unit length of 8 ½ in the first section of Sonata III is achieved by using six bars in 2 / 2 time and two in 5 / 4 ( rather than eight bars in 2 / 2 and one in 1 / 2 ) . In many sonatas the microstructure ? how the melodic lines are constructed ? deviates slightly from the pre @-@ defined proportion .

Cage had frequently used the nested proportions technique and its variations before , most notably in First Construction ( in Metal ) ( 1939 ) , which was the first piece to use it , and numerous dance @-@ related works for prepared piano . In Sonatas and Interludes , however , the proportions are more complex , partly because fractions are used . In his 1949 lecture on Sonatas and Interludes Pierre Boulez specifically emphasized the connection between tradition and innovation in Sonatas and Interludes : " The structure of these sonatas brings together a pre @-@ Classical structure and a rhythmic structure which belong to two entirely different worlds . "

= = Recordings = =

Sonatas and Interludes has been recorded many times , both in its complete form and in parts . This list is organized chronologically and presents only the complete recordings . Years of recording are given , not years of release . Catalogue numbers are indicated for the latest available CD versions . For the complete discography with reissues and partial recordings listed , see the link to the John Cage database below .

Maro Ajemian ? 1951 , Dial Records 20 ? 21 . Reissued in the 1960s , Composers Recordings Inc . CRI 700 . Reissued on CD , él records ACMEM88CD

Yuji Takahashi :

1965 , Fylkingen Records FYCD 1010 ( mono )

1975 , Denon COCO 70757 ( stereo , digital )

John Damgaard ? 1971 , Membran Quadromania 222190 @-@ 444 ( 4CD , incl. many other works )

John Tilbury ? 1974 , Explore Records EXP0004

Joshua Pierce :

1975 , Wergo WER 60156 @-@ 50

1988 , Newport Classic NPD 85526

1999 , Ants Records AG 06 ( 2CD , live recording )  
 2000 , SoLyd Records SLR 0303 ( live recording )  
 Gérard Frémy ? 1980 , Pianovox PIA 521 @-@ 2 , Ogam Records 488004 @-@ 2 , Etcetera Records KTC 2001  
 Nada Kolund?ija ? c . 1981 , Diskos LPD @-@ 930 ( 2LP )  
 Darryl Rosenberg ? c . 1986 , VQR Digital VQR 2001 ( LP )  
 Mario Bertoncini ? 1991 , released 2001 as Edition RZ 20001 ( Parallele 20001 )  
 Nigel Butterley ? 1992 , Tall Poppies TP025  
 Herbert Henck ? 1993 , ECM New Series 1842 ( 2CD , incl . Henck 's Festeburger Fantasien )  
 Louis Goldstein ? 1994 , Greensye Music 4794 ( incl . Dream )  
 Philipp Vandré ? 1994 , Mode 50 ( according to the liner notes , this is the first recording made on a Steinway " O " -type baby grand piano , the model Cage originally composed the piece on )  
 Julie Steinberg ? 1995 , Music & Arts 937  
 Markus Hinterhäuser ? 1996 , Col Legno WWE 1CD 20001  
 Steffen Schleiermacher ? 1996 , MDG 613 0781 @-@ 2 ( 3CD , part of John Cage : Complete Piano Works 18CD series )  
 Aleck Karis ? 1997 , Bridge 9081 A / B ( 2CD , incl . Cage 's lecture Composition in Retrospect )  
 Jean Pierre Dupuy ? 1997 , Stradivarius 33422  
 Boris Berman ? 1998 , Naxos 8 @. @ 559042 or Naxos 8 @. @ 554345  
 Joanna MacGregor ? 1998 , SoundCircus SC 003 ( 2CD , includes miscellaneous other works by Cage and other composers )  
 Giancarlo Cardini ? 1999 , Materiali Sonori  
 Kumi Wakao ? 1999 , Mesostics MESCD @-@ 0011  
 Tim Ovens ? c . 2002 , CordAria CACD 566 ( incl . a multimedia CD )  
 Margaret Leng Tan ? 2003 , Mode 158 ( CD and DVD , incl . many other works and several documentaries )  
 Nora Skuta ? 2004 , Hevhetia Records HV 0011 @-@ 2 @-@ 131 ( SACD )  
 Giancarlo Simonacci ? 2005 , Brilliant Classics 8189 ( 3CD , part of Complete Music for Prepared Piano )  
 Antonis Anissegos ? 2014 , WERGO ( WER 67822 )

#### == = Books == =

John Cage . Silence : Lectures and Writings , Wesleyan Paperback , 1973 ( first edition 1961 ) . ISBN 0 @-@ 8195 @-@ 6028 @-@ 6  
 Richard Kostelanetz . Conversing with John Cage , Routledge , 2003 . ISBN 0 @-@ 415 @-@ 93792 @-@ 2  
 David Nicholls . The Cambridge Companion to John Cage , Cambridge University Press , 2002 . ISBN 0 @-@ 521 @-@ 78968 @-@ 0  
 James Pritchett . The Music of John Cage , Cambridge University Press , 1993 . ISBN 0 @-@ 521 @-@ 56544 @-@ 8  
 James Pritchett , Laura Kuhn . " John Cage " . In Macy , Laura . Grove Music Online . Oxford Music Online . Oxford University Press . ( subscription required )

#### == = Dissertations and articles == =

E.S. Baumgartner . Sonatas and Interludes , by John Cage : A Structural Analysis , Mills College , 1994 .  
 Gregory Jay Clough . Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano ( 1946 ? 48 ) by John Cage : An Analytical Basis for Interpretation , MM University of Arkansas , Fayetteville , 1968 .  
 Jeffrey Perry . " Cage 's Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano : performance , hearing and analysis " , Music Theory Spectrum , Spring 2005 , Vol . 27 , No. 1 , pp. 35 ? 66 .

= = = Media = = =

Sonata V performed by Bobby Mitchell , YouTube link

4 ' 33 " and Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano performed by James Tenney at SASSAS sound , concert archive ( streaming QuickTime format ) .