

The John Cage on "Circus On" Score

" _____, _____
(title of composition) (article) (adjective)
Circus On _____"
(title of book)

Means for translating a book into a performance without actors, a performance which is both literary and musical or one or the other, by John Cage.

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For Klaus Schöning

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1. Choose a book. If it is not in the public domain, obtain permission for its use from those owning the copyright. Failing that, make step 2 in such a way that no relationships of words occur that occur in the original, or encode your text so that the original words are not represented by themselves (change the title of your work accordingly).

2. Taking the name of the author and/or the title of the book as their subject (the row), write a series of mesostics beginning on the first page and continuing to the last. Mesostics means a row down the middle. In this circumstance a mesostic is written by finding the first word in the book that contains the first letter of the row that is not followed in the same word by the second letter of the row. The second letter belongs on the second line and is to be found in the next word that contains it that is not followed in the same word by the third letter of the row. Etc. If a shorter rather than longer text is desired, keep an index of the syllables used to represent a given letter. Do not permit for a single appearance of a given letter the repetition of a particular syllable. Distinguish between subsequent appearances of the same letter. Other adjacent words from the original text (before and/or after the middle word, the word including a letter of the row) may be used according to taste, limited, say to forty-three characters to the left and forty-three to the right, providing the appearance of the letters of the row occurs in the way described above. Omit punctuation and capitalize the row, reducing all other capitals to lower case. If at the end of the book or a chapter of it a mesostic is not complete, leave it incomplete or complete it by returning to the first page of the book or chapter and continuing your search for words containing the necessary letters. Having completed the series of mesostics, identify each line by page and line of the original from which it came. Make a tape recording of the recital of the text using speech, song, chant, or Sprechstimme, or a mixture or combination of these. Ascertain its time-length. Subtract that from a total program length, and distribute the thus-determined silence between large parts and chapters of parts and at the beginning and end of the tape. You then have a ruler in the form of a typed or printed text and in the form of a recited text, both of them

measurable in terms of space (page and line) and time (minute and second), by means of which the proper position (see 5 below) of sounds (see 3 and 4 below) may be determined.

3. Make a list of places mentioned in the book and a list for each of the pages and lines where the mention is made for each. If the list once made is unmanageably long, reduce in some chance-determined way, e.g. to a number equal to the number of pages in the book.

4. Make a list of sounds mentioned in the book and a list for each of the pages and lines where the mention is made. If the list once made is unmanageably long and baffling because of the large number of kinds of sounds, establish families of sounds and extract from the whole list those related to certain of these.

5. Collect as many recordings as possible made in the places mentioned (3) and of sounds mentioned in the book (4). Re-record them in stereo one at a time on a multitrack tape at proper points in time (see 2 above) following chance determinations (a) of stereo position (using a large number of positions as can be conveniently distinguished), b) of relative duration (short, medium, long), c) of attack (roll on, fade in, switch on), d) of successions of loudness or loudness, and e) of decay (roll off, fade out, switch off). Placing transparent graph paper over the typed or printed text, inscribe the placement of each tape horizontally with respect to words in the text, and vertically with respect to available tracks. To do the work described in this paragraph, two people, one of them a sound engineer, must work together. When a multitrack tape is filled up, proceed to another. Given the circa half-hour length of multitrack tapes, divide the available studio time (reserving several days at the end for final mixing and assembling the tapes) first by the number of half-hours and then by two (place sounds and text sounds). That will permit the planning of a work schedule so that an equal amount of time may be devoted to each aspect and each part of the composition. The work is finished when the available studio time runs out.

6. Using recordings of relevant musics (in performances by soloists) or composed variations of such solos, make a chance determined total program for each having at least twice as much silence as music. Superimpose these on a multitrack tape to make a circus of relevant musics.

7. Without erasing any reduce the collection of multitrack tapes to a single one. The material is then in a plurality of forms. At one extreme, each pair of tracks can be given its own stereo sound system. At the other (suitable for radio transmission) all tracks can be heard through a single stereo system. Other uses of the material are also available so that the various "layers" (2, 3, 4, 6) can be heard alone or in any combinations, and some of them (2, 6) as recorded, or, when some or all of the performers are available, live.

Source: *Cage: Roaratorio; Laughtears—Cage, Shöning, Heaney, Ennis, et. al; Writing for the Second Time Through Finnegan's Wake* (New York: Mode Records, 28/29, 1992).