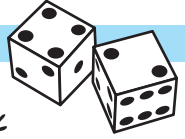


Aleatoric Music

ALSO KNOWN AS **CHANCE MUSIC** OR **INDETERMINACY**, **ALEATORIC MUSIC** IS MUSIC THAT HAS SOME ELEMENT OF **UNPREDICTABILITY** TO IT.



THE WORD "**ALEATORIC**" COMES FROM THE GREEK ROOT **ALEA**, WHICH MEANS **DICE**!

YOU COULD ARGUE THAT ALMOST ALL **LIVE MUSIC** HAS A BIT OF UNPREDICTABILITY... **DIFFERENT PERFORMERS** MIGHT INTERPRET THE SAME PIECE A LITTLE BIT **DIFFERENTLY**.



BUT **ALEATORIC MUSIC** IS DEFINED AS MUSIC WHICH HAS **MORE INTENTIONAL UNPREDICTABILITY** THAN THAT!

ALEATORIC MUSIC CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS BEING IN **TWO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES**... THOUGH A PIECE **COULD** USE **BOTH KINDS**!

ALEATORIC COMPOSITION

A COMPOSER MIGHT USE **RANDOMNESS** TO DECIDE **HOW TO WRITE** A PIECE... WHICH **NOTES** TO PLAY, **HOW LONG** THEY SHOULD LAST, OR WHICH **INSTRUMENTS** TO USE, FOR EXAMPLE.

THE RESULT IS A **FIXED PIECE**: ONE THAT **SOUNDS THE SAME** EACH TIME IT IS PLAYED!



ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF ALEATORIC COMPOSITION IS GREEK COMPOSER **IANNIS XENAKIS**, WHO WOULD USE **NATURAL PHENOMENA** TO COMPOSE MUSIC... USING PATTERNS OF **MOLECULAR MOTION** TO WRITE HIS 1975 WORK **N'SHIMA** FOR BRASS, CELLO AND VOCALISTS. THIS USE OF **NATURAL RANDOMNESS** IS CALLED **STOCHASTIC MUSIC**!

ALEATORIC PERFORMANCE

A COMPOSER MIGHT INSTEAD DECIDE TO DESIGN A PIECE TO LEAVE PART OR ALL OF IT TO **CHANCE**... MAKING THE PIECE **SOUND DIFFERENT EVERY TIME** IT IS PERFORMED!

FOR EXAMPLE, A PIECE MIGHT HAVE SECTIONS WHERE PERFORMERS ARE



INSTRUCTED TO **REPEAT** A CERTAIN PASSAGE AN **UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF TIMES**, AT THEIR OWN **TEMPO**, **INDEPENDENT** FROM EACH OTHER. THIS IS CALLED **SENZA MISURA**!

OF COURSE, THERE ARE **ENDLESS** POSSIBILITIES: PERFORMERS DIRECTED TO PLAY **WHATEVER THEY WANT**, SPECIFIC PASSAGES PLAYED AT **UNSPECIFIED TIMES**, OR PERFORMANCES WHICH DEPEND ON UNPREDICTABLE ELEMENTS, LIKE **COIN FLIPS** OR **AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**!

HEADS AGAIN...
TROMBONES,
YOU'RE UP!



ONE OF THE MOST **FAMOUS EXAMPLES** OF **ALEATORIC MUSIC** IS **JOHN CAGE'S** 1952 PIECE **4'33"**, WHICH INVOLVES ONE OR MORE MUSICIANS ON STAGE, DOING **NOTHING**, FOR **FOUR MINUTES AND THIRTY-THREE SECONDS**.

THE PIECE IS SOMETIMES **RIDICULED** AS AN EXAMPLE OF **NONSENSICAL MODERN ART RUN AMOK**, BUT CAGE SAW IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE EXPECTATIONS OF **CONCERT ETIQUETTE** TO FORCE THE AUDIENCE TO **ACTIVELY LISTEN** TOGETHER IN A **SILENT ENVIRONMENT**!

CAGE POINTED OUT THAT **4'33"** WAS NOT INTENDED TO BE A PERFORMANCE OF **SILENCE**, BUT A CHANCE TO LISTEN TO **AMBIENT SOUNDS**: NEARBY TRAFFIC, RAIN FALLING ON THE ROOF, OR EVEN WHISPERED CONVERSATIONS!

I LOVE SOUNDS JUST AS THEY **ARE**... AND I HAVE NO NEED FOR THEM TO BE ANYTHING MORE THAN WHAT THEY ARE! I DON'T WANT THEM TO BE **PSYCHOLOGICAL**, I DON'T WANT A SOUND TO PRETEND THAT IT'S A **BUCKET**, OR THAT IT'S **PRESIDENT**, OR THAT IT'S IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER **SOUND**; I JUST WANT IT TO BE A **SOUND**!

JOHN CAGE, 1991



PIECES LIKE **4'33"** REPRESENT THE **ULTIMATE ALEATORIC EXPERIENCE**; THE PERFORMER HAS **NO CONTROL** OVER THE PIECE, OTHER THAN CREATING THE **FRAMEWORK** OF A **PERFORMANCE**.

AS A RESULT, IT CAUSES US, AS **LISTENERS** AND AS **MUSIC THEORISTS**, TO CONSIDER THE VERY **DEFINITION** OF **MUSIC ITSELF**!