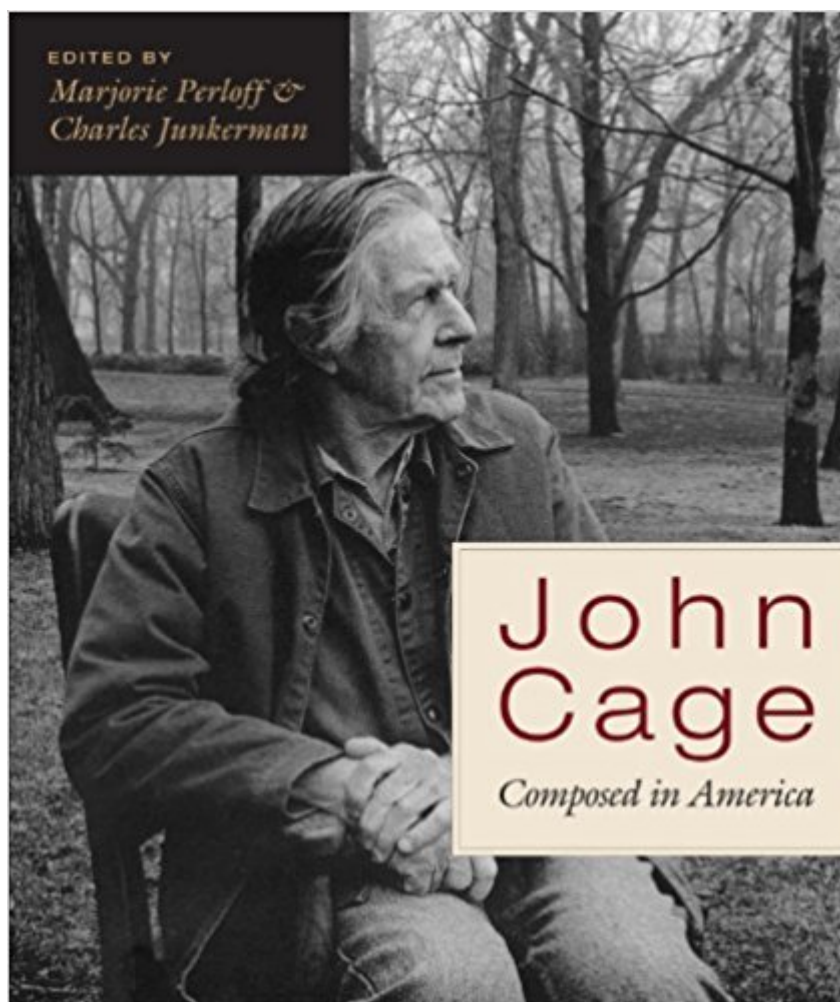


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John Cage: Composed In America



Synopsis

When the great avant-gardist John Cage died, just short of his eightieth birthday in 1992, he was already the subject of dozens of interviews, memoirs, and discussions of his contribution to music, music theory, and performance practice. But Cage never thought of himself as only (or even primarily) a composer; he was a poet, a visual artist, a philosophical thinker, and an important cultural critic. *John Cage: Composed in America* is the first book-length work to address the "other" John Cage, a revisionist treatment of the way Cage himself has composed and been "composed" in America. Cage, as these original essays testify, is a contradictory figure. A disciple of Duchamp and Schoenberg, Satie and Joyce, he created compositions that undercut some of these artists' central principles and then attributed his own compositional theories to their "tradition." An American in the Emerson-Thoreau mold, he paradoxically won his biggest audience in Europe. A freewheeling, Californian artist, Cage was committed to a severe work ethic and a firm discipline, especially the discipline of Zen Buddhism. Following the text of Cage's lecture-poem "Overpopulation and Art," delivered at Stanford shortly before his death and published here for the first time, ten critics respond to the challenge of the complexity and contradiction exhibited in his varied work. In keeping with Cage's own interdisciplinarity, the critics approach that work from a variety of disciplines: philosophy (Daniel Herwitz, Gerald L. Bruns), biography and cultural history (Thomas S. Hines), game and chaos theory (N. Katherine Hayles), music culture (Jann Pasler), opera history (Herbert Lindenberger), literary and art criticism (Marjorie Perloff), cultural poetics (Gordana P. Crnkovic, Charles Junkerman), and poetic practice (Joan Retallack). But such labels are themselves confining: each of the essays sets up boundaries only to cross them at key points. The book thus represents, to use Cage's own phrase, a much needed "beginning with ideas."

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Customer Reviews

These are a collection of marvelous essays Marjorie Perloff has edited. The scope of Cage is seemingly immense, the implications of his work has touched variegated corners and crevices, abandoned places: the music world, the world of poetry, conceptual art, performance art, mushroom enthusiasts, opera, and other synergistic art forms we have no label for yet. Perloff herself chooses the influence of Duchamp to discuss, the ends of things of the Western canon was a frightening yet fascinating point in the last century. And Cage always had done everything, like Duchamp with an element of the lighthearted at work. There are analysis here as well as seasoned music essayist Jann Pasler's discussion on Cage's "Composition in Retrospect" a 1981 mesostic text. Pasler helps explain what this figuratively complex yet disarmingly word play composition means. Cage wrote many of his most important works in this structural form. And his own "Overpopulation and Art" is included here, as a guiding means of response to these participants. This is as close as Cage gets to social and political/environmental reflection, you will not recognize Cage here. Herbert Lindenberger is a well known writer in the cloistered world of Opera and he admirably reflects on Cage's one and only Opera "Europas" and the Aesthetics that may emit itself from that variegated and multidimensional work. Although aesthetics in its traditionally bound demeanor was always and remained a by-product of the Cage edifice, here in this opera he lets others impart their aesthetic desires by allowing singers to choose their own arias to perform.

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