

George Brecht, artist and composer, was a member of John Cage's class at the New School in New York in the late 1950s and of the Fluxus group. With Robert Filliou he opened a store devoted to games of chance (*La Cédille qui sourit*) in Villefranche (France). His work as a composer covered a relatively brief period of his career but remains significant for its movement in two simultaneous directions: towards the smallest definable point (the "event") and the broadest possible set of interpretations (in the "wake" of this event).

Madison Brookshire lives in Los Angeles, where he makes films, videos and music. He studied cinema at the California Institute of the Arts and Binghamton University.

John Cage re-founded Experimental Music in the mid-century around the use of noise, chance, silence and indeterminacy. His work as a composer, a vast number of compositions, and an even vaster conception of the possibilities of music, was (and is) a source of inspiration for all the artists on this program—and uncounted others.

Jürg Frey lives in Aarau, Switzerland, where he teaches and is the artistic director of Moments Musicaux. Frey's music is extremely delicately and carefully constructed from the fewest possible elements. Along with being one of the great interpreters of Experimental Music and intensely practical in his concerns as a performer and composer, Frey is interested in the "silence that exists within sound" (from his article "The Architecture of Silence").

Michael Pisaro was born in Buffalo, New York, and lived for nearly thirty years in the Chicago area (eventually becoming a professor of music composition at Northwestern University) before joining the composition faculty at CalArts.

James Tenney, born in Silver City, New Mexico, Professor at York University in Toronto and later, until his death in 2006, at CalArts, cut an exceedingly broad path through avant-garde music. A founder of computer music, a member of the Fluxus "Orchestra," noted performer of Ives and Cage, and an inspiring teacher (the list of his students is itself practically a *vade mecum* of current Experimental Music), Tenney was a composer who reconciled seemingly divergent tendencies: the openness of indeterminacy with the highly refined system of just intonation; the clarity of the musical concept with the clang of acoustical reality.

—Michael Pisaro, 2008

4'33" AND BEYOND: CALARTS EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC WORKSHOP

March 21, 2008, 8:30 p.m.

presented by
REDCAT
Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater
California Institute of the Arts

CALARTS



4'33" AND BEYOND: CALARTS EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC WORKSHOP

PROGRAM

Five (1988)

Kathryn Clark, piano; Julia Holter, keyboard; Yu-Hui Lai, flute; Si-Young Lee, flute; Michael Pisaro, guitar

John Cage (1912–1992)

Event (1961)

Michael Pisaro, conductor. Soloists: Casey Anderson, saxophone; Eric Klerks, guitar; Si-Young Lee, flute. Ensemble: Ori Barel, computer; Scott Cazan, computer; Kathryn Clark, piano; Michael Deragon, guitar; Mari Garrett, keyboard; David Goodheim, guitar; John Hastings, guitar; Julia Holter, keyboard; James Isenberg, guitar; Andy Jasenak, guitar; Joon Kim, computer; Yu-Hui Lai, flute; Ben Mayock, keyboard

George Brecht (b. 1926)

(night) for percussion perhaps, or ... (1971)

Casey Anderson, Ori Barel, Scott Cazan, Kathryn Clark, Michael Deragon, Aaron Drake, Mari Garrett, David Goodheim, John Hastings, Julia Holter, James Isenberg, Andy Jasenak, Joon Kim, Eric Klerks, Si-Young Lee, Yu-Hui Lai, Ben Mayock, Adam Overton, Michael Pisaro, Mark So, Adrian Tenney, Tashi Wada, Michael Winter (various instruments)

James Tenney (1934–2006)

The Collection (2000)

Casey Anderson, radio noise; Ori Barel, radio noise; Scott Cazan, computer; Kathryn Clark, piano; Michael Deragon, guitar; Mari Garrett, doors; David Goodheim, guitar; John Hastings, guitar; Julia Holter, bells; James Isenberg, guitar; Andy Jasenak, guitar; Joon Kim, computer; Eric Klerks, guitar; Catherine Lamb, viola; Yu-Hui Lai, flute; Si-Young Lee, flute; Ben Mayock, electronics; Michael Pisaro, turntable; Mark So, harmonium; Cassia Streb, viola; Tashi Wada, harmonium; Michael Winter, doors

Michael Pisaro (b. 1961)

— I N T E R M I S S I O N —

Beuger's *ihwe tunings for twenty (2008)* is another kind of "number piece." This is the final piece in a series of twenty (for from one to twenty musicians, respectively). Each piece takes the number of players as the basis for a numerical/phenomenological structure designed to *count each player as one*. [The way in which this is done is fascinating, but far too complex to be summarized in a program note.] Each piece in the series is dedicated to someone who has been important to Beuger. In this case it is, as Beuger writes, "Jens Ihwe: professor for the study of literature at the University of Amsterdam (from the late '70s until late '80s). His work on the foundation of literary theory as a series of professional conversations on literature rather than as a would-be empirical science moved him to the periphery of the academic world, which he then left to become a poet and a farmer."

I founded the **Experimental Music Workshop** in 1993 as a class at Northwestern University, in order to teach experimental music in the tradition of Cage through its performance practice. The concept came with me when I started teaching at CalArts in the fall of 2000. The title was borrowed from Christian Wolff, whose similar class at Dartmouth had stopped after several years of activity. Wolff's music, along with that of Cage, Morton Feldman, Alvin Lucier, Tenney, Brecht, Pauline Oliveros, Cornelius Cardew, and those who follow in their wake, still forms the core repertoire for our performances. Antoine Beuger, Jürg Frey and James Tenney (among many others) have all been guests of the group, with multiple concerts devoted to their music. We occasionally take on literary and philosophical topics as well: concerts have been devoted to (or have simply used) the work of Stephane Mallarmé, Emmett Williams (*Alphabet Symphony*), Samuel Beckett (*Company*), Antonin Artaud, Ludwig Wittgenstein (*The Tractatus*), Gilles Deleuze, Herman Melville (*Bartleby, the Scrivener*) and Gertrude Stein (*Tender Buttons*).

Over the years many young composers and performers have worked with the group (including among them many odd persons with unique skills and talents). Several former members have come back for this concert at REDCAT. The Workshop, mainly because of the developing interests of its members, is always different, always an adventure.

BIOGRAPHIES

Antoine Beuger was born in Oosterhout, The Netherlands and currently lives in Haan, Germany. Beuger's music is nearly transparent, at the border of audibility – something like the early morning light one often sees in the great Dutch landscape painting of the Seventeenth Century. He is the artistic director of Edition Wandelweiser and executive producer of Wandelweiser Records.

How nice it is to be able to print complete scores in a program! This score is one of James Tenney's *Postal Pieces* (a series of pieces that originally appeared as postcards). If Brecht's music should occasionally be performed, as one aspect of its existence, I believe that Tenney's music, no matter how abstract it sometimes seems, must *always* be performed. However nice this score is to read, it presents sonic challenges to everyone who attempts it (and there have been many beautiful realizations). The creation of shades of meaning, using a kind of "fuzzy" language (like fuzzy logic) places exacting demands upon the performers. How soft is very soft? How long is very long? And, especially, what could sound "nearly white"? (White noise with tones? The nearly white keys of the piano? Or something that is almost, but not entirely blank?)

The Collection (Pisaro, 2000) really is a collection of little pieces: singular, clear ideas made from primary musical materials. For a performance a group selects from the twenty-five pieces in The Collection, and then they are placed (freely or by chance) within a time framework (in this case about seventeen minutes), played one time or repeated. Many of the pieces thus overlap, creating a series of delicate chamber musics.

Madison Brookshire's film **FIVE TIMES (2008)** consists of five camera rolls, played back to back. From the filmmaker's description: "Five rolls of film, unedited, spliced one after the other. The only images and sounds come from the light that reaches the film when it is loaded into and taken out of the camera." The experience of watching such a film is much more complex (visually and psychologically) than a description of its content. This work has some clear connections to the work of Cage, not least of which is that, that which is normally ignored or not seen at all becomes the foreground. The aspects of light and sound that emerge through the "cracks" of the process are all the more powerful in contrast to their surroundings.

More or less normal (2008) was written by Jürg Frey for the Experimental Music Workshop. The score is a single melody (in nineteen sections) that could be played as a solo, but it also has instructions for how to stagger the individual phrases of the melody among a group of up to nineteen performers (it works something like a musical canon, like those found in Bach's *Musical Offering*). The greater the number of players, the shorter the duration of the piece will be: from twenty-three minutes as a solo to about four minutes as a piece for nineteen "because each of the nineteen musicians plays in this case only one phrase." We will be performing a version for twelve musicians (lasting about eleven minutes). In essence what begins a melody turns itself into a kind of melodic-harmony (with rhythm).

FIVE TIMES (2008)

b/w 16mm sound film

Madison Brookshire (b. 1980)

More or less normal (2008), world premiere

Jürg Frey (b. 1953)

Kathryn Clark, piano; John Hastings, guitar; Julia Holter, keyboard; James Isenberg, guitar; Andy Jasenak, guitar; Eric Klerks, guitar; Yu-Hui Lai, flute; Si-Young Lee, flute; Michael Pisaro, guitar; Catherine Lamb, viola; Cassia Streb, viola; Tashi Wada, harmonium

ihwe tunings for twenty (2008), world premiere

Antoine Beuger (b. 1955)

5'00" (being a version of 4'33") (1952)

John Cage

Casey Anderson, saxophone; Scott Cazan, computer; Kathryn Clark, piano; Michael Deragon, guitar; Aaron Drake, computer; Mari Garrett, keyboard; David Goodheim, guitar; John Hastings, guitar; Julia Holter, keyboard; James Isenberg, guitar; Andy Jasenak, guitar; Eric Klerks, guitar; Yu-Hui Lai, flute; Si-Young Lee, flute; Ben Mayock, electronics; Adam Overton, computer; Michael Pisaro, guitar; Mark So, harmonium; Tashi Wada, harmonium; Michael Winter, computer

PROGRAM NOTES

Fifty-six years after its composition and first performance, John Cage's 4'33" is anything but a stunt. Beyond the discovery that ambient sounds had always been a part of the concert hall, and that the frame (i.e., performer, instrument, time structure) alone was sufficient for the creation of a musical event, is the realization that there are many kinds of musical silence. This idea has since been extensively explored by composers, beginning with Cage, continuing on into the heroic generation of American Experimental Music (Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, George Brecht, James Tenney, Alvin Lucier, Pauline Oliveros, La Monte Young, etc.), and their European friends (starting from Cornelius Cardew (England), Dieter Schnebel (Germany), Eliane Radigue (France), Urs Peter Schneider (Switzerland), among others) and beyond, with successive generations in Europe and the United States. At the 1991 composition seminar in the town of Boswil, Switzerland called "Stille Musik" (silent music), Christian Wolff, Urs Peter Schneider, Dieter Schnebel, Ernstalbrecht Stiebler, and a group of younger composers, including Antoine Beuger and Jürg Frey, gathered together to explore the work that they had

already done with this concept. Beuger and Frey went on to found the Wandelweiser Composers Ensemble—a collective whose name has become synonymous with this kind of music in Europe (and increasingly in North America, Japan and elsewhere). This tradition or tendency has influenced a large group of younger musicians, artists and filmmakers, including Madison Brookshire and several of those performing as part of the ensemble for this evening’s concert.

At the root of this music lies a belief that the concept and the experience of silence is one of the fundamental features of the musical experience. Curiously, silence itself, as a word, a metaphor, a description, a duration or a material has never received anything like a uniform definition. At the heart of the idea for this tendency (and of the work on this concert), is the belief that it is the task of the composer to determine the relationship between sound and silence; and that this relationship, far from being clear and stable, is always changing and developing.

The correspondence with the blank (or white) canvas, while very close, has one crucial difference. Cage has said that it was the experience of Rauschenberg’s White Paintings that motivated him to complete his silent piece. In addition, it is well known that the creative and conceptual thought about the role, the function and the expression of the blank or monochrome canvas, of the raw material of art-making and the empty site has been crucially important to the evolution of art. (If one were even to start listing artists here, one would probably never stop. I mention only two personal favorites: the late German artist, Mauser, and the American monochrome painter, Marcia Hafif.) However, one can experience an “empty” space in an instant, whereas silence necessitates an engagement with its duration (however long). We all know that *waiting* runs entirely counter to the stated goals of our contemporary commercial world.

The idea of this program is to present a series of eight silences: landscapes with few obvious features, where quietness and stillness take precedence over “activity,” where event is understood not as a succession of notes, but rather the establishment of an atmosphere. I feel that this music is nonetheless alive in many small ways. It is filled with a wealth of complex features, details which transcend notation and defy exact description. One might think of the diffuse, but still intense feeling of sunlight that emerges on the other side of a grey cloud, or the gentle roar of a river, two miles away, in a quiet forest.

Five (1988) John Cage’s series of about fifty number pieces, written in the last part of his life (from 1987 to 1992) represents a large reservoir of silent music. The pieces all

feature simple tones or actions, for which a certain window of time is given (so-called “time brackets”). Thus the first sound (or group of sounds) for each player in *Five* may begin at any time from 0'00" and 0'45" and may end at any time between 0'30" and 1'15". Not only do the performers never know exactly how their sounds will fit in with others, it is also always possible for silence to break through the sound.

Event (1961) This piece has, as its entire score, the following instruction:

EVENT

pulse start

pulse stop

The piece appeared as part of Fluxus composer/chemist/artist/handyman George Brecht’s box of notecard compositions (pieces which all fit on one side of a single small card) given the general title *WATER-YAM*. Although for many it is sufficient just to read the pieces (like poems, found events, or imaginary scores), the laconic brevity of the score also seems to beg for the occasional “realization.” To do this, one must occasionally go all the way back to the beginning.

For Percussion Perhaps, Or ...

(night)

for Harold Budd

very soft

very long

nearly white

**James Tenney
(8/6/71)**