



John Cage on His 70th Birthday: West Coast Background

I

NO LOS ANGELES-BORN composer has so crucially affected music history as John Cage. Testifying to his uniqueness, Charles Hamm's eleven-column Cage article in *The New Grove* (1980), III, 597-603, exceeds in length the articles on Leonard Bernstein (three columns), Roy Harris (five), or Virgil Thomson (six). Hamm introduces Cage with the claim that Cage "has had a greater impact on world music than any other American composer of the 20th century." The 60-item bibliography at the end of Hamm's article includes some dozen European items—but, even so, touches only the visible tip of the European iceberg.

When he was not yet fifty, *Contemporary Biography Yearbook*, 1961, pages 90-92, gave Cage glowing coverage in the same volume with Benjamin Britten, Darius Milhaud, Rosina Lhevinne, and Sviatoslav Richter. *Who's Who in the World* began profiling him in 1974. By 1980 Gale Research Company's *Biography and Genealogy Master Index* could award him 26 citations, many of them composite. In comparison, multifaceted Aaron Copland rated 34 citations, Charles Ives 16.

In 1981 he was the only musician among eight New Yorkers presented with the prestigious Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture (*New York Times*, February 18, III, 32:3). His 69th birthday that year¹ inspired a Cage Festival at Hartford, Connecticut, that served as prelude to a series of apocalyptic festivals programmed worldwide in honor of his 70th birthday. Typical of the tributes being paid him in the autumn of 1982 was this paragraph in "The Live Wires," *Washington Post*, November 18, 1982: "Cage is quite simply the ranking iconoclast and idea-man of contemporary music and the father-figure of post-avant-garde experimentation. He has been called the most influential American composer in the history of music."

Both the current *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ("composer whose work and revolutionary ideas profoundly influenced mid-20th-century music") and *Encyclopedia Americana* with a Cage article by Gunther Schuller add further testimony to the grandeur of Cage's present-day reputation. Nonetheless, Gunther Schuller gives him a wrong birth date and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* locates him as teaching in Seattle

¹For description of the Hartford, Connecticut, first performance of his ten-hour monologue, *Empty Words*, performed as part of the Cage festival put on by "an enterprising Hartford group called Real Art Ways," see Lon Tuck, "John Cage: Master of the Aesthetic Outrage Game," *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar section, April 4, 1982, pp. 62-63.

Ironically, elaborate bicentennial celebrations of the founding of Los Angeles (1781) knew not who Cage was in 1981. As climactic event of the bicentennial year, Royce Hall on December 13, 1981, re-sounded with a heavily subsidized Festival of Music Made in Los Angeles (reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1981, V, 1:1). Schoenberg and Stravinsky rubbed elbows on the program. Neither Cage nor any other native of Los Angeles entered the program. The one musical event coinciding with Cage's 70th birthday that was noticed in the *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1982, CALENDAR, 56, was his presence at the 20th Cabrillo Music Festival (Aptos, California) over 300 miles north of Los Angeles.

1936-38, whereas in actuality he still was teaching in Los Angeles from 1936 to 1938. These errors, and others concerning his West Coast years, run amuck in the prolific Cage literature now available.

Inter-American Music Review, the first (and to the present date, sole) musicological journal edited and published in Los Angeles, therefore owes John Cage the tribute of a biography that dwells on his family origins, correctly establishes the chronology of his West Coast years, and at least to some extent evaluates their significance.

II

Los Angeles

Cage's father—John Milton Cage, Sr., born in California in 1886—achieved a national reputation certified in his *New York Times* obituary of January 5, 1964, 92:1, headed "John Cage, Invented Submarine Devices." After identifying him as having died January 4 at Montclair, the necrology reads:

John M. Cage, an inventor and research engineer, died yesterday at his home of a heart ailment. He was 77 years old and lived at 240 Park Street. Mr. Cage was vice president of Sturdy Cage Projects, Inc., of Los Angeles, and president of Cage Laboratories, Inc., and Cage Projects, Inc., which he operated from his home.

He invented the hydrophone during World War I and the sonobuoy in World War II; both were devices for detecting submarines. From 1916 to 1921 he worked with Professor Hugh Keller of the University of Michigan on adapting the gasoline engine for use in submarines. Mr. Cage's many patents included an inhaler for treating colds, a radio using alternating current, and a lightning protection system. He leaves his wife, Mrs. Lucretia Harvey Cage, and a son, John, of Stony Point, New York.

John Milton Cage, Sr.'s 34 patents recorded in the *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office* begin with No. 896,361 filed February 21, 1906, at Denver, Colorado, and extend to No. 3,014,135 filed jointly with his then partner William R. Hewlett of Hewlett-Packard Company, on March 4, 1957, at Los Altos, California. The places of filing these patent applications give evidence of his whereabouts. While at Denver, he assigned half-interest in his first patent for a submarine boat to his father-in-law, James Carey Harvey. City directories also help establish his places of residence. According to the Los Angeles City Directory of 1911, page 248, "John M. Cage, inventor," lived that year at 616 West 43d Place.

John Milton Cage, Jr.'s birth certificate signed by C. W. Seeber, attending physician, September 7, 1912, attests delivery of the composer-to-be, September 5 at 5 A.M. in Good Samaritan Hospital, Los Angeles. His 26-year-old father's occupation is listed on the certificate as "Mechanic (Ship Builder)," and his then residence is given as Long Beach. His 27-year-old mother, maiden name Lucretia Harvey, is certified as having been born in Iowa,² and his parents are listed as having had one previous child, no longer living.

To trace the movements of the family during the youth of the composer: *Resident and Classified Business Directory of Long Beach and Vicinity 1913-14*, page 70,

²*Women of the West, A series of biographical sketches of living eminent women in the eleven western states*, ed. by Max Binheim assisted by Charles A. Elvin (Los Angeles: Publishers Press [427 H. W. Hellman Building], 1928), p. 30, states that she was born at Des Moines.

identifies John M. Cage (house at 605 Moss Avenue) as General Manager of the Los Angeles Submarine Boat Company. The Long Beach (1914-15) City Directory calls him inventor (house at 1707 East Broadway). The 1915 Los Angeles City Directory identifies him as in that year president of the Cage Submarine & Boat Company (still residing at Long Beach). His applications filed at Long Beach December 26, 1912, and October 26, 1914 (Nos. 1,126,616 and 1,281,132) resulted in patents assigned to the Los Angeles Submarine Boat Company of systems for air delivery and for steering and propulsion of submarines.

John M. Cage, Sr.'s next applications, dated at Detroit March 15, 1916 and June 7, 1917 (Nos. 1,294,395 and 1,301,036), resulted in patents assigned to Cage Engine Syndicate, Inc., a Corporation of Delaware (internal combustion engines). On July 23, 1920, then residing at Ford City, Ontario, he filed another application assigned to Cage Engine Syndicate, Inc., New York, New York, for an "internal combustion engine and means for supplying charge thereto." Seven months later when he filed his next applications for patents February 8 and August 2, 1921 (Nos. 1,367,797; 1,386,393; 1,386,394) he had returned to Long Beach, California. His application filed September 26, 1921, for patent of a condenser (No. 1,518,688), places him on that date in Santa Monica, California.³

Los Angeles City Directories of 1923 and 1924 pick him up in those years as an "engineer" residing at 2708 Moss Avenue. In 1925 he was a "mechanical engineer" residing at 4604 Los Feliz Boulevard, and in 1926 a "radio engineer," again at 2708 Moss Avenue, where he continued in 1927 ("electrical engineer"), 1928 ("research engineer"), 1929 and 1930 ("engineer"), 1931 ("research engineer"), and 1932 ("electrical engineer"). His name is absent from 1933 and 1934 Los Angeles City Directories, but his whereabouts can be known from applications dated at Schenectady, New York, June 21, 1933, May 11, 1935, and August 6, 1935 for patents assigned to General Electric Company on an electric beam tube, a starter for pool-type tubes, and an electric discharge device (Nos. 2,074,829; 2,078,123; 2,089,174). Los Angeles City Directories of 1936 and 1941 place him again in Los Angeles, now residing at 1207 Miramar.⁴

By 1928, the year of the composer-to-be's graduation from Los Angeles High School, his mother had already gained enough fame to be listed in the prestigious biographical dictionary, *Women of the West*, page 30. Here she is identified as Press Chairman of the Los Angeles District of the California Federated Women's Clubs, founder of the Lincoln Study Club of Detroit, former member of the executive board of the Long Beach Ebell Club, and holder of other club distinctions. In 1936 she began enjoying a separate bold-face entry in Los Angeles City Directories as

³His application filed August 25, 1921 (Nos. 1,575,541 and 1,575,542) at Santa Monica, California, for patents on an internal combustion engine and a sleeve-valve engine were assigned by mesne assignments to Halvor Andresen of Christiania (=Oslo), Norway, and Oliver Otis Howard, of Rockport, Massachusetts.

⁴His extreme versatility resulted in patents applied for July 25, 1946, and April 8, 1947, at Wellesley, Massachusetts, for tire vulcanizer and a dielectric heating apparatus (Nos. 2,480,631, and 2,610,288); July 27, 1948, at Montclair, New Jersey, for a television camera tube (No. 2,618,758); August 22, 1948, at Montclair assigned to Cage Projects, Union City, New Jersey, for a cathode ray tube (No. 2,567,874); June 13, 1952, at Upper Montclair for microwave generator (No. 2,698,388). In 1951 McGraw-Hill published the first edition of John M. Cage's 301-page textbook, *Theory and application of industrial electronics* (prepared with assistance from C. J. Bashe).

"Cage, Crete, Club Editor, *Los Angeles Times*." These bold-face entries for Crete = Lucretia Cage (always residing with her husband) continue through the 1939 directory. In 1940 she enters the directory as "Cage, Crete, Mrs., writer." However, even before bold-face listings in city directories, her by-line appeared day after day over *Los Angeles Times* club news. For instances: on Friday, June 7, 1935, the date of the composer's marriage to Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff,⁵ she published a lengthy article at page 6 entitled "Tenth District P.-T.A. [Parents-Teachers Association] Speaker Urges 'Lessons in Manners' at Conventions." On June 8, she published in Part II, page 6, "Club Women Given Instructions on How to Salute Flag Correctly."

Already in high school, the composer-to-be (only surviving child) began showing leadership qualities to match those of his parents. In his senior year he was Contributing Editor of *Le Flambeau*, French newspaper published every month by members of the French classes at Los Angeles High.⁶ Among a class of 408 graduating seniors he was elected "by faculty vote to be an Epehbian [one among 13 Epehbiens] on the basis of merit in scholarship, leadership, and character."⁷ His fellow graduating Epehbian, Josephine Miles, long since an internationally renowned poet and distinguished professor at the University of California, Berkeley,⁸ remembers him as an outstanding Latin scholar. Sitting one behind the other in Dr. Walker Edwards's room, they were in a Virgil class of only five. A third member of the class was Woodrow Wilson Borah, sometime Abraham D. Shepard Professor of History, at the University of California, Berkeley. According to Professor Miles, their Virgil teacher often praised the excellence of John Cage's translations from Book V of the *Aeneid*.

Alongside the picture of each graduating senior in *The Los Angeles High School Blue and White Published by the Summer Class of 1928* appears a summary. Cage's summary of page 52 forms an acrostic for ROMAN: Recreation: *orating*; Occupation: *working*; Mischief: *studying*; Aspiration: *to earn a D.D.* [Doctor of Divinity] and *Ph.D.*; Noted for: *being radical*. To believe his pictures at pages 52 and 86 of this summer class annual, he was already in 1928 a strikingly prepossessing youth. During the previous year he had won second place in [Los Angeles] City World Friendship oratorical finals with a speech on "International Patriotism." Representing Los Angeles High School, he had won first place in the Southern California Oratorical Contest with a speech at Hollywood Bowl on "Pan-Americanism." The

⁵Daughter of Andrew Petrovich Kashevaroff (1863-1940), who was a Russian Orthodox priest, the librarian of the Alaska Territorial Library and Museum, and an important writer on Alaskan subjects (see *Who Was Who among North American Authors 1921-1939* [Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1976], II, 800, and *Melvin Ricks' Alaska Bibliography*, ed. Stephen W. and Betty J. Haycox [Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort for Alaska Historical Commission, 1977], 135), Xenia Andreyevna Kashevaroff was divorced from the composer John Cage in 1945. In 1982 she lived at 301 East 90th Street in Manhattan, according to the 1982-1983 telephone directory, page 252.

⁶*The Los Angeles High School Blue and White Semi-Annual Winter 1928*, p. 101. Emma Swezey sponsored the French language newspaper.

⁷*The Los Angeles High School Blue and White Published by the Summer Class of 1928*, p. 86. I thank Mrs. Baasha K. Johnson, librarian of Los Angeles High School, for access to Los Angeles High School annuals.

⁸See *Who's Who in America*, 42nd edition, 1982-1983, II, 2306. I thank her for amiably sharing her recollections of John Cage in a lengthy telephone conversation.

latter speech has been published. In it he extolls such Argentines as Honorio Pueerredón [1876–1945; ambassador to the United States] and Manuel Ugarte [1878–1951; writer and ambassador to Mexico, Cuba]. According to him, the United States had not kept *silent* long enough to hear the voice of Latin America.¹⁰

Cage's graduating yearbook documents several musical organizations—but none to which he belonged. Verna Cecelia Blythe directed the high school orchestra and the Boys Glee Club. To crown the musical year, she conducted Rudolph Friml's *The Firefly* on May 17 and 18, 1928, with Rudolph Friml, Jr. singing the role of Jenkins, confidential secretary. Rudolph Friml, Sr. assisted at rehearsals. Among the six members of the 1920's high school music faculty, only one seems to have taught Cage, Fannie Charles Dillon (1881–1947). A pianist and composer profiled in *Women of the West*, 1928, and in biographical compendia thereafter to *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, 1978, she alone among the music faculty enjoyed national eminence.

Of the 26 Los Angeles High School alumni/ae "distinguished in music" who are listed at page 98 of Cage's graduating yearbook, Sigana Sornberger, who graduated in 1927, studied at Juilliard in 1928.¹¹ Not yet launched in music but still ministerially minded, Cage chose Pomona College at Claremont, California. Enrolling approximately 800 elite students of both sexes, Pomona College in 1928–1930 academic years charged \$300 annual tuition and cost students not less than New England private colleges on which it was modelled. When "matriculating" February 9, 1929, in his second semester of residence, Cage signed the *Record Book* at page 379, "John Milton Cage," pledging himself to uphold the ideals of the college.

Among the ten Pomona music faculty while Cage was an enrolled student, the most prolific composer was the college organist, Joseph M. Clokey. Another who composed successful college and fraternity songs was Everett S. Olive, "pupil of Teresa Carreño" and sometime accompanist of Lawrence Tibbett, Edward Johnson, and other eminent singers. *The Metate*—Pomona College yearbook—in neither 1929 nor 1930 issues registers Cage as having had anything whatsoever to do with Pomona's numerous musical organizations (college choir, band, orchestra, and glee clubs all listed their membership). Nor do issues of the Pomona College daily, *The Student Life*, mention his performing or having anything that he had written performed. Instead, he was known in *The Student Life* as a "prominent campus writer." The issue of January 8, 1930 (1:1) mentions him as one of three contributors of short stories to January, 1930, *Manuscript*, the Pomona College literary magazine.

Selling for 35¢, *Manuscript*, in its new 9 x 11½" format, was published January 10, 1930, with Cage's short story, "The Immaculate Medawewing," at pages 11–14 and 31.

Verlaine Medawewing hates dirt of any kind with a passion. Although strongly attracted to beauteous Dorothy, he refuses to share with her a sandwich on which flies have crawled. He recoils from her young brother because chocolate has dirtied the boy's sticky fingers. She urges him to see beauty even in books with soiled covers and grimy pages.

¹⁰*Gran Enciclopedia Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediar Editores), vi (1960), 571; viii (1963), 239.

¹⁰For the text of this speech, see *John Cage*, ed. by Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968; 1970), pp. 45–49.

¹¹In more recent years, Los Angeles High School's ranking musical alumni have included names such as Leonard Pennario and Leonard Slatkin.

Cage published this story—into which a moral can be read—using as his first name, Jonathan. The *Pomona College Who Who 1894-1930* (Claremont: Pomona College, 1930), page 50, lists him as "Cage, Jonathan, '32, 347 West 6th Street, Claremont; home address: 2708 Moss Avenue, Los Angeles." His first name again appears as Jonathan in *The Metate of 1930*, page 45.

The Pomona College Musical calendar during his sophomore year included concerts by Alfred Cortot November 9, Lawrence Tibbett February 8, and Felix Salmond February 27. But of likelier importance to Cage was Henry Cowell's recital of his own compositions in Bridges Auditorium December 16, 1929. The December 6 issue of *The Student Life* contains an article by Pomona music department chairman, Ralph H. Lyman, quoting Richard Buhlig, then Los Angeles's ranking concert pianist. Later to be claimed as Cage's teacher, Buhlig had visited Pomona campus the afternoon of December 5. While on campus he had lauded Cowell and had urged students to hear him. *The Student Life* of December 13 carried faculty member Walter A. Allen's praise of Cowell in an article headed, "Pianist Employs New Technique." The front-page review of Cowell's concert in *The Student Life* of December 17, written by Pomona junior Phyllis Lorbeer, itemized each of Cowell's compositions in his three groups. According to her, Cowell preceded his first group with a speech on musical conditions in the Soviet Union.

At the close of Cage's last semester at Pomona, Professor Raymond C. Brooks, a Yale Divinity School graduate, awarded Cage "B" in Orientation to Religion. Cage's church membership when he entered Pomona was Methodist Episcopal.¹² In June 1930, without any plan to return, he left Pomona "to travel in Europe." His alumni card dated January 1932 that is on file at Los Angeles High School confirms that he did nothing musically while at Pomona.¹³ His alumni card does mention his having had with Don Sample an exhibition of "modern paintings." His January 1932 alumni record at Los Angeles High concludes thus: "Cage studied art in Europe for past year exploring fields such as abstraction, Germanic, & expression."

Only after his June 7, 1935, marriage does the 1936 Los Angeles City Directory at last pick up "John Cage, jr." as a "musician" residing at 1207 Miramar in the same house with his parents. The 1937 Los Angeles City Directory lists him as living with his wife Xenia in a house at 1916 Walcott Way in East Hollywood. According to the extension catalogue of the University of California at Los Angeles, *Lifelong Learning*, Volume VII, Number 21 (Berkeley, December 20, 1937), page 8, "John Milton Cage, Jr." was in 1937-38 "Assistant in the Elementary School, University of California (Los Angeles)." In the Spring semester of 1938 (*Lifelong Learning*, VII/21, page 38), "Mr. John Milton Cage, Jr." and his maternal aunt Mrs. Phoebe James gave a UCLA extension course that met at Van Nuys Elementary School fifteen Tuesdays, January 25 to May 10, 4-6 P.M. Valued at two units, their course, entitled "Musical Accompaniments for Rhythmic Expression," cost the enrollee \$12.

In 1982 two retired teachers from UCLA Elementary School still recalled both Phoebe James and John Cage's activities in this school (which in the late 1930's was a Southern California bastion of Dewey-Kilpatrick progressive education). Diana

¹²John Cage, ed. Kostelanetz, p. 52.

¹³Mabel Shaw Bridges Hall of Music built in 1915 housed music activities. Rembrandt Hall built in 1914 housed art. I thank Tania Rizzo, Head, Special Collections, The Hunnold Library, Claremont 91711, for access to Pomona documentation.

W. Anderson, now residing at 220 4th Place, Manhattan Beach, California, taught physical education in the school 1928 to 1958. Creative rhythmic movement was the watchword, so far as the thousand enrolled children went.¹⁴ Every source of sound entered the musical accompaniments provided by aunt and nephew—from balloons squeezed with wet fingers or jiggled with rice inside to radiators struck with tynes. She remembered Cage's constructing a xylophone for her. Once with his wife he entertained her in the most witty and charming way at his house on Walcott Way. In late 1982 another retired teacher who remembered with warmest approval both Cage and his now deceased aunt, Phoebe James, was Mrs. Paul Booth (formerly Lola Binney), residing at 1112 East 27th Street in Salt Lake City. She remembered John Cage's taking off the front of the upright piano, tying the strings with various objects, and his making copper wires "sing." Continuing to teach in the school after Cage left for Seattle, Phoebe James published two Collections itemized in *National Union Catalog*, CCLXXVI, 628—*Accompaniments for rhythmic expressions* (Los Angeles, 1946) and *Songs for rhythmic expressions* (Hollywood, 1944). Her colleagues at UCLA Elementary School testified to her supremely imaginative and resourceful improvisations that on a moment's notice could imitate any sound from the creaking of covered wagons crossing the plains to the exultant shouts of vikings as they approached land. However, some sounds were interdicted. By fiat of Charles Wilkin Waddell (director of the UCLA training schools) and Corinne Aldine Seeds (principal of the Elementary School), Phoebe James did not play keyboard imitations of warlike Indians' whoops while scalping their enemies nor was she allowed to imitate sounds connected with any other "antisocial behavior."

The Los Angeles musical calendar during Cage's last two years before transferring to Seattle included such events as the following. At Shrine Auditorium on March 12 and 13, 1937, Stravinsky conducted his two first ballets and *Divertimento* from *Le Baiser de la Fée* with a company of 100 dancers. On March 31 and April 3 Trudi Schoop and Ted Shawn appeared at Philharmonic Auditorium. On April 14 Schoenberg conducted the Federal Music Project's Orchestra in his *Pelleas und Melisande* symphonic poem during a memorable program that included also Webern's *Passacaglia*, Opus 1, Adolph Weiss's six-minute *American Life*, *scherzo jazzoso* (premiered Carnegie Hall, February 11, 1930), and works by Gerald Strang and Oscar Levant. Two days later Martha Graham and "12 assisting young artists" triumphed at Philharmonic Auditorium.¹⁵ On April 19 music from William Grant Still's ballets *La Guiabliesse* (1927) and *Sahdji* (1930) formed Part II of a program at Manuel Compinsky's Pacific Institute of Music (Wilshire at Vermont) that also included choruses from Still's *Blue Steel* (1935). Summer events at Hollywood Bowl included Howard Hanson's conducting his *Romantic Symphony* and other American works, Carlos Chávez's conducting his *H.P.* ballet suite amid a full length concert, and a

¹⁴The free school directed by dynamic Corinne Aldine Seeds taught Grades I through VI, preceded by nursery and kindergarten. Each grade studied "major units." Units included 'boats and harbors,' "how the pioneers moved westward," "vikings and crusaders," "newspapers and radio," and the like.

¹⁵Because of limited opportunities for achieving national réclame while tied to Southern California, such creative dancers as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey (1895-1958), and Charles Weidman (1901-1975) had already by the mid-1920's quit the Los Angeles area.

According to Renée Duncan Hawley, "Los Angeles and the Dance 1850-1930," UCLA Master's thesis, 1971, p. 142, the Hollywood environment squelched all initiative and incentive to continue trying to create a new vision of the dance in Los Angeles after the breakup of the Denishawn (Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis) dance school and company based in Los Angeles 1915 to 1929.

"Mexico Night at the Bowl" conducted by visiting celebrities Agustín Lara and Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, Jr. Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* played the Philharmonic February 4-12. On February 20, 1938, Modest Altschuler conducted the Pasadena Symphony Orchestra in an all-American program that emphasized traditional composers.

However, throughout the season the Federal Music Project symphony orchestra conducted by Gastone Usigli did the most for less known United States composers. A Festival of American Music March 5, 1938, given at Belasco Theater, included Elinor Remick Warren (*The Harp Weaver*), Mary Carr Moore (concert version of Act I of her opera *Rizzio*), Scott Bradley (*Headless Horseman*), Otto Mueller (*Pacific Coastline*), and Homer Grunn (*Träumerei*). On May 10, Pauline Alderman's opera *Bombastes Furioso*, with tenor Russell Horton heading the cast, had its premiere at the University of Southern California. Venturing into opera, the Federal Music Project (costing the county a monthly \$100,000 in the summer of 1938 and hiring 1017 persons, of whom all but 47 were on relief) premiered *Gettysburg*, with music by Morris Rugar to a libretto by Arthur Robinson, September 23 at the Bowl (reviewed by Edwin Schallert in the *Los Angeles Times* September 24, "Premiere Brilliant As Production").

On September 24, 1938, the Sunday *Los Angeles Times*, Part III, page 5, carried two musical notices side by side. The first (column 7) announced a lecture by Phoebe James the ensuing Thursday evening at 815 South Hill (University of California Extension) on "Development of rhythm and musical accompaniments for creative expression." The second (column 8), headed "John Cage to Join Faculty at Seattle," read thus:

John Cage, young composer and instructor in the music department of the University of California at Los Angeles, will join the faculty of the Cornish School in Seattle this year. After four years at the Paris Conservatoire, young Cage came to Los Angeles to work with Arnold Schoenberg, with whom he has made notable progress.

III

Seattle

Seattle in 1938 had a population of 412,000. The University of Washington enrolled 12,000 students. However, Cornish School, teaching music, theatre, radio, dance, and visual arts, was then the acknowledged center of arts instruction in the Northwest area.

Nellie Centennial Cornish (1876-1956),¹⁶ founder of the school which employed Cage for two academic years, had on March 27, 1937, announced her resignation from being head. However, on April 4, 1937, the board of the Cornish School Foun-

¹⁶Concerning her, see Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), p. 260. Born July 9, 1876, at Greenwood, Nebraska, she died April 24, 1956, at Seattle, where she had moved in 1900. She founded the Cornish School of Music in 1914. In 1919, enlarged with other departments, it occupied two entire floors of the Booth Building at 905 East Pine Street. In 1921 was completed the building (at Harvard Avenue South and East Roy Street) occupied by the school during Cage's connection with it. When proclaiming August 20, 1975, as Cornish School Day, Governor Daniel J. Evans (governor of Washington 1965-1977) called it the "Northwest's most respected and celebrated professional training school for the arts." On May 27, 1977, the National Register of Historic Places designated the building erected in 1921 a historic landmark.

dition, responsible for its finances since 1931, rejected her resignation. As a result, she delayed her official retirement until 1939.

At the close of the 1936-1937 academic year Welland Lathrop, pupil of Martha Graham (who had taught briefly at the Cornish School in 1930), left the dance department to teach at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York. He was replaced in the fall of 1937 by another Martha Graham pupil, Bonnie Bird. Born in 1914, she was daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Scott E. Bird of Seattle. On March 16, 1938, she gave her first faculty dance recital at Cornish, the music being written for it by George McKay of the University of Washington faculty. On May 19, 1938, she married Ralph H. Gundlach, associate professor of psychology at the University of Washington. Next month, June 12, 1938, two important dancers graduated from Cornish's dance department, Syvilla Fort,¹⁷ native of Seattle (daughter of Mrs. R. E. Dill; graduate of Roosevelt High School), and Fedor Stojak, native of Tacoma. Fortunately, Syvilla Fort, who was Black, continued in the school the next year (paying part of her tuition expenses with fashion modeling at Seattle department stores). The most important male dance student at Cornish during the 1937-1938 and 1938-1939 academic years was Mercier (= Merce) Cunningham,¹⁸ born at Centralia, Washington.

In chronological order the documented events of Cage's two-year Seattle stint run thus:

1938

October 7 Cornish Dancers, consisting of Bonnie Bird, assisted by Dorothy Herrmann and Mercier Cunningham, present their first dance recital of the academic year with Composer and Accompanist John Cage at the piano. The program begins with a "pre-classic" group including a *Pavane* and *Galliard* by Arbeau, *Sarabande* and *Rigaudon* from Lambranzi, an *Allemande* by François Couperin, *Gigue* by Durante, *Chaconne* by Louis Couperin, and *Courante* by Loelliet.

December 9 John Cage and Group (Doris Dennison, Xenia Cage, Mercier Cunningham, Edna Mae Coffman, Joyce Wike), assisted by Bonnie Bird and the Cornish Dancers (Dorothy Herrmann, Syvilla Fort, Mercier Cunningham), present a

¹⁷Born in 1917, she died at New York City November 8, 1975. See "Syvilla Fort, a Dance Teacher Who Inspired Blacks, Is Dead," *New York Times*, November 9, 1975, 71:2-3; also Edward Mapp, *Directory of Blacks in the Performing Arts* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1978), p. 120. From 1948 to 1954 she was dance director for Katherine Dunham. From 1955 to 1975 she conducted her own Syvilla Fort Studio. She married the dancer Buddy Phillips who died in 1963. Alvin Ailey, Eartha Kitt, James Earl Jones and Butterfly McQueen were her pupils. Films in which she had parts included *Stormy Weather*, 1943, and *Jammin' the Blues*, 1945.

¹⁸Horst Koegler, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ballet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 139, gives April 16, 1919, as his date of birth, and lists these six Cunningham ballets with music by Cage: *The Seasons* (1947), *Antic Meet* (1958), *Field Dances* (1963), *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965), *Land rover* (1972), *Un jour ou deux* (1973). Cunningham's name appears in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as early as February 22, 1938, on which date he is announced to be dancing the night of February 23 at Sunset Club in a Seattle Clubhouse program involving Bonnie Bird's group. Ralph Gilbert, who preceded John Cage as her accompanist, composed the music for the dance that closed the February 23 program, *And Spain Sings*.

Cunningham's name again appears in the *Post-Intelligencer* of November 26, 1938, on which date he is announced to be dancing *Jazz Epigram* at the annual Cornish pre-Christmas program November 30.

"Modern American Percussion Concert" at Cornish School beginning at 8:30 P.M. Cost of tickets: 53¢ and 27¢ (students). The program includes Cage's twelve-minute *Trio* [1936] (Allegro, March, Waltz) for drums, bamboo sticks, and wood blocks; and his twenty-minute *Quartette* [1935] (Fast, Slow, Slow, Fast) for gongs, drums, wood blocks, triangles, automobile parts, also music by Guggenheim winner Ray Green (*3 Inventories of Casey Jones* for pop bottles, bottle with marbles, drums, cymbals, gongs, piano), William Russell (*Waltz and Fox Trot* for drums, bell, steel bar, cymbals, drums, wood blocks, saw, piano, bottle to be broken), and Gerald Strang (*Music for 3 Players* [Alla marcia, Moderato, Rondino] for cymbals, wood blocks, bells, iron pipe, drums, triangle, maracas, gong).¹⁹

1939

January 6 *Pine Cone*, Carmel, California, weekly newsheet, carries this news item: "John Cage, young modern composer who lived here several years ago, was in Carmel over the New Year's holiday, along with his wife, Senya [= Xenia]. John is now teaching percussion at the Cornish School, Seattle, and composing music for the pupil of Martha Graham, Bonnie Bird, who is also teaching dancing at the School."

January 9 *Tacoma Times* announces that Bonnie Bird and Cornish Dancers (Dorothy Herrmann, Mercier Cunningham, and Syvilla Fort) will appear at Jones Hall of the [Tacoma] College of Puget Sound on Wednesday, January 11, 8.15 P.M., in a program beginning with ten historic compositions accompanied by John Cage. These include the pieces danced by the Cornish Dancers the previous October 7. On the same program Mercier Cunningham dances *Unbalance March* by Hindemith and Syvilla Fort dances *Sentimental Melody* by Aaron Copland, Cage accompanying. The final number of the program is Ray Green's *3 Inventories of Casey Jones* performed by Cage's percussion group. This group consists of Xenia Cage (responsible for the "decor of the number"), Edna Mae Coffman, Doris Dennison, and Joyce Wike.

January 30 At the Seattle Repertory Theater, sponsored by Seattle Symphony League,²⁰ Bonnie Bird—assisted by Cornish Dancers Syvilla Fort, Dorothy Herrmann, and Mercier Cunningham, and accompanied by John Cage—presents the same historic dances that had been given the previous October 7 at Cornish School, 710 East Roy Street, and previous January 11 at College of Puget Sound, Jones Hall.

February 14 Theresa Stevens, staff writer for the *Seattle Star* publishes under the heading "Talent Trails A Column of Chatty Gossip About Your Seattle Neighbors Who Write and Paint" the following article:

¹⁹Concerning Ray Green and Gerald Strang, see E. Ruth Anderson, *Contemporary American Composers, a biographical dictionary*, 2d ed. (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1982), pp. 208 and 501. Between 1932 and 1940 William Russell (born Russell William Wagner February 26, 1905, at Canton, Missouri) specialized in percussion ensemble music. Thereafter he desisted from composing to do jazz history research at New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰Announcement in *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, January 15, 1938. Warmest thanks are due Karyl Winn, Manuscripts Librarian at University of Washington, who kindly gave me access to the clippings and programs, files from which most of the data on Cage's Seattle years has been here extracted.

Percussion Music! A paradox if it's anything at all. Be that as it may, great numbers of Seattleites are listening to percussion music. Interpretive dancers are being accompanied in their recitals by percussion music and the term is being used one way or another wherever things arty are discussed.

It has been hurting our eyes to see the words together in print. It's been hurting our ears just to hear them mentioned and it took us two weeks to gather enough courage to call to John Cage for help. John is Seattle's leading percussion music composer, player and expert.

"The name is a poor one," he agreed so wholeheartedly that our teeth slid off their edges for a moment—a moment all too short, before young Cage continued happily: "Percussion Music really is the art of noise and that's what it should be called." The whole application then, as we got it from John Cage—who really is an awfully nice person: P- M- or as he prefers it called, the A- of N- is the blending and organization of sounds not ordinarily considered musical.

For instance, the hitting of typewriter keys might be arranged so as to become p- m- or part of a percussion orchestra. In short, p. m. is made by hitting or knocking such things as milk bottles or wooden spoons or automobile parts. It might also include squeaking things like unoiled hinges or new patent leather shoes. Various types of whistles are also included and all regular orchestra instruments like drums, cymbals, etc.

Now in the case you're still interested, and we, since we've come this far are, John Cage is planning a concert of percussion music to be given sometime in May at Cornish School. At that time he intends to make use of some of the noises of every-day life, usually considered unpleasant—like radio static and interference. This young member of the Cornish School staff is devoted to the development of this art of noise. In short, it's his baby, as anyone around there will tell you.

February 24 *Seattle Times* announces that "Mrs. John Cage Speaks Tonight on *How a Book is Bound* in Cornish Lounge."

March 23 According to the *Post-Intelligencer* of this date, John Cage will help sponsor an informal hour at 3 P.M. the following Sunday in Cornish School lounge. The paintings of the Russian-born Alexei von Jawlensky (1864-1941), German resident forbidden to exhibit by Nazi authorities, are to be the subject of the hour.

March 24 and 25 After extensive advance publicity,²¹ Cornish School presents Bonnie Bird and Cornish Dance Group in "Two Humorous Dance Plays with Original Music": *Ho to AA*, text by Charles Tracy, music by John Cage; and *Marriage at the Eiffel Tower*, text adapted from Jean Cocteau,²² music by John Cage, Henry Cowell, and University of Washington music professor 1941 to 1968, George McKay (1899-1970).²³ This "Hilarious Dance Concert," as the paired evenings priced at 53¢

²¹Seattle's *Ballard News* of March 23, 1939, called the event a "Hilarious Dance Concert." The *Ballard* girl Roberta Tvedt was allowed the part of The Manager in "the highlight of this unusual concert, the dance-play *The Marriage at the Eiffel Tower* written by Jean Cocteau. . . . an experiment in a new form of theater making use of narrators who comment, question, and explain the action on the stage." After identifying Bonnie Bird as choreographer, this newspaper release continues: "John Cage, noted young composer, is in charge of all the music for the concert."

²²Cocteau's one-act *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (Paris, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, June 19, 1921), choreography by Jean Börlin (1893-1930) and music by five members of Les Six (Auric, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, Tailleferre), required two speaking parts. In the translated version produced at Cornish, Bonnie Bird and her husband Dr. Ralph Gundlach took the two speaking parts.

²³McKay's daughter Georgianne "has a principal part in Hilarious Dance Concert," according to the *Ballard News* of March 16.

and 27¢ are billed, begins at 8:30 P.M. with something by Carlos Chávez titled *Contemporary Challenge* that is danced by Bonnie Bird. *Skinny Structures*—danced by Dorothy Herrmann, Mercier Cunningham, and Syvilla Fort—follows (music by Milhaud, Casella, Jean Wiener, and Felix Petyrek [1892-1951]).

In the adapted Cocteau, Cunningham dances The General who presides at the wedding and who is devoured by The Lion—a part danced by Syvilla Fort. Fort also dances three other parts: those of The Ostrich, The Bicycle Girl, and The Bathing-Girl from Trouville. According to the review in the *Seattle Star* of March 25, music for the Cocteau begins with Wedding March (Entrance), and continues with "Rubbish Music" (*Tocatta and Fugue and Subsequent Mow-Down, Sad Music in the Modern Minor, Quadrille that is a Barn Dance, Wedding March* (Exit), and "Rubbish Again."

The same concert includes Cage's six-minute *Imaginary Landscape* [No. 1], described in *Ballard News* of March 16, 1939, as "a sophisticated comment on surrealism" in which "sliding tones, associated with static, are employed in combination with an unusual use of the piano and cymbal." The concert ends with Ray Green's *Casey Jones* inventions, Cage and Doris Dennison providing the accompaniments.

April 12 *O.A.C. Barometer* of Corvallis, Oregon, announces that "Bonnie Bird, instructor in modern dance at Cornish School, has accepted an invitation to direct a master lesson for the state-wide dance symposium next Saturday; Miss Bird and her accompanist John Cage will arrive in Corvallis sometime Saturday morning."

April 26 At the Cornish School, 710 East Roy Street, the Cornish Dance Group with John Cage again at the piano repeats the Hilarious Dance Concert given with great success the preceding March 24 and 25. Tickets are again 53¢ (adults), 27¢ (students).

May 19 Cage conducts his "second percussion concert" of the season. Advance notice in the *Seattle Star* of May 12 headed "Seattle Man Music Pioneer" reads as follows:

Leading the way in opening a new and unusual form of modern musical expression, John Cage, Seattle musician, will present one of the first all-percussion concerts ever heard here at the Cornish School May 19.

To him, drums are adequate in themselves for musical interpretation, rather than merely as background for orchestration. He has written a solo for drums, bamboo sticks and wood-blocks which will be one of those presented.

Dragon's mouths, tortoise shells, jawbones, Japanese temple gongs, automobile parts, bottles, bongos and many other percussion instruments are used by Cage and others pioneering in this field of musical expression.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* of May 14 carried a preliminary article headed "Cage to Direct Concert May 19" which began:

The second percussion concert under the direction of John Cage has been announced for Friday evening, May 19, at 8:30 o'clock in the Cornish School Theater. Players assisting Mr. Cage are Xenia Cage, Merce Cunningham, Doris Dennison, Imogene Horsley,²⁴ Lenore Hovey, Margaret Jansen and Lenore Thayer.

²⁴Born at Seattle October 31, 1919, she became one of the important historical musicologists of her generation. See her entries in *Who's Who of American Women, 9th edition 1975-1976*, p. 415, and in *The New Grove*, viii, 724.



On May 18, the *Post-Intelligencer* continued with such further data as this: "The program [May 19] contains work of contemporaries who share with Mr. Cage the belief that music is 'organized sound, which permits free use of percussion instruments, but also bottles and automobile brake drums.'"

The *N.E. Independent* of May 19 elaborated with a list of the composers and their works to be performed: William Russell [= Russell William Wagner] (*March Suite, Studies in Cuban Rhythms, Waltz and Foxtrot*); Lou Harrison (*Counterdance in the Spring; Fifth Sinfony*); Johanna Beyer (*Three Movements*); Henry Cowell (*Pulse* for dragon's mouths, woodblocks, drums, tom toms, rice bowls, temple gongs, cymbals, gongs, pipe lengths, brake drums); Cage (*Trio* [Allegro, March, Waltz] for drums, bamboo sticks, woodblocks).

May 31 Sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Syvilla Fort and Fedor Stojak²⁵ give a joint dance recital at Repertory Playhouse, East 41st and University Way. The review in the Seattle *N.W. Enterprise* records this data:

Syvilla Fort, young Seattle dancer, has made tremendous progress within this last year. Completing the three-year course last June at the Cornish School, famous art center of the Northwest, Miss Fort returned to the school in the Fall [1938] to do special work in radio,²⁶ costume designing and post-graduate work in dance.

June 18 Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* announces that John Cage will offer a course entitled "Children's Creative Music" during Cornish's summer session, June 19 to July 21. The Summer Announcement of a Children's Five Week Vacation School advertises Creative and Experimental Music taught by John Cage as meeting two hours weekly, with registration fee of \$5 for the five-week course. "In this course the children play simple instruments which they themselves construct," reads the course announcement.

July 21 Seattle *Capitol Hill Tribune* under the caption "Three Hundred Will Leave Cornish School As Summer Session Draws To Close" contains the news: "Miss Doris Dennison, eurhythmics teacher, and John Cage, creative music instructor, will participate in the percussion concert soon to be held in San Francisco."

August 20 Tacoma *Sunday Ledger* announces John Cage among the faculty for Cornish's 26th season. He teaches "creative composition and percussion instruments." The Fall 1939 Cornish catalogue (listing the faculty alphabetically) includes the following squib identifying John Cage (third in the list):

Studied at Paris Conservatoire under Lazare Lévy [1882-1964]. Studied with Richard Buhlig [1880-1952].²⁷ Adolph Weiss, Arnold Schoenberg, Henry Cowell. Taught at University of California Extension and Santa Monica [California] Public School. Creative Composition and Percussion Instruments.

²⁵According to *South Tacoma Star*, September 30, 1938, Stojak taught ballet, modern, and Hawaiian dance at Merrick Dance Studio in Tacoma, season of 1938-1939. Son of Mrs. Sophia Stojak, 5615 Durango Street, Tacoma, he attracted the attention of Richard Eugene Fuller (1897-1976; president-director Seattle Art Museum 1933-1973), who sent him to New York where in August 1940 he joined the Martha Graham Company.

²⁶Cornish's radio school, founded in 1935, enrolled Chet (Chester Robert) Huntley (1911-1974), Edward Beck, and Dave Crockett, the first year of its functioning.

²⁷Briefly profiled in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, 6th ed. (1978), p. 250, Buhlig was a concert pianist—not a composer. *The New Grove*, III, 597, misspells his name *Buhling*, and errs in citing him as Cage's teacher of composition.

December 1 *Seattle Times* under "Nothing New But Not New" announces that John Cage and his 12-member percussion group will give their third percussion concert Saturday night December 9, 8:30 P.M., at Cornish School.

Sponsors include Dr. Richard E. Fuller, Seattle Art Museum president and director, Mark Tobey [1890-1976], artist, and John Steinbeck, "who visited Mr. and Mrs. John Cage last summer" (plus a bevy of Seattle's own social elite). Program to include among other novelties Cage's nine-minute *First Construction (in Metal)* for percussion sextet, with assistant, and Mildred Cooper's²⁹ *Dirge* for pianos, tuned a quarter-tone apart (New Music Editions, 1937). *N.W. Veteran* of December 2 headlines the story "Cornish School Presents John Cage and His Group in a Unique Concert of Modern American Percussion."

December 17 Cornish obtains a new director, Mrs. Sarah McClain Sherman, who lasts only five months before resigning. During the remainder of the school year, Cornish endures constant upheaval terminating in her resignation May 10, 1940, and replacement by a four-member faculty junta consisting of Stephen Balogh, Ellen Wood Murphy, Martha Sackett, and Walter Reese.

1940

January 14 *Seattle Times* announces that the Seattle-born Ralph Gilbert who had preceded Cage as Bonnie Bird's accompanist, is the accompanist of Martha Graham during her tour that will bring her to Seattle's Music Hall Theatre the ensuing March 5.

January 17 *Post-Intelligencer* announces Bonnie Bird's formation of an American Dance Theater for tours of the Northwest.

February 11 *Portland Oregonian* reports a forthcoming concert by John Cage Percussion players February 14 (Wednesday night) at Reed College: "New Musical forms and experimentation not previously presented in Portland will be a feature of the program." Program includes premiere of *Second Construction* for percussion quartet (John and Xenia Cage, Doris Dennison, Margaret Jensen).

April 8 According to *Tacoma Tribune*, a Guggenheim Foundation Composition fellowship³⁰ goes this year to a 29-year-old native of Seattle, Earl Hawley Robinson, pupil of George McKay, Hanns Eisler,³¹ and others.

Robinson's credentials for the award—*Ballad for Americans* (baritone solo and mixed chorus with piano accompaniment, text by John Latouche)—had been first heard in New York the previous Spring as finale in the WPA production *Sing for Your Supper*. Paul Robeson's singing it in November 1939 on the radio show "Pursuit of Happiness" had inspired such a deluge

²⁹In 1958 the first American after Whistler to win the international painting prize at the Venice Biennale, Tobey taught at Cornish 1923-1929. He again held classes in Seattle 1938-1945. In 1940 he took up flute and piano.

³⁰Born in Buenos Aires, December 10, 1887, she died at Santa Barbara August 9, 1974. See Anderson's *Contemporary American Composers*, p. 109.

³¹Cage won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1949, six years after his New York debut in the concert of percussion instruments at Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art that was reviewed in *Time*, February 22, 1943, p. 70 (see also *Life*, March 15, 1943, pp. 42, 44 [Xenia Cage's picture]).

³²The Committee for Investigation of Un-American Activities conducted Earl Robinson's hearing April 11, 1957. Robinson headed the music department of John Cage's alma mater, Los Angeles High School, 1958 to 1965, and taught for UCLA Extension, 1967 to 1971.

of fan mail that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had bought the song as a film vehicle for Robeson and Eugene Ormandy had asked for an orchestration of the piano accompaniment, so that the Philadelphia Orchestra might perform it with Robeson as soloist. Roberson's Guggenheim project will be a setting of Carl Sandburg's *The People, Yes*, to which text he has been given exclusive rights.

April 26 *U. District Herald* under the headline, "Negro Dancer to Appear Sunday [April 28, 8:30 P.M.] in Solo Recital at Repertory Playhouse," announces that "John Cage of Cornish, who composed the music for *Bacchanale*," will be one of her two accompanists (Frances Chatters Brook will be the other).

May 10 *Seattle Star* announces resignation of Cornish's head the previous five months, Mrs. Sarah McClain Sherman. After a power struggle, Stephen Balogh emerges as head of Cornish School Music Department August 25, 1940.

May 24 Cornish's financial ledger for this year, page 147, shows a transfer of a portion of John Cage's faculty salary [Inv. #297] to pay "for discs obtained by him for percussion recordings."

June 29 Cornish's financial ledger, page 157, shows under Dance Department expense, "Bird \$1166.67; Cage \$560.00; Fisher \$1276.50."

July 18 Cage's percussion concert (17 players) at Lisser Hall, Mills College, Oakland, California, begins with Cowell's *Pulse*, and continues with Cage's *Second Construction* for sleigh bells, rattle, maracas, wind glass, snare drum, tom toms, temple gongs, tam tam, thundersheet, gongs, string, piano. The remainder of the program includes the premiere of Russell's *Chicago Sketches* (1940; Russell's last composition), Lou Harrison's *Canticle* [No. 1]; and works by two Cubans—a Suite by José Ardévol (born at Barcelona, 1911) and *Rítmicas V* and *VI* by Amadeo Roldán (1900–1939; born at Paris).