

# SOUND OF A CAGE 2016

The triennial Sound of a Cage is a collaboration of an interdisciplinary and professional field of artists. The event will take place in Stavanger, and curator is Liv Runesdatter/CARMA Contemporary Art, Music and Dance. The seminar is built up around the legacy of John Cage and his contemporaries, and it combines presentations of art, music, dance and performance using workshops, lectures and topical discussions.

The program is particularly tailored for professional artists, culture workers and arts' students. New in 2016, is that we offer parts for the program as a sound-arts safari for children and/or families on different locations on and around Tou Scene.

## HISTORY

The first Sound of a Cage was held in 2010 and focused on the "open form" as a musical form and an approach to composition. The open form originates from the New York school of composition in the 50s and 60s, with composers such as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros and Christian Wolf as the main representatives.

The open-form movement changed the understanding of music through:

- eradicating the boundaries between different forms of artistic expression;
- valuing all representations of sound and movement as distinctive and equal;
- rejecting traditional music notation;
- breaking down the barriers between composer and performing artists by recognising and challenging the performers as part-creators of the work, and awarding the professional and amateur performers equal status;
- recognising silence as equivalent to sound.

*It has been said that if Duchamp saved the head from the eye, Cage saved the ears from the head.*

*The Cage legacy is fundamental for understanding the "open form", for the recognition of "silence" as equivalent to sound and that all sound is equal. Experiencing the Harvard Anechoic Chamber in 1951 turned out to be crucial for Cage's continued work, but it also impacted on the way posterity has viewed music in general.*

*Cage swore that while in the soundproof room, he could hear his own nervous system vibrate, and his blood bubble its way through the body's circulatory system. He therefore concluded: Silence does not exist and thus not in music either. It merely takes a different form of music, and it was this "other music" that Cage turned into his artistic foundation. Cage recognised the intrinsic value of the individual sound, without regard to established evaluation criteria of what is considered "good" or "bad" sound in a musical perspective. John Cage himself illustrated this point in 1983, by saying that touching an object that thus make a sound, is a way of bringing out its soul.*

For two days the participants at Sound of a Cage 2010 were presented to workshops on the open form, performance, new choreography, concerts, poetry and an extensive selection of lectures.

The professional seminar lasting for two days, presented the works of Christian Wolff, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Jaap Blonk, Trevor Wishart and Else Olsen Storesund. Participating in the seminar were the musicians/ensembles Else Olsen Storesund, Sigyn Fossnes, Song Circus, Bjerga/Iversen, Pål Asle Pettersen, dance artist Marit Sandsmark, poet Torild Wardenær, Lars Mørch Finborud (musician, writer, curator Henie Onstad Kunstsenter), stage actor Adam Löwert and Martin Worts (curator).

Sound of a Cage 2013 was based on "form" both as a notion and an instrument. The events occurred at the Stavanger Art Museum, except from the final concert which took place at Tou Scene. The theme opened up for different and confronting perspectives, and the lectures interlinked the different subjects and fields of art.

Director of Stavanger Art Museum at the time, art historian Peter Meyer, gave an interesting presentation based on Jan Groths collection of Norwegian and international arts from 1960 up until today, in which he also referred to examples from music, architecture and design. Morten Eide Pedersen freely lectured on the development of the concept of form within art music from 1920 to present, drawing lines to pictorial and performing art. The design studio NODE Berlin Oslo presented its work, and spoke about methodology and artistic processes. Ingrid Romarheim Haugen from the National Library of Norway and the University of Oslo presented her Master's thesis on "Lautleben". Sidsel Endresen had a workshop and presented "Lautleben", the piece of art she created together with Rolf Wallin together with video created by Tone Myskja. "Lautleben" had in 2012 spent ten years with its performer, and it was striking to see how the piece has changed together with the performer and the technical premises. The chamber ensemble Song Circus performed Cornelius Cardews "Paragraph 7" from "The Great Learning" with lyrics of Confucius. Stavanger Art Museum held exhibitions of Dorte Østergaard Jakobsen and Henrik B. Andersen (<http://www.museumstavanger.no/samlinger/kalender/?ctl=Details&did=288&mid=6134>) .

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The starting point for Sound of a Cage 2016 is "sound poetry". Tou Scene is the main stage. Sound of a Cage 2016 will be documented through sound and film recordings.

### *Briefly on sound poetry as an art form*

The idea of "texts without words", text as phonetic sound, detached from semantics, can be traced back to the Futurist and Dada movements in the 1920s and 30s. Kurt Schwitters' "Ursonata" is one of the first known examples of sound poetry. Later on, the art form developed in the beat cultures where well-known names such as Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Brion Gysin started using cassette recordings. European examples were found in France, Italy and United Kingdom, and names such as Bob Cobbing in the UK and Henri Chopin in France were significant figures. In Sweden a peculiar form of sound poetry developed, known as "text-sound-composition". Behind it were persons with links to Radio Sweden and Fylkingen-groups. Important names are Åke Hodell and Sten Hanson.

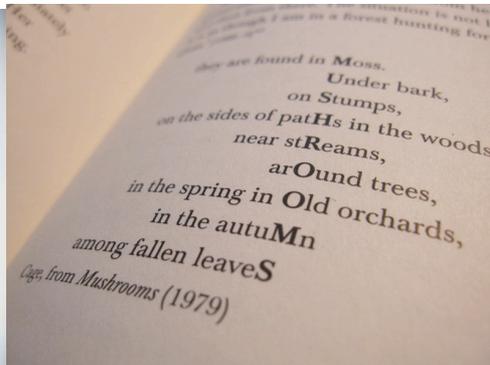
The program is in progress and will be released in June. Once again Sound of a Cage offers an inter-artistic program, with recent productions of stage art, concerts, workshops, art displays, subject related conferencing and lectures. This year, as before, the theme is anchored in John Cage's artistic legacy. The participants will be diving into John Cage's lectures, mesostic texts and mycollogical poetry:

*Already in the early days, Cage pointed out the similarities between composing music and writing poetry. His so-called "lectures" belonged to a text-form which he was devoted to his whole life. These were lectures where he turned the ideas and compositoric moves he used in his music, into text. "Lectures of Nothing" from 1950, is an example that is written over the same rhythm structure which he used in the piece "Sonatas og Interludes" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fPSz-o4zzY> "London Lectures" is written by the help of chance operations. Cages "Lectures" share many of the same qualities as his early percussion works and pieces for prepared piano, such as: anti-syntax, odd sound textures, rapid changes of tempo and theme and irregular breaks.*

Later on, Cage invented mesostics, a poetic form where names or spine-words in versals run vertically down the poem. Mesostics differs from acrostics, where the words are left-justified. Poets such as Lewis Carol and Jackson Mac Low used the acrostic form. Cage produces hundreds of mesostic texts, using names and spine-words such as James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Merce Cunningham, Erik Satie, Ezra Pound, Mushrooms and Indeterminacy for spines. In the mesostic text "Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake", the name of the author James Joyce went downwards in versals, and Finnegans Wake was used as the source text in order to find words which contained the letters in the name. He then used chance operations to determine which of the selected words would be used in the text and where to place them.

Cages mesostic over James Joyce:

as you  
 Jamey  
 Our  
 countrY  
 is a ffrinCh  
 soracEr this is  
 the grand mons inJun this is  
 the Alps hooping to sheltershock  
 the three lipoleuMs this is  
 thEir  
 legahornS  
 Jinnies  
 is a cOoin her  
 phillippY  
 dispatCh  
 to irrigatE the willingdone



*In order to increase his production and limit his own meddling and intention, Cage had the poet Jim Rosenberg develop a software called Mesolist, which read through the source text and picked out the words that complied to the set criteria. Since it would take too long to roll the die hundreds of times, and Cage had some software developed, called JC, which simulated the roll of die at tremendous speed.*

*However, Cages mesostic works are not given full justice published in a book, but are meant for recitals. He himself sometimes recited them softly, whispering and singing, sat next to a desk on a piano chair, in dramatic chiaroscuro lights. During these recitals, which could last for hours, poetry gained free language, just as random, indecisive and full of change as nature itself.*

*Cages mesostics appeared in two specific fields outside of the artistic sphere: in mycology (the study of mushrooms) and in social philosophy. Cages affection for mushrooms stemmed from the Great Depression in the 1930s, where he at times was so poverty stricken, that in order to survive, he had to feed off the mushroom growing outside the cottage in which he lived at the time. One day Cage got poisoned and almost lost his life. He decided to learn everything there was to learn about mushrooms. The literature he gradually collected on mushrooms, turned out to be one of the biggest in the USA, and today belongs to the University of California, Santa Cruz. In the 1950s, Cage and two of his friends started a course on mushroom identification at the liberal art school The New School in New York. The course still runs to this day. Cage was also teaching the subject at the New York New School of Social Research. He was eventually the personal delivery of mushrooms for several restaurants in New York, and in 1958 he participated in an Italian quiz show with mushrooms as his topic of choice. A few days later he returned to home with the first prize of 6 million Lire in his baggage.*

*Mycology became a running theme both in his authorship and his music.*

*Cages mycology can easily be rejected as general trivia, but for Cage the mushroom was a symbol of change and of nature's decomposition and recovery. The mushroom's random growth and spore structure makes it difficult to place in a rational system. Within the mushroom's growth patterns, Cage believed to have identified a principle that was transferable to society itself. Human beings, like the mushroom, must be allowed to live without supervised control or general controlling mechanisms. John Cage published the mesostic poetry collection "anaRchy<sub>15</sub>" in 1988. It was made up by 50 % mesostics based on source texts of 30 anarchistic quotes. For Cage his poetics was not merely a model for the liberation of art, but also for liberation of man and society. When interviewed by Terje Mosnes for the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet in 1983, Cage said that poetics represented a musical model for a society very different from the one we are living in, and for one he believed to be a better society. "The way Cage disposed of old methods and materials, building up a new music based on sound, silence and time as building blocks, western communities would have to be deconstructed and rebuilt." (Lars Mørch Finborud, Vinduet, 2007.)*

*John Cage's "Happy New Ears Theory" on music's liberation from anthropogenic traditions and occasional attempts on returning to nature, consisted of a method which he believed could apply to all art forms. In the last instance it could even liberate the individual person, and lead to a utopian anarchistic society.*

<http://www.ayearfrommonday.com/2012/07/mushroom-book-1972.html>)

<http://www.vogue.com/4588365/haute-cuisine-john-cage-recipes-vogue/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNzVQ8wRCB0>