interpenetrating but never mingling as chords.” Most contemporary critics could only see that Cage was removing pitch -- and therefore harmony -- from music. Yates was unique in that he saw the new musical life that the prepared piano opened up.

4. As rasavant music
The content of the Sonatas and Interludes draws upon to the Hindu aesthetic theory of rasa. This can be translated as “emotional character.” In the classical theory, there are eight moods or emotions that are the flavors of rasa: four light moods (the Erotic, Heroic, Wondrous, and Comic) and four dark moods (the Odious, Furious, Terrible, and Pathetic). A ninth possibility exists: Tranquillity, the common tendency of the other eight. What Cage knew about rasa he learned from reading the works of Ananda Coomaraswamy. How this classification of emotions applies to the Sonatas and interludes has never been clear. That there are sixteen sonatas suggests that there are two sonatas per emotion...but then again, rereading Coomaraswamy reminds me that the question is probably of little real importance: “The ‘nine rasas’ are no more than the various colourings of one experience: just as we speak of poetry categorically as lyric, epic, dramatic, etc., without implying that poetry is anything but poetry. Rasa is tasted – beauty is felt – only by empathy . . .”

5. As a transforming experience: a journey
Cage was fond of telling a story from Irish legend, in which a prince and a magical horse follow the path of a magic ball that rolls in front of them. The rolling ball takes them from one adventure to another, ultimately taking them to the object of their quest. These large ongoing pieces of Cage’s have this same quality: start here and follow the rolling ball. While composing them, he knows exactly what he’s doing – he’s following his system – but he has no idea where he’s going... The Sonatas and interludes are lacking that feeling of the self-consciously monumental statement that accompanies so many grand works. Instead its epic nature affects you gradually over time as you follow the continuity of events, from point to point in the journey, until you emerge from the other side -- transformed.

6. As a work in progress (John Cage, 1948)
In February of 1948, John Cage gave a lecture at Vassar College. He had not completed Sonatas and interludes at the time he gave the lecture; he mentions them only briefly: “Another passing remark, this time by Edwin Denby, to the effect that short pieces can have in them just as much as long pieces can, led me two years ago to start writing twenty short Sonatas and interludes which I have not yet finished.” He then starts a new paragraph and hints at their future: “They have all been written in my new apartment on the East River in Lower Manhattan which turns its back to the city and looks to the water and the sky.”
FACULTY ARTIST SERIES RECITAL
John Milbauer, piano
Tuesday, November 29, 2022
Holsclaw Hall
7:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

prl 6:50-7:00 p.m.

Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano (1948)...............John Cage (1912-1992)
I II III IV First Interlude V VI VII VIII Second Interlude Third Interlude IX X XI XII Fourth Interlude XIII XIV and XV ‘GEMINI’ – after the work by Richard Lippold XVI

The performance will last approximately 55 minutes.

“if anybody is sleepy
let him go to sleep” from Lecture on Nothing (1950)

JOHN MILBAUER is Professor of Piano and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs in the College of Fine Arts. He attended Cage’s Norton Lectures as a freshman, and was first drawn to Cage’s music upon hearing his teacher perform the Suite for Toy Piano.

Six views of the Sonatas and interludes (excerpts)

by James Pritchett (copyright 1995 by James Pritchett, used with permission)

1. As a masterwork
Sonatas and interludes has the reputation of being a masterwork, and this is well deserved. A word like “masterpiece” creates certain expectations, however: you expect grandeur, big effects that sweep you off your feet; you expect the exposition, development, and exploration of grand themes; you expect an epic, a monumental journey. Cage’s masterwork is quite different from this: it is a big piece with a quiet voice. The very instrument he writes for, the prepared piano, undermines the grand statement, and operates entirely by muting: by attaching objects to the strings of the piano. The results are different from note to note –some resonant, some dry, some metallic, some wooden – but they are always, always quieter than before. The prepared piano is an instrument that is personal and intimate; the music written for it must by necessity be music for a small space, music between two people.

2. As a meditation (Peggy Glanville-Hicks, 1948)
Peggy Glanville-Hicks never mentions Sonatas and interludes in the profile of John Cage that she wrote for Musical America (1948), but she was attuned to Cage’s quiet introspection, and opens her article accordingly: “To one who is an artist in the highest sense, meditation is an absolute prerequisite; and in the vital pandemonium that is musical America, few have the strength, the inclination, or the awareness of its importance to embark upon a way of life which ensures time for reflection.” The image of Cage’s music that she conveys is one of fragility, delicacy, and sensitivity. She makes a point of describing Richard Lippold’s small wire sculptures that floated in Cage’s spacious loft on the lower east side of New York. The near-invisibility of these sculptures parallels the near-inaudibility of Cage’s music.

3. As a new musical resource (Peter Yates, 1949)
Peter Yates wrote about Sonatas and interludes in Arts & Architecture (1949): “The principle of tonal balance is to the effect that more highly pitched sounds tend to unrest and sounds of lower pitch to rest... . Cage may repeat the same group of simultaneous sounds, emphasizing first the higher registers as a dominant and then the lower as a tonic... . Other means of structure are found in the balance between movement and non-movement, between sound and silence, between the hurrying of many tones at one level of sound and the slow fall of single sounds upon another level, the two