



S O U T H W E S T C H A M B E R M U S I C

WHY CAGE?

Southwest Chamber Music began its celebration of the John Cage Centenary in January 2010 and will end it with a celebration of the composer's 100th birthday on September 5, 2012.

But “why Cage?” Why are we continually fascinated by this iconoclastic individualist who, much like Carl Ruggles and Charles Ives, paved his way apart from tradition and method, reaching for an essence that was nothing -- or something?

Enough time has passed that John Cage's music and philosophies are finally being understood. Chance, the I-ching, silence, transformation of sound, are only a few of Cage's musical explorations which took him well beyond the traditions and paths composers of his time were challenging. Now that these ideas are within our grasp, we begin to realize that what Cage was trying to say is far more radical than we could have imagined.

Despite his still-controversial place in the history of music, John Cage emerges as a vital and highly influential part of the American cultural landscape, with his music played all over the world. Cage's works are a distillation of long-held American democratic ideals, often highlighting individual determination and Yankee ingenuity as a viable alternative to older, collectivist European ideals. It is well known that John Cage had an intense connection with the cultural fabric of the United States. Much like Henry David Thoreau, who often was an inspiration to the composer, Cage had an obsession with the ability of Yankee ingenuity to bring people together to solve problems.

Southwest's *Cage 2012* presents for the first time John Cage as a composer with three distinct periods of early, middle and late works, as has been done with other iconic classical composers such as Beethoven or Stravinsky. The Early Cage Period includes his through-composed works ending with the *Sixteen Dances* of 1951; a Middle Cage Period that includes his discovery of compositional chance procedure in the Chinese *I-ching* that culminate in *Europerras* in 1987; and a final summation until his death in 1992 with abstractly numbered pieces, and a reconciliation with his lifelong fascination with time.

Cage's music embodies a study in contrasts and a spirit of inclusiveness that is endemic to the American cultural landscape. His music can be performed by trained musicians and amateurs; it is facile and impossible; there is activity and inactivity; technology and primitivism; solos and ensembles; teachers and students; order and chaos; sound and silence. *Cage 2012* highlights these contrasts into a compelling and important portrait of an American Master.

John Cage's influence cannot be denied, and now at his 100th birthday, it is time to take a new look at Cage's works and philosophies and to celebrate this American cultural icon.

That's “why Cage.”