

JOHN.
CAGE.
GUITAR.

AARON
LARGET-
CAPLAN



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JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

1	A Room	2'35
	Three Easy Pieces	
2	i Round	2'05
3	ii Duo	0'55
4	iii Infinite Canon	1'06
5	Chess Pieces	7'52
6	Dream	7'06
	Six Melodies	
7	i Melody 1 *	2'29
8	ii Melody 2 *	1'47
9	iii Melody 3 *	2'00
10	iv Melody 4 *	2'27
11	v Melody 5 *	1'51
12	vi Melody 6 *	2'00
13	In a Landscape	8'36
14	Bacchanale +	10'38
		54'03

All guitar arrangements by Aaron Larget-Caplan

AARON LARGET-CAPLAN *guitar, prepared guitar +*

SHARAN LEVENTHAL *violin **

ADAM LEVIN *prepared guitar +*

Noted for his “astounding technical proficiency and artistic delicacy” by the *Boston Musical Intelligencer*, classical guitarist **Aaron Larget-Caplan** is an international recording and touring artist performing repeatedly throughout Europe, Russia and the United States. A champion of new music and collaborations, Aaron has premiered over 80 solo and chamber compositions, many being the first compositions for guitar by the commissioned composers. Aaron has three critically-acclaimed solo recordings: *Tracing a wheel on water* (2006), *New Lullaby* (2010) and *The Legend of Hagoromo* (2015). He is featured as a soloist and chamber music on Albany, Navona, and American Composers Alliance. In 2015 he became a Stone Records artist. In concerts and recordings, Aaron utilizes many of his own arrangements of music by J.S. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Reynaldo Hahn, and numerous Spanish composers. His arrangements of John Cage are the first officially sanctioned arrangements of Cage's music for guitar and are exclusively published by Edition Peters. Edition Peters also publishes his arrangement of *Mystic Flute* by Alan Hovhaness (2018). Aaron is the founder of the New Lullaby Project, a 21st century commissioning and recording endeavour, which has seen over 55 premieres since 2007 of classical miniatures in the genre of a lullaby. He is also the founder of the classical Spanish music and flamenco dance group ¡Con Fuego!. Aaron has received numerous awards and grants for his performances, commissions and for bringing music into communities from the American Composers Forum, Massachusetts Cultural Council, New England Foundation For the Arts, the D'Addario Foundation, and the Mu Phi Epsilon Foundation. He was awarded as an I.D. LOTT - Identifying Future Leaders of Today and Tomorrow for his artistic and community work in Dorchester, Massachusetts, and he is an ACME Honouree for being a distinguished Artist and Educator by

the international professional music fraternity Mu Phi Epsilon. He lives in Boston with his wife and muse, Catherine.

Sharan Leventhal, violin, has toured four continents as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. She has received grants from the NEA, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music Recording, Chamber Music America, New Music U.S.A., and the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, and has premiered well over 130 works. Sharan has appeared as a soloist with numerous orchestras, is a founding member of the Kepler Quartet, Marimolin, and Gramercy Trio, and can be heard on the New World, Northeastern, Newport Classic, Naxos, Navona, GM and Catalyst labels. She teaches at Boston Conservatory at Berklee and Berklee College of Music, and is founder and director of Play On, Inc., a non-profit supporting chamber music programs for children.

Praised for his “visceral and imaginative” performances by *The Washington Post*, guitarist **Adam Levin** has performed extensively throughout the U.S.A., Europe, and South America. Levin has received numerous top prizes, including the Fulbright Scholarship, the Program for Cultural Cooperation Fellowship from Spain's Cultural Ministry, and the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship to research and perform contemporary Spanish guitar repertoire in Madrid, Spain. Adam commissioned thirty solo guitar works from four generations of contemporary Spanish composers, which resulted in a contract for a four-volume encyclopaedic series for Naxos, *21st Century Spanish Guitar*. Adam has released six critically-acclaimed albums, including *In the Beginning* (2009); *Duo Sonidos* (2010); *Music From Out of Time* (2010); *Fuego de la Luna* (2011), *21st Century Spanish Guitar, Vol. 1 & 2* (2013, 2016). Adam is a D'Addario Artist.

*"I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas.
I'm frightened of the old ones."*

John Cage

John Cage and Guitar

Cage did not write for guitar. And yet ... here ... we ... are. In the 17 years that separate the earliest and latest pieces on this recording, one can hear the mind of a searching artist as it explores, deviates, collaborates, repeats, invents, changes, and creates a new sonic order.

Why Cage on Guitar?

Artists create to fulfil a desire within them. I have always been disappointed by the lack of representation by mid-century American composers in the guitar repertoire, so in 2012 I set out to create. I found similarities in arranging Cage to arranging Bach: the music is so strong on its own that instrumentation feels secondary. Beautiful music is beautiful. The music on this recording features seven early and mid-career compositions, dating from 1933 through 1950 for solo guitar, violin and guitar, and prepared guitar duo. All guitar parts were originally written for solo piano or prepared piano. In regard to notes, the compositions required few adjustments from the originals and fit very well on the guitar. The music is playful, meditative, meandering, introspective, large, quiet, haunting, regal, and yet it is just sound. Any meaning you create is your own.

Write for guitar? Cage did not

Stylistically the pieces range from polyphonic tonal compositions of his youth to minimalist, modal, prepared instruments, and Far-East-influenced compositions written for dance. Even in his early years Cage was an explorer of sound and form using atypical phrase lengths, simple harmonies, and unusual rhythm structures. The later solo works in this collection are masterpieces of resonance and products of collaboration with modern dance choreographers Merce Cunningham, Syvilla Fort, and Louise Lippold. Listeners can bathe in the solitude of a single line or be hypnotized by the rhythm and pacing; much like the music of Erik Satie, who was a great influence on Cage, melodies are simple and the forms complex.

The guitar, John Cage did not write for

We have no record of Cage commenting on guitar or having interest in writing for guitar until the end of his life. And yet, his musical aesthetic seems perfectly suited for the instrument: he loved variations in timbre, quiet dynamics, percussive instruments, modal scales with little modulation, and music often in two voices with the occasional thicker harmony. It was ideal! Yet, as perfect as the relationship could have been, it did not happen, and one must ask the question as to why. A simple answer is he did not play guitar, and during this period of his career he often performed his own music. Another issue is who would perform his music if he wrote it? The prominent guitarists in the USA through the 1950s were not playing music by contemporary American composers, and by the time a new generation of open-minded guitarists came,

Cage was no longer writing music that suited the instrument. It is with this in mind that I approached the project of arranging and recording music by John Cage on guitar.

Guitar on John Cage

I was first introduced to the music of John Cage while a student at the New England Conservatory, but it would be over ten years before I would attempt to arrange his music for guitar. In that time, I just lived my life and didn't give Cage much thought beyond attending concerts, reading his book *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961), and learning of the influence of the Far East on his music and then how the I-Ching influenced his chance operation composing process. By the time he passed away just before his 80th birthday, the idea of "John Cage, music rebel" was more widespread than his music. Even today many musicians are usually only aware of "4'33" and typically accompany it with a bad joke. One does not need to dig deep to still find critics of him or those who don't consider him a composer. After concerts where I perform his music, many laugh at the uproar he caused, considering him more of a philosopher, painter, rabble-rouser, or as Schoenberg called him "an inventor - of genius". Many still don't realize that Cage composed melodic music, but Cage was a composer and one influenced by others. His attention to form and space harken to the music of Erik Satie, with his late masterwork *Cheap Imitation* being rhythmically based on Satie's *Socrate*. One can easily find Claude Debussy in Cage's focus on timbre, silence, dynamics and rhythmic detail, and though one may not hear it, even Schoenberg had a profound effect on the composer.

JOHN. CAGE. GUITAR.

A Room (1943)

Though Cage did not use the term, *A Room* could be considered minimalist, as it only uses a small collection of 5 notes (gamut) in three registers in multiple patterns. Using a complex rhythmic scheme that is not really audible – 4, 7, 2, 5; 4, 7, 2, 3, 5, *A Room* is a hypnotic flowing piece. Written in two voices it begins and ends with some of the most guitar-like writing: alternating two notes between two voices. Taking advantage of the guitar's ability to play the same pitch on various strings, I assign each voice to a string (tenor – 1 & 2, bass – 3 & 4).

Premiered at the Center for New Music, San Francisco, California, 7 April 2018

Three Easy Pieces – Round, Duo, Infinite Canon (1933)

These short contrapuntal works show Cage exploring simple forms (round and canon) in two voices, with very little emphasis on harmony. Besides a seven-measure phrase length in *Duo*, the first two compositions could easily be mistaken for 19th century guitar compositions. Almost nothing was changed in the arrangement from piano to guitar, except for the addition of tremolo in the cadenza of *Duo*, and a more reasonable tempo in *Infinite Canon*.

Premiered at the Church of the Advent, Boston, Massachusetts, 14 October 2016

Chess Pieces (1944)

John Cage gave up painting as a young man to focus on music, and he did so until the late 1960s, though it had been known that Cage did a painting in 1944 for an exhibition that was comprised of works that were in some manner related to

Marcel Duchamp's interest in chess. In 2005 pianist Margaret Leng Tan saw the chess board painting and discovered it to include a full composition across the top: a through composed piece of 22 systems of music with each idea or episode being twelve bars. The score does not give instrumentation, meter or tempo. The use of pizzicato, harmonics and timbre decisions were made by the performing artist.

Premiered at the Mantova Chamber Music Festival, Mantova, Italy, 1 June 2017

Dream (1948)

When I heard *Dream* I knew I needed to arrange it. Its meandering line is full of motion and yearning yet meditative. The music was written for dance using a pre-conceived rhythmic structure chosen by Merce Cunningham, and using a fixed gamut of tones (a six-note scale). The single-line melody moves in thirds and seconds, and is occasionally interrupted by chords made up of the same gamut of tones. Though Cage writes that there should be “no silence”, there is a meditative spaciousness not heard in the earlier compositions. To create the desired resonance of the original, the guitarist must perform the single melodic line over multiple strings (campanella) and incorporate harmonics into some of the chords and melodic lines.

Premiered at the Eastport Arts Center, Eastport, Maine, 12 August 2016

Six Melodies (1944) • **Violin & Guitar**

Written at the time of his string quartet, Cage wrote in a letter to Pierre Boulez that he considered the *Six Melodies* a “postscript to the Quartet”. Cage uses a simple gamut of sounds with very precise instructions of how they are to be played by the

violinist to create a haunting and spacious sonic world. The violin plays without vibrato, and each note is designated to a string. The rhythmic structure is 3.5, 3.5, 4, 4, 3, 4, and, like the other works, one does not necessarily hear it.

Melody 1 sonic landscape introduction, unique in its use of written-in rubato

Melody 2 dirge-like with beautiful dissonance

Melody 3 active and full of playful syncopations

Melody 4 trills, hockets, jumps, soaring notes, and a brief guitar solo

Melody 5 a large decrescendo

Melody 6 the last melody

Premiered in Seully Hall, Boston Conservatory, Boston, Massachusetts, 22 February 2013, with Sharan Leventhal

In a Landscape (1948)

I met Cage in *Dream*, but I fell in love with Cage through *In a Landscape*. The most daunting of the arrangements due to an extended fixed gamut of tones and the use of two voices that need to resonate throughout, it happens to be also the most lyrical of the mid-period works where one can hear the lines so reminiscent of Satie. Choreographer Louise Lippold conceived of the 15 x 15 measures (5-7-3) rhythmic structure. Through composed, the composition can be divided into three parts by the repetition of the opening melodic figure and arpeggio. The work travels the length of the guitar and requires extensive use of campanella, natural

and artificial harmonics, tambura, and peaceful control. The arrangement required multiple register adjustments, but no note changes.

*Premiered at Crowell Hall, Biola University Conservatory of Music, La Mirada, California,
3 April 2018*

Bacchanale (1940) • Two Prepared Guitars

A rhythmically riotous piece, polyrhythms are created through the music's consistently adjusting groupings and meters. *Bacchanale* was first conceived by Cage as a dance work for percussion ensemble by fellow Cornish College faculty choreographer Syvilla Fort, who asked for a composition of African inspiration. The space of the performance was not large enough to allow for the battery of percussion instruments, so Cage decided to fix weather stripping, bolts, screws and nuts into the strings of the piano to create a percussion ensemble, and the first work for prepared piano was born. Its large form being Fast-Slow-Fast, the outside sections are also broken into smaller sections of various levels of Fast-Faster-Fast. The middle section is marked Very Slow-Slow-Slower and has only one dynamic triple piano (ppp). The preparation of the guitars consisted of paper woven through strings 6-2, and an alligator clip on the first string with two washers around it. It is as close to rock and roll as one can get in 1940 or with classical guitars.

Premiered at the Eastport Arts Center, Eastport, Maine, 10 August 2018, with Tim Pence

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Aaron Larget-Caplan plays a 2009 guitar by Olivier Fanton D'Andon.

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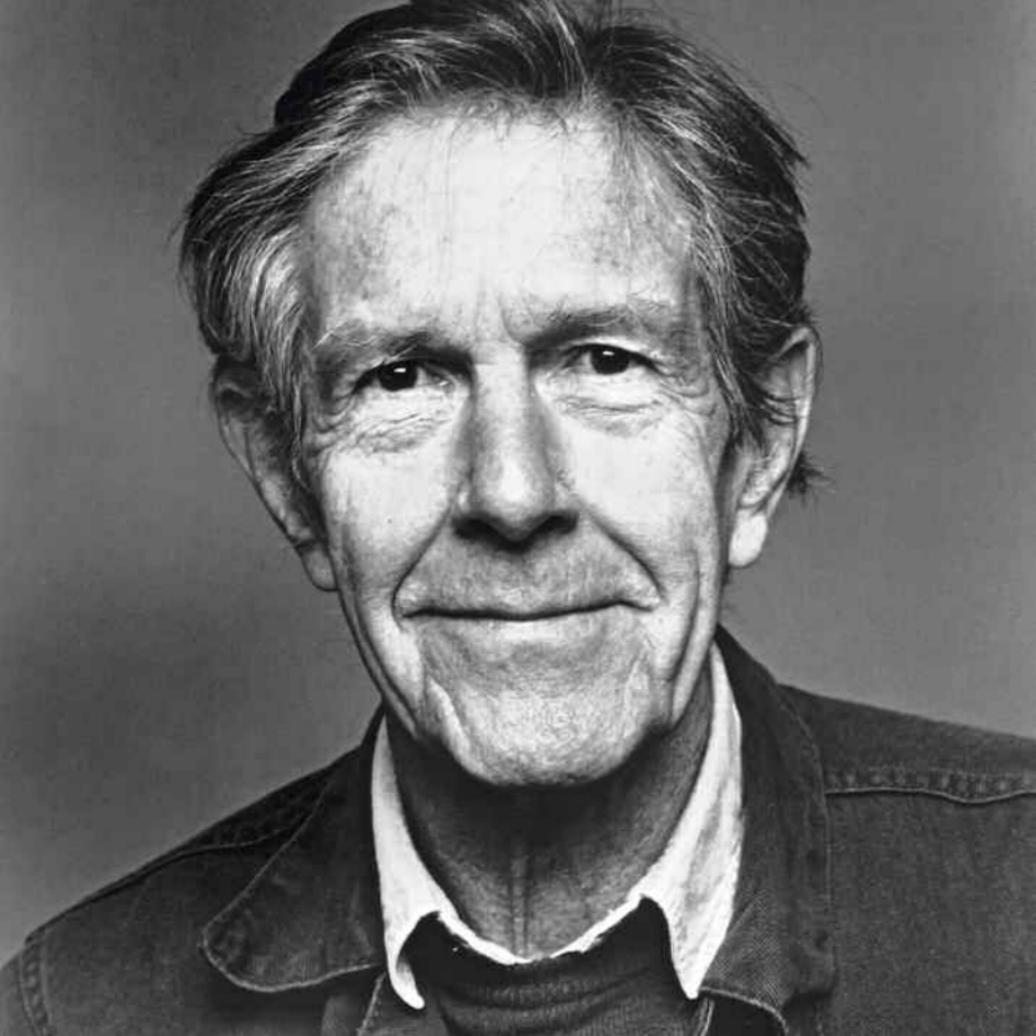
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