

CAGE¹⁰⁰

CAGE100 »Party Pieces Project«

Within the last year the Forum of Contemporary Music Leipzig [FZML] initiated the worlds largest group composition in honor of John Cage. The piece, written by 125 international composers, will now have its world premiere on 17th October 2013 in New York.

»Party Pieces« is a composition written by 125 international composers. This high amount of participating artists makes it the worlds largest group composition to date. The »Party Pieces Project« was initiated by the Forum of Contemporary Music [FZML] within the one year lasting international festival CAGE100 that is implemented by the FZML on the occasion of John Cage's 100th birth. Concerning the importance of the 'Party Pieces Project' within the whole festival Thomas Christoph Heyde, artistic director of CAGE100 and FZML, explains:

„The ‚Party Pieces Project‘ is one of the most important parts of CAGE100 in two ways: First of all it was a great possibility for such a high amount of artist to set their very own, personal tribute to John Cage. The consciousness for the groundbreaking achievements of Cage is prominently present in the written works which are composed artificially and witty at the same time – also visually, by the way. The responses to our requests were overwhelmingly positive. Many more artists than expected decided to take part in the project. Furthermore the ‚Party Pieces Project‘ is also the development of a composition idea Cage himself has had within the 1940s. During this period he used to sit together with some friends to write a group composition according to some specific rules. We examined these rules quite detailed and transmitted them to the ‚Party Pieces Project‘.

The preparation for the »Party Pieces Project« had begun in 2010. Only composers with a connection to Germany, the point of initiation of CAGE100, or to the USA, home country of John Cage, were asked to contribute something to the piece. The choice of artist was made by a board of trustees consisting of four dramatic advisors of the Forum of Contemporary Music Leipzig [FZML].

To ensure that the whole composition could be completed within the running time of the CAGE100 festival, the composers were split into 5 groups, respectively 5 movements.

The division of the composers and the running order within one group was determined via I-Ging coin oracle – a system that Cage himself also used a lot of times for his compositions. By using the I-Ging the FZML ensured that no influences from outside and no personal preferences could have any impact on the overall composition.

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Before the composers started with their work, everybody received a package that contained 2 empty sheets of transparent paper as templates for their manuscript. One was provided with staves, the other one was empty to allow classical as well as graphical notation systems. Only the first and the last composer of each group was informed about their position within the running order. All the others did not know anything about it:

"Although none of the composers knew who is his successor or predecessor, the running order and the division was completely set by chance and there was forwarded only one little measure as musical orientation to the next compose. Considering these facts there is an astonishing number of similarities within the pieces. There is, for example, some kind of little theme or motif that occurs again and again: the melogram C-A-G-E. Also dealing with chance operations - as compositional elements as well as an option for the creation of unheard sound - and leaving space for the freedom of the performer as well as for the use of unusual objects for the creation of sounds are permanently relevant. Anne La Berg, for example, decided to throw a superball onto the piano strings and onto the percussion instruments, or Jing Jing Luo who puts 2 heavy books onto the piano strings, or Steve Antosca, who fixes just the rhythm of his notes for the performer, but not the pitch."

explains Sebastian Vaske, executive dramatic advisor of the 'Party Pieces Project'.

The composition process started on 26th June 2012 and on 11th March 2013 the last connecting measure was sent to the last composer of each group.

The »Party Pieces« will have their premiere on 17th October 2013 at the Miller Theatre New York and will be interpreted by the ensemble Either/Or under the direction of Richard Carrick. Also for the Miller Theatre, the most renowned location for concerts of contemporary music in New York, the 'Party Pieces Project' is a unique highlight within their concert program, says Melissa Smey, executive director of the Miller Theatre:

"I am thrilled to present the world premiere of the CAGE100 Project's epic finale. I am so excited for our audience to have the opportunity to hear contributions from 125 of the finest international composers in one extravagant musical work on our stage, performed by the incredible musicians of Either/Or. The culmination of many months of experimentation and collaboration will surely be an evening to remember."

The score of »Party Pieces« was exhibited at the Gallery of Contemporary Art

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Leipzig from 22nd August until 15th September 2013 and could inspire about 1.000 visitors. Furthermore the FZML produced a limited, handmade box with information material and reproductions of all the 125 written manuscripts on the original transparent paper, that was also presented within the exhibition.

The five rules of the CAGE100 »Party Pieces Project«:

1. Each composer contributes a small self-composed part to the whole piece.
2. Each composer receives the previous part's last section or measure of the consecutive group composition that he is intended to carry on. One week is given for each composer to complete his part. After his composition is completed he sends it back.
3. Each composer notates handwritten with a maximum of 5 measures or 1 minute of music onto special sheet music templates. The last measure [in graphical or bar less notation the accordingly labeled last section] is then passed over by the FZML to the next composer who again connects to the given composition.
4. Each composer can liberally select out of the following instruments in a soloist setting: oboe, bassoon, trumpet in C, trombone, pitched percussion [marimba, xylophone, vibraphone], accordion, piano, violin, viola and violoncello.
5. It is not allowed to use techniques such as preparation, scordatura, live electronics, etc. It is possible to use various kinds of mallets for percussion or various kinds of damper and mutes for strings and winds in case that the musician will have enough time to change or to remove it prior to the next »Party Piece«. The whole composition will be conducted. It is also possible that the musicians orientate themselves to a digital video clock.

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