



BMOP
sound

JOHN CAGE: SIXTEEN DANCES

JOHN CAGE 1912–1992

SIXTEEN DANCES

BOSTON MODERN ORCHESTRA PROJECT

GIL ROSE, CONDUCTOR

SIXTEEN DANCES (1951)

- | | | | |
|------|--------------|----------------|-------|
| [1] | No. 1 | [Anger] | 1:27 |
| [2] | No. 2 | [Interlude] | 3:07 |
| [3] | No. 3 | [Humor] | 1:43 |
| [4] | No. 4 | [Interlude] | 2:06 |
| [5] | No. 5 | [Sorrow] | 2:01 |
| [6] | No. 6 | [Interlude] | 2:17 |
| [7] | No. 7 | [The Heroic] | 2:40 |
| [8] | No. 8 | [Interlude] | 3:29 |
| [9] | No. 9 | [The Odious] | 3:10 |
| [10] | No. 10 | [Interlude] | 2:20 |
| [11] | No. 11 | [The Wondrous] | 2:05 |
| [12] | No. 12 | [Interlude] | 2:09 |
| [13] | No. 13 | [Fear] | 1:24 |
| [14] | No. 14 | [Interlude] | 5:12 |
| [15] | No. 15 | [The Erotic] | 3:10 |
| [16] | No. 16 | [Tranquility] | 3:51 |
| | TOTAL | | 42:12 |

By David Vaughan

At the beginning of the 1950's, John Cage began to use chance operations in his musical composition. He and Merce Cunningham were working on a big new piece, *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three*.

To facilitate the composition, Cage drew up a series of large charts on which he could plot rhythmic structures. In working with these charts, he caught first glimpse of a whole new approach to musical composition—an approach that led him very quickly to the use of chance. “Somehow,” he said, “I reached the conclusion that I could compose according to moves on these charts instead of according to my own taste.”¹

The composer Christian Wolff introduced Cage to the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*, which had just been published by his parents' company, Pantheon Books.² As soon as Cage saw the charts used for identifying the names of the hexagrams, he made the connection with his own charts, and saw that he could use the book as the basis for the chance operations toward which he had been moving. His first composition involving chance was *Music of Changes* (for piano), followed by *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (for twelve radios, each with two “players,” one operating the wave-length and the other the volume control). Both these works continued to follow the square-root rhythmic structure that Cage had been using. He drew up charts for such elements as tempo, duration, kind of sound, and dynamics, then made choices among them by tossing coins, as when obtaining oracles from the *I Ching*.

Value judgments are not in the nature of this work as either composition, performance, or listening. The idea of relation being absent, anything may happen.



A "mistake" is beside the point, for once anything happens it automatically is.³

Cunningham began to think about ways in which he could apply similar methods to choreography, which he used for the first time in *Sixteen Dances*.

The *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* was special for me in my work. It was a long piece (53 minutes) intended to fill an evening. It was also the first time the use of chance operations entered into the compositional technique.

The choreography was concerned with expressive behavior, in this case the nine permanent emotions of Indian classical aesthetics, four light and four dark with tranquility the ninth and pervading one. The structure for the piece was to have each of the dances involved with a specific emotion followed by an interlude. Although the order was to alternate light and dark, it didn't seem to matter whether Sorrow or Fear came first, so I tossed a coin. And also in the interlude after Fear, number 14, I used charts of separate movements for materials for each of the four dances, and let chance operations decide the continuity.

The work had an overall rhythmic structure to which Cage wrote the score, generally after the dances were finished. He composed it for both piano and small orchestra, distinguished by a number of unusual percussion sounds. Although each dance was a separate entity, we were beginning to use "poetic license" in disregarding connecting points within the dances.⁴

The order became: Anger, The Humorous, Sorrow, The Heroic, The Odious, The Wondrous, Fear, The Erotic, and finally Tranquility. These were all solos with the exception of the erotic, which was a duet, and tranquility, which was a dance for the four of us. The solos were concerned with specific emotional qualities, but they were in image form and not personal—a yelling warrior for The Odious, a man in a chair for The Humorous, a bird-masked figure for The Wondrous.

There were postludes to a number of the solos. Following Fear was a quartet with a small gamut of movements, which was different for each dance, and this was choreographed by chance means. That is, the individual sequences, and the length of time, and the directions in space of each were discovered by tossing coins. It was the first such experience for me and felt like "chaos has come again" when I worked on it.⁵

The formal ideas in the choreography, music, and costume design have been described by Cunningham's other principal collaborator in the piece, Remy Charlip:

The music and the costumes have a formal arrangement, which allows for a single change for each dance. In the music, John Cage started with a specific set of sixty-four sounds for the first dance, and for each pair of dances replaced eight sounds with eight others, until at the end there was a completely new set of sounds. The first piece started with harsh and sharp sounds, and in the last piece there were long and resounding sounds. The costumes were treated in a similar manner, with dark and warm colors in the beginning, and with one costume change for each dance, ending in cool, light colors in order to contribute to the final, serene effect.

Mr. Cunningham's arrangement of the sequence of dances was based on the conviction that it is possible for anything to follow anything else, and that the actual order of events can be chanced rather than chosen, the resultant experience being free and discovered, rather than bound and remembered.⁶

There were various "additions and props," some of them made by Cage and Cunningham themselves. In the twelfth dance, Cunningham remembers, a trio, "two of the girls dragged another one in a basket, and they wore white, transparent dresses, like little kids." Charlip made the mask Cunningham wore in the "wondrous" solo, from a drawing by John Heliker; he built the mask on a plaster cast of Cunningham's face. (Heliker remembers going to

look at Northwest Indian masks at New York's Museum of the American Indian before making this drawing.⁷)

In the “ballad of the odious warrior,” Cunningham wore a fantastic patchwork coat made by two bibulous friends of his, Antoinette Larrabee and Constance Smith, decorated with bits of fringe and lace, bells, metal ornaments, and beads. In this solo Cunningham made “use of vocal sounds, shouts, groans, and grunts. Some see this dance as a hunter frightened by his hunt, others as an exuberant drunk on a binge.”⁸ After this came a “blues” duet of “two girls in a night-club,” wearing “some kind of draped garment.”

Excerpted from *Merce Cunningham, Fifty Years*, by David Vaughan (Aperture, 1997)

1. Calvin Tomkins, “John Cage,” *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant Garde* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 105.
2. *The I Ching or Book of Changes*; the Richard Wilhelm translation rendered into English by Cary F. Baynes, with a foreword by C.G. Jung (New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series XIX, 1950).
3. John Cage, “Composition,” *Silence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 59.
4. Merce Cunningham, “A Collaborative Process between Music and Dance,” *TriQuarterly* 54 (Spring 1982): pp. 175–176. Reprinted in Peter Gena and Jonathan Brents, eds., *A John Cage Reader* (New York: C. F. Peters Corporation, 1982), pp. 107–120.
5. Merce Cunningham, “Two Questions and Five Dances,” *Dance Perspectives* no. 34 (issue titled *Time to Walk in Space*, Summer 1968): pp. 49/51.
6. Remy Charlip, “Composing by Chance,” *Dance Magazine* XXVIII no. 1 (January 1954): pp. 17/19.
7. John Heliker, interview with the author.
8. Charlip, “Composing by Chance,” p. 17.

SIXTEEN DANCES was composed in 1951 for Merce Cunningham and premiered by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and full ensemble on January 21, 1951 at the Hunter Playhouse (New York). The work is scored for flute, trumpet, four percussion, piano, violin, and cello.

By James Pritchett

The musical career of John Cage divides at the year 1951. Prior to this he was known as the composer of music for percussion ensembles and as the inventor of the “prepared piano”; a kind of one-performer percussion band. After 1951 Cage became the leading figure of the American avant-garde through his experiments with chance, indeterminacy, electronics, and multimedia. His early work uses new sonic resources for expressive ends, and is characterized by exotic timbres, rhythmic vigor, and, in the works for prepared piano, a unique sort of understated lyricism. His later work is the product of a different aesthetic, one in which personal expression is avoided. Instead, Cage worked to allow each sound in his music to be itself, completely independent and separate from all the others.

Sixteen Dances, begun at the very end of 1950 and completed just after New Year's 1951, sits right at this point of inflection in Cage's career. It was the last work that Cage composed before he committed himself to the use of chance operations. It represents an intermediate step in Cage's development of techniques that used predefined collections of sounds (“sound gamuts,” as he called them). Inspired by his work with the prepared piano, where each key of the instrument was made to have its own unique sound, he began in the late 1940's to write instrumental works where the collection of harmonies and sonorities was limited to a specific, unchanging collection. His orchestral

score for Merce Cunningham's ballet *The Seasons* (1947) is an early example, and his *String Quartet in Four Parts* (1949–1950) was a masterpiece created from a relatively small collection of sonorities. Following this, he began work on a concerto for prepared piano in which, for the first time, he used a chart of sounds: a tabular arrangement of the sound gamut.

He had already completed the first two movements of the concerto when he interrupted work on it to compose *Sixteen Dances*. Naturally, he turned here to a sound chart as well, a table of sixty-four different sounds arranged into eight rows of eight columns each. As with the earlier works, he used this device to deliberately limit his compositional choices: at any point in the piece only one of those sixty-four sounds could appear. Composition thus became a matter of moving from place to place on the chart, picking one sound out after another, then stringing them together rhythmically into phrases. To insure variety Cage added a twist to this system: over the course of the sixteen movements the contents of the chart gradually change, so that the sounds heard in the finale are completely different from those of the opening.

While the technique may appear dry and pedantic, its use was actually quite free, and in Cage's hands the sound chart was a formidable musical tool. He needed the flexibility to accommodate the program of the dances. Cunningham took as his subject the "permanent emotions" of Hindu aesthetics: anger, sorrow, the odious, fear, humor, the heroic, the wondrous, and the erotic. A ninth emotion, tranquility, pervades the other eight and is considered to be their common tendency. Dances representing the nine emotions alternate with non-specific "interludes". By various means—rhythms, dynamics, pacing, silences—Cage was able to mold the raw materials of the chart into expressions of the various emotions. The chart thus produced music which is in turn panic-stricken (fear), light-footed and quirky (humor), crabbed and ugly (the odious), bleak (sorrow), sensual and lithe (the erotic), and so on. Remarkable effects are produced in the interludes as

well: Cage is able to draw forth from the chart an innocent folk-like melody for the twelfth dance and even a blues number for the tenth.

These expressive moments demonstrate that his selection of sounds here was deliberate and not arbitrary or chance-driven. They are strongly reminiscent of Cage's earlier work, especially *The Seasons* and *String Quartet in Four Parts*. But the natural tendency of the chart technique did not point in this direction: it pointed instead to Cage's future and the music of chance. The tabular arrangement of sounds suggested to Cage the possibility of making arbitrary moves along its rows, columns, and diagonals to create unexpected continuities of sounds. Each of the sounds he had composed was interesting in itself and could be combined in limitless ways with the other sixty-three. The chart could be used like a kaleidoscope, jumbling and juxtaposing his sounds. He had already experimented with this technique in the first two movements of his new prepared piano concerto, and he brought it to bear on parts of *Sixteen Dances* as well. The fourteenth dance is a perfect example of this kind of chart music: enigmatic and imperturbable, its sounds proceed one after the other with no apparent connections. It is impossible to say whether or not Cage used chance in these movements. What we know for certain is that, immediately after completing *Sixteen Dances*, he turned again to his concerto and used the *I Ching* to compose its final movement.

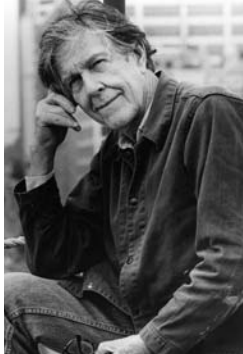
It reveals something of Cage's character that two of the "emotional" movements—the heroic and tranquility—are set in this latter style. Cage's vision of heroism was not one of powerful action, but was instead the heroism of accepting that which happens, of giving up control and allowing things to express themselves. Cage was inspired at this time by the work of composer Morton Feldman, and immediately after the premiere of *Sixteen Dances* he wrote his "Lecture on Something" as a tribute to Feldman. In it, he notes Feldman's having "changed the responsibility of the composer from making to accepting," and notes that "if one should object to calling Feldman a composer, one could call

him a hero." The finale of *Sixteen Dances* stems from this worldview, and is the most strikingly dramatic of the dances: the impassive continuity of the chart music unfolds over the constant sound of distant gongs. This tranquility, obtained through the heroism of a self-transcending discipline, is not just the overall tendency of these *Sixteen Dances*; it is the tendency of Cage's work from 1951 onwards.

James Pritchett is the author of the book *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

© 2009 James Pritchett

RIIS WIDSTRAND, LOS ANGELES, 1987
COURTESY OF THE JOHN CAGE TRUST



John Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde and is widely regarded as perhaps the most influential American composer of the 20th Century. The son of an inventor, Cage had an unremarkable and generally unmusical childhood. He attended two years of college, then left to travel in Europe. When he returned to the United States, he began to study seriously, first with Henry Cowell and then with

Arnold Schoenberg. It was at this time that he began writing in his own musical system, often using techniques similar to those of Schoenberg. In 1937 he moved to Seattle and took a job accompanying a dance company. From this experience, he began to view music as segments of time to be filled with sounds. During this period his music is marked by strict, mathematically devised proportions of time. He filled these segments with new sounds, including different objects used as percussion (brake drums, for example), electronic sounds, and prepared piano (a piano with objects placed between the strings to modify pitch and timbre).

In the 1940's he moved to New York and joined a group of avant-garde artists, including painters Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham. Cage was long associated with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company as a composer, performer, and music director. At about this same time, Cage developed an interest in Eastern religions. He continued his use of carefully structured segments of time, but began to fill them in with materials derived by chance processes (the rolling of dice, the use of the *I Ching*, and other methods). In perhaps the ultimate statement of this aesthetic, he wrote *4'33"*, a piece of total silence on the part of the performer and into which the random sounds of the world enter. This cemented his beliefs that the goal of music was "purposelessness," and that the role of the composer was to create situations in which sounds could "simply be."

To this end, he continued to devise strategies for creating activities in which sounds could happen. The most expansive example of this is *HPSCHD*, created with Lejaren Hiller. The piece is written for seven harpsichordists, various other performers, and fifty-one tapes, along with multiple films, slides, and light shows. Using various activities, the basic coordination of these elements is set in motion, and the audience walks among the performers over the course of five hours.

Cage is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1978 and to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1988. In 1982 the French Legion d'Honneur made Cage a Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In his later years, Cage turned to computers as an aid to his creation of pieces, and became interested in theater (or in his vision, circuses). Along with his musical contributions, he left a large collection of writings that explain and exemplify his aesthetic.



LIZ LINDER

Gil Rose is recognized as an important conductor helping to shape the future of classical music. Critics all over the world have praised his dynamic performances and many recordings. In 1996, he founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), the foremost professional orchestra dedicated exclusively to performing and recording music of the 20th and 21st Centuries. Under his leadership, BMOP's unique programming and high performance standards have attracted critical acclaim and earned the orchestra eleven ASCAP awards for adventurous programming as well as the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American

Music. In 2007 Mr. Rose was awarded Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Award as well as an ASCAP Concert Music award for his exemplary commitment to new American music. Since 2003 Mr. Rose has also served as Music Director of Opera Boston, a dynamic opera company in residence at the historic Cutler Majestic Theatre. During his tenure, Opera Boston has experienced exponential growth and is now acknowledged as one of the most important and innovative companies in America. He has curated the Fromm concerts at Harvard University and served as the Artistic Director of the Ditson Festival of Contemporary Music at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art.

As a guest conductor, Mr. Rose made his Tanglewood debut in 2002 and in 2003 he debuted with the Netherlands Radio Symphony as part of the Holland Festival. He has led the American Composers Orchestra, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra of the Ukraine, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana and the National Orchestra of Porto as well as several appearances with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players.

Since 2003, he has served as the Artistic Director of Opera Unlimited, a contemporary opera festival, and has led the world premiere of Elena Ruehr's *Toussaint Before the Spirits*, the New England premiere of Thomas Adès' *Powder Her Face*, as well as the revival of John Harbison's *Full Moon in March* with "skilled and committed direction" according to *The Boston Globe*. In 2006 Opera Unlimited presented the North American premiere of Peter Eötvös' *Angels in America* to critical acclaim.

Also recognized for interpreting standard operatic repertoire from Mozart to Bernstein, Mr. Rose's production of Verdi's *Luisa Miller* was hailed as an important operatic event. *The Boston Globe* recognized it as "the best Verdi production presented in Boston in the last 15 years." *The Boston Phoenix* has described Mr. Rose as "a Mozart conductor of energy and refinement." Mr. Rose's recording of Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* for Naxos has been hailed as an important achievement by the international press. In the 2007–08 season he led the Boston premier of Osvaldo Golijov's opera *Ainadamar* with Dawn Upshaw. In the 2009–10 season he will lead new productions of Rossini's *Tancredi* with Eva Podles, the premier of Zhou Long's new opera *Madame White Snake*, and Offenbach's *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* starring Stephanie Blyth.

Gil Rose's extensive discography includes world premiere recordings of music by Louis Andriessen, Derek Bermel, John Cage, Robert Erickson, Lukas Foss, Charles Fussell, Michael Gandolfi, John Harbison, Lee Hyla, David Lang, Tod Machover, Steven Mackey, Steven Paulus, David Rakowski, Bernard Rands, George Rochberg, Elena Ruehr, Gunther Schuller, Reza Vali, and Evan Ziporyn on such labels as Albany, Arsis, Cantaloupe, Chandos, ECM, Innova, Naxos, New World, and BMOP/sound, the Grammy-nominated label for which he serves as Executive Producer. His recordings have appeared on the year-end "Best of" lists of *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, *The Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *American Record Guide*, *NPR*, and *Downbeat Magazine*.

The **Boston Modern Orchestra Project** (BMOP) is widely recognized as the leading orchestra in the United States dedicated exclusively to performing new music, and its signature record label, BMOP/sound, is the nation's foremost label launched by an orchestra and solely devoted to new music recordings.

Founded in 1996 by Artistic Director Gil Rose, BMOP's mission is to illuminate the connections that exist naturally between contemporary music and contemporary society by reuniting composers and audiences in a shared concert experience. In its first twelve seasons, BMOP established a track record that includes more than 80 performances, over 70 world premieres (including 30 commissioned works), two Opera Unlimited festivals with Opera Boston, the inaugural Ditson Festival of Contemporary Music with the ICA/Boston, and 28 commercial recordings, including the inaugural recordings of BMOP/sound.

In March 2008, BMOP launched its signature record label, BMOP/sound, with John Harbison's ballet *Ulysses*. Its composer-centric releases focus on orchestral works that are otherwise unavailable in recorded form. The response to the label was immediate and celebratory; its five inaugural releases appeared on the "Best of 2008" lists of *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, National Public Radio, *Downbeat*, and *American Record Guide*, among others, and its recording of Charles Fussell's *Wilde* Symphony for baritone and orchestra received a 2009 Grammy Award nomination (Best Classical Vocal Performance). *The New York Times* proclaimed, "BMOP/sound is an example of everything done right. Distinctively packaged and smartly annotated, these eminently desirable discs augur a catalog likely to be as precious as that of another orchestra run initiative, the Louisville Orchestra's pioneering First Edition series." Additional BMOP recordings are available from Albany, Arsis, Chandos, ECM, Innova, Naxos, New World, and Oxingale.

In Boston, BMOP performs at Boston's Jordan Hall and Symphony Hall, and the orchestra has also performed in New York at Miller Theater, the Winter Garden, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, and The Lyceum in Brooklyn. A perennial winner of the ASCAP Award for



Adventurous Programming of Orchestral Music and 2006 winner of the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music, BMOP has appeared at the Celebrity Series (Boston, MA), Tanglewood, the Boston Cyberarts Festival, the Festival of New American Music (Sacramento, CA), and Music on the Edge (Pittsburgh, PA). In April 2008, BMOP headlined the 10th Annual MATA Festival in New York.

BMOP's greatest strength is the artistic distinction of its musicians and performances. Each season, Gil Rose, recipient of Columbia University's prestigious Ditson Conductor's Award as well as an ASCAP Concert Music award for his extraordinary contribution to new music, gathers together an outstanding orchestra of dynamic and talented young performers, and presents some of the world's top vocal and instrumental soloists. *The Boston Globe* claims, "Gil Rose is some kind of genius; his concerts are wildly entertaining, intellectually rigorous, and meaningful." Of BMOP performances, *The New York Times* says: "Mr. Rose and his team filled the music with rich, decisive ensemble colors and magnificent solos. These musicians were rapturous—superb instrumentalists at work and play."

John Cage

Sixteen Dances

Alicia DiDonato Paulsen, flute; Joseph Foley, trumpet; Robert Schulz, percussion; Craig McNutt, percussion; Bill Manley, percussion; Nathan Davis, percussion; Nina Ferrigno, piano; Gabriela Diaz, violin; Rafael Popper-Keizer, cello

Producer	Gil Rose
Recording and editing	Joel Gordon and David Corcoran
SACD authoring	Brad Michel

Sixteen Dances is published by Henmar Press Inc. Sole selling agent C.F. Peters Corp. All Rights Reserved. Used with permission.

Sixteen Dances was recorded on April 6, 2007 in Jordan Hall at New England Conservatory (Boston, MA).



This recording was made possible in part by the Fromm Music Foundation, and with the cooperation of the Boston Musicians' Association.

Special thanks to Laura Kuhn (director, John Cage Trust), David Vaughan (archivist, Merce Cunningham Dance Company), and Ana Keilson (film and video archivist, Merce Cunningham Dance Company).

© 2009 BMOP/sound 1012



Design: John Kramer and Robb Ogle

Cover art: John Cage, *New River Watercolor, Series I, No. 5* (1988)

Photographer: Ray Kass and the Mountain Lake Workshop
Courtesy of the John Cage Trust

Booklet 50% recycled (25% post consumer).
Vegetable based inks throughout.

