

“... a time to keep silence, and a time to speak ...” (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

## John Cage (1912–1992) Some of “The Harmony of Maine”

Transcription for organ of ten registers by Christopher Anderson

Presented by Codex Fest @Bridwell Library  
Perkins Chapel, Southern Methodist University  
April 18, 19, and 20, 2023 at 8:30 a.m.

- Alpha C.M. *My soul, repeat his praise, whose mercies are so great;  
whose anger is so slow to rise, so ready to abate.*
- Majesty C.M. *Behold the glories of the Lamb, amidst his father's throne!  
Prepare new honors for his name, and songs before unknown.*
- Harmony C.M. *Come let us join our cheerful songs, with angels round the throne.  
Ten thousand are their tongues, but all their joys are one.*
- Creation L.M. *The spacious firmament on high, with all the blue ethereal sky  
and nspire'd heavens a shining frame, their great original proclaim.*
- Hallowell S.M. *O let thy God and King, thy sweetest tho'ts employ;  
thy children shall his honours sing in palaces of joy.*
- Advent C.M. *The Lord descended from above, and bow'd the heav'n's most high;  
and underneath his feet he cast the darkness of the sky.  
On Cherubs and on Cherubims full royally he rode.  
And on the wings of mighty wind came flying all abroad.*
- Turner L.M. *Thy mercies, Lord, shall be my song, my song on them shall ever dwell:  
To ages yet unborn, my tongue thy never failing truth shall tell.*
- Sunday C.M. *Arise, arise! The Lord arose on this triumphant day;  
your souls to piety disclose, arise to bless and pray.*
- St. John's C.M. *With cheerful notes let all the earth to heav'n their voices raise.  
Let all nspire'd with godly mirth sing solemn hymns of praise.*
- Invitation L.M. *Child of the summer, charming rose, no longer in confinement lie;  
Arise! To light thy form disclose, rival the spangles of the sky.  
The rains are gone, the storms are o'er, winter retires to make the way,  
come then thou sweetly blushing flow'r, come lovely stranger, come away.  
The sun is drest in beaming smiles to give thy beauties to the day,  
young zephyrs wait with gentlest gales to fan thy bosom as they play.*
- Transmigration *Come let us renew, our journey pursue, roll round with the year,  
and never stand still till our master appear.  
His adorable will let us gladly fulfil, and our talents improve,  
by the patience of hope and the labour of love.*

*Our life is a dream, our time as a stream glides swiftly away,  
 And the fugitive moment refuses to stay:  
 The arrow is flown, the moment is gone,  
 the millennial year rushes on to our view, and eternity's here.  
 O that each on the day of his coming may say,  
 I have fought my way thro', I have finish'd the work thou did'st give me to do.  
 O that each from the Lord may receive the glad word,  
 Well and faithfully done, enter into my joy, and sit down on my throne.*

The Lilly P.M.

*Peaceful and lowly in their native soil, they neither know to spin nor care to  
 toil; yet with confess'd magnificence deride our mean attire, and impotence  
 of pride.*

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Organist: Christopher Anderson  
 Assistants: Lisa Anderson, Valerie Stagaman  
 Organ: Robert L. Sipe, Inc. (Dallas, 1969/1997)

John Cage composed his *Some of "The Harmony of Maine"* in 1978, the first of three works for organ. (The others are *Souvenir* from 1983 and *Organ2/ASLSP* from 1987, the latter having been given in Perkins Chapel in a sixteen-hour version in April 2022.) The piece uses as its departure point the New England tune book *The Harmony of Maine*, published in 1794 by Supply Belcher (1751–1836). The names of the movements are the eighteenth-century tune names, and the abbreviations (C.M. common meter, L.M. long meter, S.M. short meter, P.M. peculiar meter) indicate the standard metrical patterns of the texts set to the music. Cage's compositional premise is an exercise in reduction on multiple levels: using chance procedures, he has abridged the original's contents from sixty-three to thirteen pieces, and he has reduced all the textures to three parts (some originals were in four parts), assigned to the two keyboards and one pedalboard of the organ. Further chance operations have extended the length of some pitches while wholly eliminating others. Yet another chance mechanism has imposed upon the whole a lively timbral landscape, so that the organ is often required to change registration on every pitch that survived into Cage's score. The result is an out-of-focus yet vibrant residue of the 1794 original: hence the *Some of* in Cage's title.

Cage requires an organ of thirty-one registers (stops) and six assistants to manage them, though the Perkins Chapel organ heard today has only ten stops. I have used yet another chance procedure to transcribe *Some of "The Harmony of Maine"* to fit the tonal spectrum of the instrument at hand, now needing only two assistants. I also have included in the above program the texts (lyrics) from the 1794 model, though Cage does not cite them. His point is entirely one of musical process that isolates sounds to be enjoyed in and of themselves. He would vehemently oppose any rationalized overlay of extramusical "meaning." The audience is invited into an extraordinary experience of listening, one in which silence ("nothing") lays claim to as much integrity as sound ("something"). Cage here quite literally deconstructs European functional harmony into a kaleidoscope of discrete sounds made to stand on their own.

