



SOUTHWEST  
CHAMBER  
MUSIC

# *Project Muse Guide – April 2011*

## LYNN VARTAN - PERCUSSION

This presentation will focus on the music of John Cage  
performed by Lynn Vartan

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### ABOUT LYNN VARTAN



**Lynn Vartan, percussion**, is an active performer and educator who is an advocate for diversity in music. As a new music percussionist, Lynn has worked with Michael Colgrass, Donald Crockett, Vinny Golia, Arthur Jarvinen, Ursula Oppens, Joan Tower, Glen Velez and Xtet, and is known for her athleticism and exciting energy on stage. She has commissioned and/or performed new music by composers Crockett, Hoey, Krausas, Muhl and Naidoo. As a soloist, she has been featured on the Los Angeles Philharmonic Green Umbrella Series, the Different Trains Series and the USC Contemporary and Percussion Ensembles. In February 2003, Lynn recorded Stephen Hartke's *Tituli* with the Hilliard Ensemble for release on the ECM series. Lynn performed with the Tambuco Percussion Ensemble on Southwest Chamber Music's *Complete Chamber Works of Carlos Chavez, Volume 3*, which was nominated as Best Classical Album for the 2005 Grammy Awards.

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### ABOUT SOUTHWEST CHAMBER MUSIC



Two-time GRAMMY® Award-winning Southwest Chamber Music has been bringing PROJECT MUSE in-school performances to schools throughout Los Angeles County since 1994 with music that reflects the vast diversity of art music from around the world. We perform throughout the year in venues throughout Los Angeles County, including the Armory Center for the Arts, The Colburn School, and a summer festival at The Huntington Library.

## FEATURED COMPOSER



**John Milton Cage Jr.** (September 5, 1912 – August 12, 1992) was an American composer, philosopher, poet, music theorist, artist, printmaker, and amateur mycologist and mushroom collector. A pioneer of chance music, electronic music and non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. He was also instrumental in the development of modern dance, mostly through his association with choreographer Merce Cunningham, who was also Cage's romantic partner for most of their lives.

Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition 4'33", the three movements of which are performed without a single note being played. The content of the composition is meant to be perceived as the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed, rather than merely as four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence, and the piece became one of the most controversial compositions of the twentieth century. Another famous creation of Cage's is the prepared piano (a piano with its sound altered by placing various objects in the strings), for which he wrote numerous dance-related works and a few concert pieces, the best known of which is Sonatas and Interludes (1946–48).

His teachers included Henry Cowell (1933) and Arnold Schoenberg (1933–35), both known for their radical innovations in music, but Cage's major influences lay in various Eastern cultures. Through his studies of Indian philosophy and Zen Buddhism in the late 1940s, Cage came to the idea of chance-controlled music, which he started composing in 1951. The I Ching, an ancient Chinese classic text on changing events, became Cage's standard composition tool for the rest of his life. In a 1957 lecture, *Experimental Music*, he described music as "a purposeless play" which is "an affirmation of life – not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living".

## FEATURED WORK

*Child of Tree* is a composed improvisation for plant materials. Cage specifies amplified cactus and pea pod shakers as two of ten "instruments" that are to be chosen by the performer. The aleatory is realized on three levels. First by the interpretation of the "score": the instructions provided are written out in rough-draft-form in Cage's chicken scratch, with words, sentences and paragraphs crossed out and scribbled over. The difficulty of reading the words and the ambiguity of what is and what is not crossed out adds an element of chance to the construction. Second, by the means of composing the structure: prior to the performance, the performer throws coins and interprets the results (heads or tails) by the oracle of the I Ching (the Chinese Book of Changes). These chance operations determine how many sections the prescribed 8 minutes is to be divided, the lengths of those sections and which instruments are to be used in which sections. And thirdly, aleatory is realized in the performance, which is simply an improvisation. The performer is instructed to "clarify the time structure by means of the instruments," but even though the performance is completely designed by the performer, an element of chance still exists "because the improvisation can't be based on taste and memory since one doesn't know the instruments" (John Cage in an interview, 1982).

## **MUSICAL VOCABULARY** (from the California Standards for the Arts, unless noted otherwise)

**CHANCE OPERATION** is a means of making a decision and how relinquishing control changes the outcome.

**DYNAMICS** are various degrees of volume in the performance of music, such as loud and soft.

**EXTENDED TECHNIQUES** are unconventional, unorthodox or “improper” techniques of playing musical instruments, in order to expand and explore the possibilities of different instruments.

The **I-CHING** is an ancient Chinese oracle book that deals with philosophy and divination.

**IMPROVISATION** is the spontaneous creation of music.

An **INTERVAL** is the distance in pitch between two tones.

The **MARIMBA** is a musical instrument in the percussion family. Keys or bars (usually made of wood) are struck with mallets to produce musical tones. The keys are arranged as those of a piano. The modern marimba was developed by Japanese and American builders based on the Hispanic-American traditional marimba.

A **MELODY** is an organized sequence of single notes.

The **METER** is the grouping of beats by which a piece of music is measured.

The **PERCUSSION FAMILY** includes all musical instruments that are played by being struck.

**PONTICELLO** is a string instrument technique where one plays on the bridge of the instrument to achieve a special effect.

**RHYTHM** is the combination of long and short, even and uneven sounds that convey a sense of movement in time.

**SCORDATURA** is an alternate tuning used for the open strings of a string instrument. It is an extended technique used to allow the playing of otherwise impossible melodies, harmonies, figures, chords, or other note combinations.

A **SCORE** is the written form of the entire composition. All players have a part of the score for their instrument, unless they have memorized the notes.

**SOUND PERCEPTION** is how you interpret what you hear and where you hear it.

The **TIMBRE** is the tone color or character of sound heard.

The **TONALITY (KEY)** is the tonal center of a composition.

**TREMOLO** is a shaking sound which is achieved by repeating the same note extremely quickly or by playing two notes very quickly, one after the other.

**TUNING** is to adjust a music instrument to the desired frequency or pitch.

### **CONTINUE LEARNING WITH THESE INTERNET RESOURCES:**

*For more information on **Lynn Vartan**, visit:*

<http://www.lynnvartan.com>

*For more information on our featured composer **John Cage**, visit these websites:*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Cage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cage)

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/john-cage/about-the-composer/471/>

<http://www.johncage.info/>

*To try to **create your own composition** at:*

[www.creatingmusic.com](http://www.creatingmusic.com)

*Another excellent interactive website for kids with **information about instruments** is:*

[www.playmusic.org](http://www.playmusic.org)



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iTunes, [www.classiconline.com](http://www.classiconline.com) &

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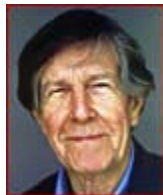
*For more information and to access exciting educational videos and podcasts:*

1.800.726.7147 or visit our website [www.swmusic.org](http://www.swmusic.org)

And find us on  [www.facebook.com/southwestchambermusic](http://www.facebook.com/southwestchambermusic)

**Come to Our Concerts!**

## **Cage 2012 Festival**



**Armory Center for the Arts**

145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena, CA 91103

**Friday, April 8 at 8PM**

**Saturday, April 9 at 8PM**

**Sunday, April 10 at 8PM**

Southwest Chamber Music's educational programs are funded in part by the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, California Arts Council, The Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division, D'Addario Music Foundation, Dept. of Cultural Affairs – City of Los Angeles, Fletcher Jones Foundation, Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, Henry Family Fund, James Irvine Foundation, Lluella Morey Murphey Foundation, Los Angeles County Arts Commission, Metropolitan Associates, National Endowment for the Arts, Pasadena Arts League, Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts, Pasadena Tournament of Roses Foundation, Sidney Stern Memorial Trust, and Wells Fargo Foundation.

[www.swmusic.org](http://www.swmusic.org)