

Play What You Like: Fluxus, Music & More . . .

Jade Dellinger

Drawing its title from an early work (included here) by Italian Fluxus artist Giuseppe Chiari and celebrating the profound impact and enduring legacy of John Cage, *Play What You Like: Fluxus Music & More* is a chance-based and interactive installation featuring visual art by the pioneering composer, his circle of friends, collaborators and other notable artists influenced by the movement Cage helped to inspire.

Often relying on chance to shape the outcome and actively engaging the viewer, Fluxus art, events and scores for performances involved simple actions, ideas, and objects from everyday life. Incorporating concrete poetry, visual art, and writing, Fluxus performances were the embodiment of Dick Higgins' idea of "intermedia"—a dialogue between two or more disciplines to create a third, entirely new art form. Yet, as many of the Fluxus artists had formal training in music, musical composition and performance—frequently involving the alteration, misuse or abuse of traditional instruments—became central to their activity. Beginning with a series of festivals featuring concerts of experimental music and other avant-garde performance, Fluxus artists reacted against the commodification of art, its commercialization in the gallery system, and its static presentation in museums. A primary goal of most Fluxus artists was to destroy any boundary between art and life. Founder George Maciunas stated that Fluxus was "anti-art," to underscore the revolutionary mode of thinking about the practice and process of art while using humor to mock the elitist world of "high art" and bring art to the widest possible audience.

Featuring original Fluxus participants Philip Corner, Dick Higgins, Giuseppe Chiari, Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Joe Jones, Yoko Ono and Milan Knížák, as well as Laurie Anderson, David Byrne, Glenn Branca, Dave Muller, Stephen Vitiello and Christian Marclay, among others, the exhibition *Play What You Like: Fluxus Music & More* also includes the New York premiere of a special variation on John Cage's much-celebrated *33 1/3*.

Conceived in 1969 as a visitor participation piece, Cage's *33 1/3* encourages gallerygoers to interact freely with a room full of record players and stacks of vinyl Lps. However, as the composer never specified Lp titles for use in the installation, a prominent group of "guest curators," including Iggy Pop, Richie Ramone, Lee Ranaldo, Pauline Oliveros, Meredith Monk, John Baldessari, William Wegman, Bryan Ferry (Roxy Music), Joan La Barbara, David Harrington (Kronos Quartet), Graham Nash, Terry Allen, Vito Acconci, Matthew Barney, Jim Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha and others have been invited to submit Top 10 picks to fill record bins at Howl! Happening.

Each "guest curator" for John Cage's *33 1/3 - Performed by Audience* was given the freedom to determine their own approach for making selections. Many included records to which they had contributed, while others (like Mike Kelley, The Residents, and Alex James from Blur) were resolute about not including their own recordings. Some approached the challenge with the potential blend of music and voice foremost in mind, like David Byrne in committing entirely to obscure spoken word Lps (from Alfred Wolfsohn's *Vox Humana: Experiments in the Extension of The Human Vocal Range* on Folkways Records to the recordings of Frank Zappa protégé Wild Man Fischer, and the poet T.S. Eliot). Blixa Bargeld of the industrial noise band Einstürzende Neubauten reverently dedicated his entire Top 10 to a wide array of John Cage records, while Yoko Ono focused wholly on her own recordings (and those of her late husband John Lennon and son Sean Ono Lennon). Jack White (The White Stripes) provided special pressings from his Third Man Records label, and Emil Schult from the Teutonic electronic music pioneers Kraftwerk contributed vintage vinyl from his personal record collection.

As artist/participant Lee Ranaldo recently recalled: "I remember John talking about how he didn't like to listen to a record more than once. What was the point? If one gave oneself over to

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the experience the first time, then why repeat? He didn't really care for the idea of music as 'fixed in time' on a black platter. He said he'd rather open the window and listen to the trucks rolling by, or whatever else was coming in—the constantly changing music of 'NOW' rather than a packaged simulacra of 'then.'"

The duration of *33 1/3* is indeterminate. When first performed at the University of California, Davis, the audience interacted with John Cage's record installation for nearly four hours. However, *33 1/3 - Performed by Audience* at Howl! Happening is accessible on a daily basis—during regular gallery hours (and for the occasional special event). As Cage would have expected, the work remains "silent" when there are no visitors to interact with it—and cacophonous (or perhaps most musical) when fully occupied by audience-performers. As John Cage famously surmised: "Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music."

An intimate friend and collaborator of Bob Rauschenberg's, the composer once noted: "I am very happy to have known Marcel Duchamp and to be living still in the time of Rauschenberg. . . I am not interested in the names of movements but rather in seeing and making *things not seen before*." As Director of the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida Southwestern State College and guest curator of this exhibition, it is my hope that *Play What You Like: Fluxus Music & More* satisfies that simple objective.