

MELBOURNE  
FESTIVAL  
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OCTOBER 2018

# ZUBIN KANGA JOHN CAGE SONATAS & INTERLUDES

Wednesday 12 October 6pm | Salon

*Presented by Melbourne Recital Centre in association with Melbourne Festival*

## ARTIST

**Zubin Kanga**, solo piano

## PROGRAM

**John Cage** (1912-1992)

**Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano** (1946-1948)

Sonata I

Sonata II

Sonata III

Sonata IV

First Interlude

Sonata V

Sonata VI

Sonata VII

Sonata VIII

Second Interlude

Third Interlude

Sonata IX

Sonata X

Sonata XI

Sonata XII

Fourth Interlude

Sonata XIII

Sonata XIV and XV ("Gemini" - after the work by Richard Lippold)

Sonata XVI



## ABOUT THE MUSIC

John Cage towers over modern American music as one of its most original musical voices, and most influential iconoclasts. Cage's music spans many styles and approaches, from his work with chance operations (using dice and the Chinese 'Book of Changes', the *I Ching*) to his many collaborations with dancers and choreographers including his partner, Merce Cunningham, to his experimentation with graphic notation. Perhaps his most famous work is *4'33"* (1948). Consisting of four minutes and 33 seconds of silence, it's often unfairly used as the punchline for jokes about experimental music, though it deserves to be seen as Cage intended it - as a deeply profound exploration of the rituals of performance and the intensity of performed silence: two obsessions that can be found throughout his oeuvre.

One of Cage's most significant innovations was his radical expansion of the 'prepared piano'. Although he was not the first to stick objects between the strings of a piano to alter its sound, the extent and complexity of preparations that Cage developed set a new benchmark which has rarely been surpassed. Inserting screws, bolts, rubber, plastic and other objects between the strings, Cage was able to produce a range of percussive sounds, that were strange and modern as well as recalling the sounds of ancient instruments of other cultures, particularly the gongs of Indonesian Gamelan and the drumming sounds of Indian tablas. The most famous of these works, and one of Cage's crowning achievements is the *Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano* (1946-1948).

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The Sonatas and Interludes established Cage's reputation as a composer of international standing. The dedicatee, Maro Ajemian performed the work widely, including at Carnegie Hall and Cage himself performed the work on tours around the USA and Europe, meeting Olivier Messiaen who organised a performance for his students, and beginning a friendship with Pierre Boulez. It was first introduced to Australian audiences by the composer-pianist Nigel Butterley in 1973, and it has influenced several generations of Australian composers since, although live performances in Australia remain relatively rare.

The work is made up of 16 Sonatas (in binary form, mimicking the structure of the pre-classical sonatas of composers like Scarlatti) and four Interludes which are much more varied in structure and through-composed. The Sonatas combine their traditional forms with a modern approach to their internal structure, with the same numeric proportions found on each level of magnification, from the detail of the rhythms to the number of bars in each phrase, giving the works a beautiful fractal geometry. At the time of composition, Cage was influenced by the Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who described nine 'rasas' (emotional states) found in Indian music. Cage stated that all the rasas could be found among the movements, the four white emotions (humour, wonder, erotic, and heroic) and the four black emotions (anger, fear, disgust, and sorrow) with the ninth emotion, tranquility, present throughout the work.

The preparation of the piano creates a new instrument, a meta-piano which varies according to the specific materials used and the idiosyncracies of each piano. The work is thus re-composed every time the piano is prepared, building the sound world afresh for each performance. In formulating my approach to the preparations, I communicated with a number of leading new music specialists around the world who had extensive experience of performing the work, including Rolf Hind (UK), John Snijders (Netherlands) Adam Tendler (USA) and Luk Vaes (Belgium), who had measured and photographed all of Cage's original preparations. As far as possible, I have attempted to source materials close to those Cage would have used, although some of the plastic and rubber materials that would have been available at a hardware store in 1946 needed substitution for modern equivalents. Above all, my aim has been to be true to Cage's unique and paradoxical aesthetic: modern, cerebral, mechanistic and complex, as well as being ancient, spiritual, tender and ecstatic.

*Words by Zubin Kanga*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

London-based Australian pianist, Zubin Kanga has performed solo recitals across Europe, Australia and the USA, including at the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh, Occupy the Pianos (UK), Manifeste (France) Borealis (Norway), Metropolis and BIFEM (Australia) festivals as well as appearing as soloist with the London Sinfonietta and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He is a member of Ensemble Offspring, and has also performed with the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Ensemble Plus-Minus, Endymion Ensemble, and the Kreutzer Quartet, as well as performing piano duos with Rolf Hind and Thomas Adès.

Zubin has won many prizes for his performances, including the 2012 Art Music Award for 'Performance of the Year (NSW)', the Michael Kieran Harvey Scholarship, the Limelight Award for Best Newcomer and the Greta Parkinson Prize from the Royal Academy of Music. His recent recordings include *Not Music Yet* (Hospital Hill Recordings), *Orfordness* (Metier) and *Piano Inside Out* (Move Records), which was nominated for Best Classical Album at the Australian Independent Music Awards.

Zubin has collaborated with many of the world's leading composers including Thomas Adès, Michael Finnissy, George Benjamin and Steve Reich and premiered more than 60 works. A Masters and PhD graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, London, he is now a Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Nice and IRCAM (Paris) and a Research Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music.

[zubinkanga.com](http://zubinkanga.com)

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