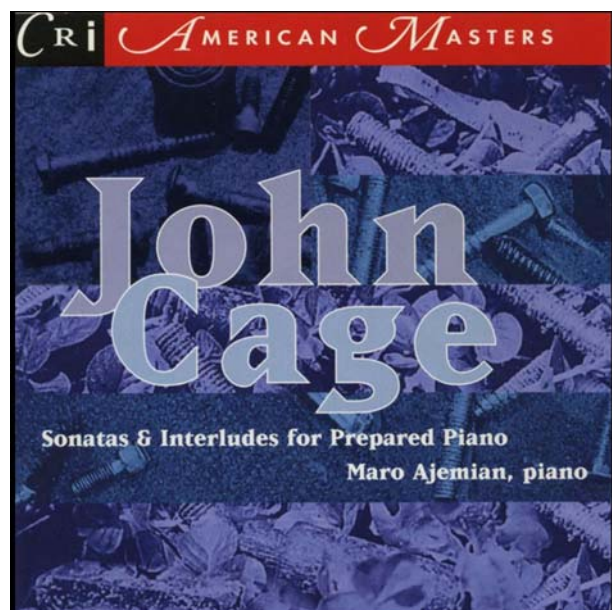


John Cage

Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano (1946-48)

1. Sonata I	(2:59)
2. Sonata II	(2:22)
3. Sonata III.....	(2:28)
4. Sonata IV.....	(3:08)
5. First Interlude	(3:40)
6. Sonata V.....	(1:25)
7. Sonata VI.....	(2:17)
8. Sonata VII	(2:27)
9. Sonata VIII.....	(2:50)
10. Second Interlude.....	(4:12)
11. Third Interlude	(2:59)
12. Sonata IX.....	(3:58)
13. Sonata X.....	(3:29)
14. Sonata XI.....	(3:21)
15. Sonata XII	(4:11)
16. Fourth Interlude.....	(2:40)
17. Sonata XIII.....	(4:00)
18. Sonata XIV and XV	(7:04)
19. Sonata XVI.....	(5:02)

Maro Ajemian, piano

Total playing time: 66:53

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Notes

“Oh, damn it! I wish I'd thought of that!” Lou Harrison, on the invention by John Cage of the prepared piano.

John Cage (1912-1992) wrote the *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano gradually between 1946 and 1948. Maro Ajemian, to whom the work is dedicated, premiered the first four in performance at Town Hall in 1946, and she gave the first New York performance of the full set at a celebrated concert in Carnegie Recital Hall on January 12, 1949. The concert was considered a milestone in Cage's career, the *Sonatas and Interludes* instantly recognized as both the culmination of Cage's decade of writing for the prepared piano and as his first genuine masterpiece.

“John Cage came into his own last night both as an innovator and a composer,” Ross Parmenter wrote the next day in the *New York Times*. “It left one with the feeling that Mr. Cage is now one of the country's finest composers and that his invention has now been vindicated musically.” Although the *Sonatas and Interludes* has become among the most performed and recorded of Cage's works, the original recording of it by Ajemian in 1951 for Dial Records and reissued here for the first time on CD was always considered by Cage, who had often at the time played the work himself, definitive.

Cage spoke a good deal about the *Sonatas and Interludes* and the prepared piano throughout his long career, and the following quotes by Cage come from a miscellany source of published interviews, of Cage's private correspondence and his writings.

—Mark Swed

After reading the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, I decided to attempt the expression in music of the “permanent emotions” of Indian traditions: the heroic, the erotic, the wondrous, the mirthful, sorrow, fear, anger, the odious and their common tendency toward tranquility.

A set of preparations for the *Sonatas and Interludes* is not available. There are not only differences in screws or bolts but also in pianos (of the same make and size). I would say then that using my table as a set of suggestions, choose objects that do not become dislodged or in other ways stand out from the music. You will often be able to tell whether your preparation is good by whether or not the cadences “work.”

If you want to adhere to past models, listen to the recording by Maro Ajemian...and then attempt to imitate that preparation.

I had written the structure so that I knew the length of the phrases of the piece from the beginning to the end. I placed objects on the strings, deciding their position according to the sounds that resulted....Having those preparations of the piano and playing with them on the keyboard in an improvisatory way, I found melodies and combinations of sounds that worked with the given structure.

Coomaraswamy insisted that certain ideas were true and that these ideas were to be found in both the Occident and the Orient. My first reaction was to express this idea as far as I could in discourse. So I wrote *Sonatas and Interludes*. In it there are some pieces with bell-like sounds that suggest Europe and others with a drum-like resonance that suggest the East. The last piece is clearly European. It was the signature of a composer from the West.

Composing for the prepared piano is not a criticism of the instrument. I'm only being practical.

The first eight, the twelfth and the last four sonatas are written in AABB rhythmic structures of varying proportions, whereas the first two interludes have no structural repetitions. This difference is exchanged in the last two interludes and the sonatas nine through eleven, which have respectively a prelude, interlude, and postlude.

When Bach societies couldn't obtain eighteenth century harpsichords they employed thumb tacks on the piano hammers. Hot jazz pianists have used the newspaper idea for years.

Just as you go along the beach and pick up pretty shells that please you, I go into the piano and find sounds I like. This is the sound Virgil Thomson calls a ping affected by a thud.

There's none of this boom, boom, boom business in my music. In my music a measure is taken as a strict measure of time—not a one, two, three, four—which I fill with various sounds. Beethoven, whose music was based on harmonic structure, might write eight measures one day and change it to six the next. Such a thing would not occur to me. Beethoven could vary his measures, but never the key of the music. In my music, the number of measures is invariable, but I don't have to confine myself to a certain key or octave. The notes stand by themselves.

The sonatas of *Sonatas and Interludes* follow the Italian, not the German form, AABB, though some of the later ones diverge from that through development of the interludes preceding, between, or following the repeated parts, as I recall.

My only suggestion is that if you enjoy playing the *Sonatas and Interludes* then do it so that it seems right to you.

—John Cage

As a virtuoso pianist dedicated to contemporary music, **Maro Ajemian** was a true pioneer. She was born in Switzerland in 1921 and came to New York a year later with her Armenian parents. After piano lessons from her mother, she won a city-wide music competition at the age of six, received a medal from Frank Damrosch, founder of the Institute of Musical Art (which later merged with Juilliard Graduate School to form the Juilliard School), and enrolled as the youngest student in the history of the school.

Ajemian made her Town Hall debut in 1940, and in 1942 she was selected to play a concerto with the Juilliard Orchestra. She chose to perform a work which she had discovered by the unknown Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian. Her second Town Hall concert, on April 14, 1946, established her, in the words of the *New York Herald-Tribune's* Virgil Thomson, as "a true child of her time." The second half of that program consisted of works by John Cage, Alan Hovhaness, Paul

Bowles, Richard Yardumian, and Khachaturian and marked the first time that any works by these composers had been performed in recital. The program included a two-piano work by Hovhaness which Ajemian performed in duet with the composer, and Cage's *Four Sonatas for Prepared Piano* which were written for the occasion and later expanded into the *Sonatas and Interludes*. Ajemian's recording of the complete work was issued in 1951 by Dial Records in a two-LP set.

Ajemian frequently programmed Cage's prepared piano works on her recitals. But after numerous situations where concert sponsors feared that their Steinway B pianos would be damaged, Cage provided Ajemian with a letter from Steinway assuring one and all that no harm would result. Among the other prepared piano works which became associated with Ajemian, there was also Cage's score for the surrealist film by Max Ernst, *Dreams That Money Can Buy*.

It was on the recommendations of Cage and Lou Harrison that Ajemian acquainted herself with Hovhaness, a fellow Armenian. After meeting him in Boston in 1944, she organized the Friends of Armenian Music Committee in New York which broke the ice for Hovhaness with two very successful concerts of his orchestral music at Carnegie Hall in 1947 and Town Hall in 1949. Both as a performer and repertoire consultant to such producers as Edward Cole of MGM Records, David Hall of Mercury Records, and George Avakian, better known for his legendary jazz productions, Ajemian was directly responsible for the first forty-one recordings of Hovhaness's music and the first four of Cage's.

Maro Ajemian often performed with her sister, the violinist Anahid Ajemian. Both appeared in the historic Hovhaness concerts and both were signed to recording contracts with MGM Records. They commissioned and recorded double concerti by Ernst Krenek, Lou Harrison, and Carlos Surinach. Among other composers who wrote for them were Henry Cowell, Wallingford Riegger, Ben Weber, and Andrew Imbrie. In 1952, they became the first musicians to receive the American Composers Alliance's Laurel Leaf Award for Distinguished Service to American Music.

The Ajemians were among the first young American musicians to tour Europe after World War II. They performed American music in their Paris and London debuts in 1949 and during an extensive European tour in 1951, they introduced audiences to the music of Ives, Rudhyar, and Ruggles, among others. In 1978, Maro Ajemian died of a heart attack in Houston, Texas, where she lived with her husband, the business executive Lionel Galstaun. Anahid Ajemian continues to perform contemporary music as a member of the Composers String Quartet since its founding in 1963.

Production Notes

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