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## Editorial

The *International Conference JOHN CAGE 101* took place at the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia in August 2013. This event was supported by the university (UPSI), the American Embassy, and a wide variety of contributors including musicians, composers, musicologists, academics and attenders from Malaysia, other parts of South East Asia, Australia, Europe and the United States of America. The Malaysian Music Journal is privileged to publish this special issue of a selection of papers emanating from this conference – a landmark and unique event in Malaysian musical performance and research presentations.

John Cage's centenary occurred in 2012 and was celebrated throughout the world. Here at the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, we celebrated JOHN CAGE 101 – past, present and future – as, in the words of the conference Chair, Dr Andrew Blackburn, an opportunity 'for highly creative approaches to sharing our researched knowledge.' (CAGE101 Programme booklet.) 'In recent years', he states, 'our understanding of music(ological) research and performance has expanded allowing new questions and forms of knowledge to be posed and explored. Performance, creation, talking about, and kinesthetically experiencing music, are all forms of knowledge and valid artifacts of research. It is a testament to the vibrancy of our field of research that our conference programme includes so many different forms of presentation – papers, paper/performances and pure performances, taking us beyond words into the realm of sound, thought, and embodiment' (ibid.).

*I remember loving sound before I ever took a music lesson. And so we make our lives by what we love.*

– John Cage, *Lecture on Nothing* (1949)

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The experience of informing – unravelling design and structures of the musical work, simultaneous theoretical, philosophical and performative questioning, changing perceptions, and challenging pre-conceived ideas and practices – underpinned my personal conference presentation, *Within and beyond the flute cage: Performing Ryoanji*. A discussion of performative processes and insights gained from the experience of performance was centred on this extraordinary work for solo flute and percussion. How the music creates a space and context for new discoveries in sound, aspects of self-realisation occurring in the performer and refreshed understandings of time evolving from an initial curiosity with the score and Cage's somewhat enigmatic instructions for performance were explored. *Ryoanji* is a musical translation of a garden; it creates 'sound as nature' (Cage, score notes); it celebrates the unintentional

aspects of microtones, fragile multiphonics, fragmented but mobile pitches that trace across the page and through the flute (representing stones) – in a dialogue of unbounded intimacy with the dry, sharp and irregular percussion pitches (representing sand). These reflections on the conflicts of expectation, removal of pre-conceived perceptions and layering of possible (and debatable) meanings and responses captured many of the elements of the meta event: the conference as a whole, as it aimed to expand horizons, and to challenge and question individual and community sonic values and relationships. Intersections of East/West cultures of sounds, notations, representations, rituals, and implications; John Cage’s music gives us the opportunity to explore all of these within the context of our inner selves, our sonic selves and the selves of others, and to create new understandings of both.

*What is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of a paradox: a purposeful purposeless or a purposeless play. This play, however, 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, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.*

– John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961)

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The conference inspired papers and performances that created encounters and reflective analyses, correspondences and forum discussions, and the establishment of a lively and vibrant cross cultural environment. Its Malaysian location brought distinctive opportunities to create links with and through Malaysian music and composers, performers, and academics. Distinguished keynote speakers presented papers and performances. Dr Warren Burt and Dr Catherine Schieve collaborated with local musicians to create *Memento Memori, a Malaysian Circus on The Garden of Evening Mists* – a remarkable work based on Tan Twan Eng’s novel *The Garden of Evening Mists* – for electronic music, live performers and visual images; further performances of chamber works, works for prepared piano, voice with electronics, works mixing traditional and contemporary instruments and electroacoustic pieces were programmed. In this issue of the Malaysian Music Journal we are pleased to include a cross section of these presentations, ranging from technological processes developed for the performance of Cage’s work to practitioner experiences of electroacoustic music in Malaysia. Composers articulate their own practices, performers discuss variants on Cagean inspired presentations, and musicologists present thoughts on Cagean influences in Malaysia.

We begin with Associate Professor Dr Valerie Ross’ *Cue From Cage: Designing ‘Ragaslendra’* – a Malaysian composer’s personal reflection on the influences of Western and non-Western theories on her work; her experience of embracing oriental philosophies through Hindustani and gamelan music; and the influences of John Cage. In *Digging In John Cage’s Garden; Cage and Ryōanji*, Professor Stephen Whittington, presents an evocative discussion of the aesthetics of Japanese traditional gardens in relation to the work of Cage, and the importance of space and materials in his music.

Dr Chan Cheong Jan discusses connections between the ideas of Cage and jazz in *The Quest for 'Newness' in Jazz: Implications of Cage's Relationship with Jazz*. This article examines jazz improvisation in the light of performance processes with particular reference to Malaysian education approaches. Dr Cat Hope presents a description of the Australian ensemble *Decibel's* recently created *John Cage Complete Variations App* for iPad tablet computer, the development of which has enabled accurate and real-time realisation of these works. Dr Gisa Jähnichen examines Asian music characteristics in contemporary music compositions from a hermeneutic perspective, incorporating discussion of post colonial education and academic individuation within Asia. Dr Robert Burrell discusses his work, *In the Presence*, which incorporates Hindustani Raga, Kalimantan folk-tune, and Malaysian avian motifs in an exploration of space and time concepts, chance and indeterminacy. Tzu En Ngaio investigates the complexities of Cage's orchestral work, *Atlas Eclipticalis*, the aleatoric compositional and performative processes involved, and graphical score elements as precursors of complex score and mixed-media immersive performance environments. Sharon Williams forwards a discussion of conceptual approaches to participatory music-making, highlighting Cage's concerns with illuminating concepts and processes, and designing events around non-hierarchical participant-based, collaborative creation. Dr Clare Chan Suet Ching argues that the Malaysian percussion group Hands Percussion interrogates traditional performance styles to create new cross-cultural works, examining the socio-cultural context that has inspired their work. Last, but not at all least, we have a fascinating report of the journey of one Malaysian composer's intersection with electroacoustic music both within and outside this country: Dr Hasnizam Abdul Wahid's keynote address, *Sound Art in Malaysia from a Malaysian Sound Artist Perspective*, captured many of the important concepts of culture, context and experimentation in Malaysian electroacoustic music, and developments occurring within the Malaysian Music Industry.

The inspiration of Cage and his groundbreaking intercultural arts practices through East/West influences as well as technological and philosophical cultures is an enduring legacy on the arts as a whole, and music in particular. We hope you will enjoy sharing some of this knowledge. Many thanks, once again, to the Malaysian Music Journal editorial board and our exceptional team of article reviewers. With their help, we have endeavoured to expand the focus and breadth of this journal, the standard of scholarship and documentation, and aim to generate ever increasing excellence and dialogue within and across Malaysian musical spheres.

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**Jean Penny**  
Chief Editor

