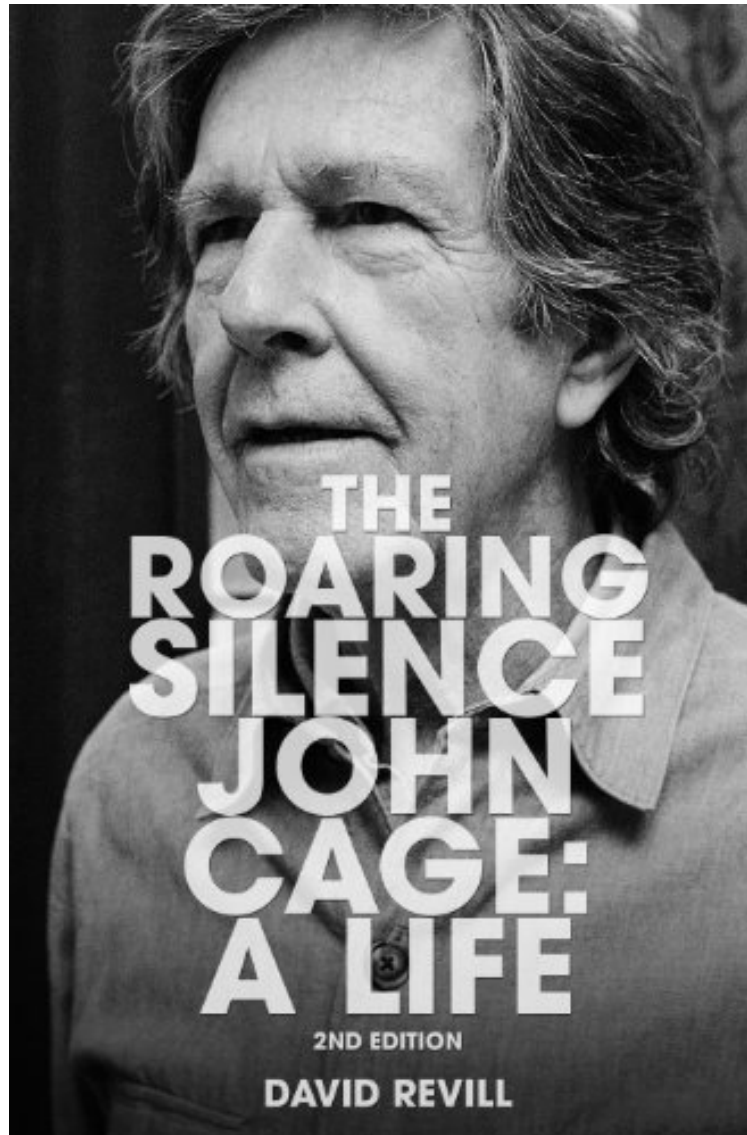


(Free) The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life

## The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life

*David Revill*

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**David Revill : The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Roaring Silence: John Cage: A Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Certainly a useful and informative biography of a major figure  
By Ronald  
Certainly a useful and informative biography of a major figure, but its theory in the introduction promises a lot more than the actual book delivers. It is largely a chronological rendering of Cage's experiences and achievements. Seems to be well researched.  
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. AN EXCELLENT BIOGRAPHY OF CAGE AND HIS MUSICAL CONTRIBUTIONS  
By Steven H Propp  
David Revill is "a writer, teacher, composer, and percussion player based in Hampshire, England... his reviews have appeared in the London Times, Times Literary

Supplement, and Manchester Guardian."He quotes Cage, "I didn't study music with just anybody; I studied with Schoenberg... I've always gone, insofar as I could, to the president of the company." When Cage told Schoenberg that he had no money, "Schoenberg asked him if he would devote his life to music. Cage... said yes. It is a promise which has never been far from his mind since. 'In that case,' Schoenberg concluded, 'I will teach you free of charge.'" (Pg. 47) When Schoenberg told Cage that "Without a feeling for harmony, he warned, Cage would always be thwarted in his efforts to write music... Cage responded, 'In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall.'" (Pg. 53)Cage developed the Prepared Piano because there was no room for a percussion ensemble in the available space for a dance work he was accompanying---only room for a conventional piano. "I decided that what was wrong was the piano, not my efforts," Cage recorded... With the performance deadline looming, Cage tried placing objects in the piano... After experimentation, he wrote the Bacchanale for a piano treated with a small bolt, a screw with nuts, and some fibrous weather-stripping." (Pg. 69-70)His breakup with his wife Xenia "was not only the loss of one relationship, an important one, but of a sexual orientation and an identity. The catalyst can be seen, with hindsight, as Merce Cunningham; he and Cage would become partners in the personal as well as artistic sense... Cage's life-decisions, work and thought need to be placed within that context." (Pg. 84)After being told by an East Indian musician that the function of music was "to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences," Cage said, "I was tremendously struck by this. I decided then and there that this WAS the proper purpose of music." (Pg. 90) He later attended the lectures on Zen by D.T. Suzuki ("The only musician generally present was John Cage"; pg. 108).Cage noted, "not paying any attention to not having any money led me to continue my work as I saw fit... When years later a young composer explained he wanted to make a living, Cage replied, 'You have to decide whether you want to make a living or whether you want to make music.'" (Pg. 142) Observing that Cage began calling himself an Anarchist in 1966, Revill says, "From then on it was a point which he would often make, and which set the tone of his increasingly frequent pronouncements on political and social matters." (Pg. 240)This book is a fantastically insightful book into the man, and his very creative music.8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. John Cage : "Perhaps You Would Understand It If You Did It"By apromisemadeThe Roaring Silence by David Revill includes all of this information and much, much more. This biography gives a very personal account of the life of John Cage, and Revill makes it clear to the reader all too often that he knew Cage personally. It seemed as if this personal relationship interfered with the account of Cage's life and made it confusing. This confusion was caused by explanation and not enough placement of where the author was in Cage's life (even though the chapters are labeled by a span of a few years each). This makes it difficult to figure exactly when Cage did some things and makes the reader guess all too often. Perhaps this non-straight forwardness should be applauded in getting into tremendous detail about some things that another author might skim over, but I only found it discouraging. Name-dropping and over-quoting were another consequence of this personal approach, which I also felt was inappropriate. Adding to this narrative confusion, Cage's life is extraordinarily complex in and of itself. To try to explain what Cage attempted in his work, along with giving concise descriptions of it would be quite a feat. Though it was nice that The Roaring Silence encapsulated all of his work, be it painting, music, or prose, it may have benefited both the author and the audience if it was clearer about what was what. In the very same chapter that discussed an integral and complex piece of music, Revill would quickly run-down what his art looked like at the time, then return to talking about the music composition. This also sparked some confusion. In terms of biographical information, The Roaring Silence seems extremely thorough. Aside from the abundance of contextual information regarding his works in the text, there is an extensive Chronology of Works among the last pages of the book. A Bibliography and Source Notes accompany the text with many other sources of information about Cage. A full sixteen pages wedged between chapters contains some black-and-white photos of his life along with some images of his artwork and compositions on staff paper. However, there is nearly no background information given about his family, or even the young Cage's life. The beginning of the book skims over Cage's life through high school in about the time that Revill would later focus on only two years of the older Cage. I contend that because Revill did not know Cage at a young age, he did not bother to research these years and thusly skimmed over it so that he could emphasize the point that he knew John before anything significant happened. Though this is yet another foreseeable weak point of the book, it does not mean that the book is all that bad. The ways in which this book are effective can be clearly overtaken by the plethora of confusion in The Roaring Silence. However, this should not be taken to mean that Revill's work should be taken for granted. In the biography, he effectively compiles as much information about John Cage's composing life that anyone could dig up. Throughout the progress of the book, he consistently refers to actual letters Cage sent or received along with transcripts of speeches or dialogues Cage was actively involved in. There is a highly objective sense in the book though it is clear that Revill has some personal biases based on his knowing Cage. Revill never comments on any of Cage's pieces or editorializes on why this piece of art is more profound than that one. Personally, for such a confusing composer such as Cage, I treasure the omission of unnecessary opinion when already having difficulty sorting out what it is that Cage actually accomplished in his life. However, I can also see why some may want the author to comment more than he does in trying to understand some people's active opinions of Cage during his life. In reviews of the biography found elsewhere, the most positive comment I could find was that The Roaring Silence is, at best, a "fine" companion to

Cage's autobiographical work *Silence*. Though I have not read Cage's autobiography, I believe that I am more strongly encouraged to go and read a copy. Perhaps having read the biography first, I might have gotten a fuller picture of his life. Perhaps this would only create more confusion. With all of the quotes straight from Cage's mouth or from *Silence* encapsulated in this work, I am inclined to imagine that the holes that remain here are also found in the autobiography. Cage's influence is apparent throughout the pages of the book. Revill draws connections with other composers directly affected by Cage's work. In Cage's constant defense, Revill also continually argues that he is possibly the most important composer of our time. He spares no time at all in delving into the heart and mind of Cage, brushing off any of the negative criticism he received continually throughout his life. The way in which Revill constructs the biography extends Cage's influence into the realms of poetry, video art, printmaking, painting and dance. Revill's *The Roaring Silence* is the first of its type, a complete biography (non-autobiographical) of John Cage. It is clear that throughout the early writing process, Revill worked closely with Cage in constructing the most authentic biography possible. In doing so, it captures much more than just a synopsis of Cage's external life. In many chapters, he discusses philosophical and aesthetic ideals that Cage held dear. In doing so, he relates periods of Cage's work to his state of mind of the time. Just as confusing as some of Cage's pieces were, so were his beliefs. Ever changing, non-committal and fervent were his ideas, sometimes all at once. The skepticism, however, that was typical of Cage's personality was evident throughout his life in both his music and his beliefs. As a media scholar myself, I find of particular interest the close intellectual bond that he shared with the ideas of Marshall McLuhan. These were both people who were out to prove the world wrong and to change it and challenge it in ways never before thought possible. The idea of the world as a 'global village' fascinated Cage greatly, and he constantly went back to McLuhan's ideas for inspiration that are evident in his own poetry, paintings and other composition. It has been said that Cage was not of this world, he was merely living in it and I strongly believe that this is a just description of the man. Cage's innovations also do not go unnoticed in this book. His prepared piano is still commonly referred to and used by many musicians today. In his time, this avant-garde instrument was looked down upon and today is commonplace among many post-modern composers. Cage also pioneered the idea of indeterminate notation in which instructions on staff paper are very loosely based and much is left largely to the performer. This focus on the performer is something that many composers tended to ignore before Cage. Now, there is a clear interest in many classical performers and the composers who write for them. Finally, Cage's use of aleatoric music and chance methods of composition such as the I Ching were extremely huge innovations for his time. Again, today, there remains a large influenced group of post-modern composers who utilize aleatoric music in nearly every composition. These sorts of influences are used by Revill in determining and emphasizing Cage's importance in the realm of classical music. In doing so, he focuses on more than just Cage's quirkiness and bizarreness and cuts through to a key element of his compositional life. As stated previously, this book also spans many years and many phases of Cage's life. Not only does Revill illuminate the composer that Cage was, he also delves into the more brushed-over aspects of his life: the performer, the printmaker, the watercolorist, the expert amateur mycologist, the game show celebrity, the political anarchist, and the social activist. His influence in all of these areas is noted doubly by Revill. I am told today by my fashion-designer girlfriend that even the 2007 color for winter is named J. Cage. The cult phenomenon known as John Cage clearly found his way into nearly everyone's life he touched in some way. It is clear that Cage's influence, not only as a composer, is evident in *The Roaring Silence*. This, I believe, is the strongest element of Revill's work. The personal flares that he adds in sometimes enhance the reading experience, and sometimes distract from the overall cohesiveness of the work. I can honestly say that I wish that I had read Cage's own *Silence* before reading this. As a companion to *Silence*, I am sure that this biography only enhances the reader's understanding. However, not all is wrong with *The Roaring Silence*. An overall fascinating read cover to cover, it was a joy to experience the mystery that was John Cage.

John Cage has been described as the most important composer of our time. He combined classical European training with Eastern spirituality to produce an American amalgam of such vitality and originality that it continues to define what we mean by avant-garde. His influence has touched generations of artists, including Philip Glass, David Byrne, and his longtime collaborator Merce Cunningham. His work and ideas have influenced not only the world of music but also dance, painting, printmaking, video art, and poetry. *The Roaring Silence* documents his life in unrivaled detail, interweaving a close account of the evolution of his work with an exploration of his aesthetic and philosophical ideas, while placing these in the greater perspective of American life and letters. Paying due attention to Cage's inventions, such as the prepared piano, and his pioneering use of indeterminate notation and chance operations in composition (utilizing the I Ching), David Revill also illuminates Cage the performer, printmaker, watercolorist, expert amateur mycologist, game show celebrity, political anarchist, and social activist. Arnold Schoenberg once called Cage "not a composer, but an inventor of genius." This revised edition presents never-before-seen correspondence between Cage and other luminaries of his day, as well as new analysis into his legacy. *The Roaring Silence* celebrates the life and work of this true American original.

"An important book, one that should be read and read again." —St. Louis Post Dispatch "An illuminating

glimpse of one of this century's most influential composers.—Miami Herald“Revill has done a terrific job.  
. . . Excellent.—L.A. Weekly