

UC San Diego
Division of Arts and Humanities
Department of Music

presents

John Cage

The complete

FREEMAN ETUDES I - XXXII

János Négyesy
violin

Wednesday, October 3, 2012 - 7 p.m.

Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall



János Négyesy with John Cage, Osnabrück 1991

UC San Diego
Division of Arts and Humanities
Department of Music
presents

FREEMAN ETUDES

I - XXXII

John Cage
(1912 - 1992)

In honor of John Cage's Centennial

János Négyesy
violin

PROGRAM NOTES

Among the usual adjectives used to describe Cage and his music, the word virtuosic is generally not included. But the *Freeman Etudes* are some of the most extreme illustrations of virtuosity both in terms of composition and performance in the history of music.

The performance virtuosity in the *Freeman Etudes* is not limited to fast, running passages and difficult fingerings. Moreover, the work is filled with sudden changes in dynamics and bow placement, both enormous stresses on the violinist's bowing technique. And with eleven types of pitch inflection, five types of *martellato* or hammering on the fingerboard, and five types of *pizzicato*, subtle distinctions in performance parameters make the climb to success even steeper. Here an unprecedented amount of precision is demanded from the performer.

One could say that Cage's compositional method, in its own non-traditional way, displays enormous virtuosity as well. Cage once commented that his definition of composition is work. "This is it. It is work. That is my conclusion." In fact, each moment in the *Freeman Etudes* is the result of a significant amount of work. The compositional process began with plotting general pitch and time locations of each moment based on tracings of a star atlas, similar to the compositional process used in Cage's earlier *Etudes Australes*. Following this initial process, Cage employed chance procedures to determine the many possible characteristics for each pitch, for instance, type of bowing, single pitch or chord, pitch slide, type of *pizzicato*, etc. In the end, each pitch and its character is the result of many different chance operations. It is the product a great deal of work.

There is an inherent irony though in a work of such compositional and performative precision coming from a composer who is famous for his use indeterminacy. But in fact the *Freeman Etudes* elaborate for us Cage's concept of indeterminacy in the compositional and performative process. Ultimately, indeterminacy is about finding freedom, even if that freedom is found at the end of a series of determinations. In explanation of his use of determinate notation, Cage writes the following:

Though the notation is determinate, the use of chance operations is not an aid in the making of something I had in mind...but to aid me in the finding of a music I do not have in mind. I just listen.

The performer, too, must find freedom in the small windows of opportunity that exist for interpretation in the etudes, an interpretation that is born from necessity, a balancing of what is demanded and what is possible. The hard work of composing the etudes is handed over like a relay baton to the performer to carry forward into their preparation and performance of the work. Indeed, Cage saw

this in political terms as well, which is illustrated in a comment made during an interview in 1983 concerning the difficulty of the *Freeman Etudes*. He states:

These are intentionally as difficult as I can make them, because I think we're now surrounded by very serious problems in society, and we tend to think that the situation is hopeless and that it's just impossible to do something that will make everything turn out properly. So I think that this music, which is almost impossible, gives an instance of the practicality of the impossible.

Cage, then, is challenging the common notion of virtuosity by making the impossible more than an opportunity to impress. Instead, it is a challenge to overcome. The impossibility he creates should be faced not with awe but with optimism.

The *Freeman Etudes* are divided into four books, each containing eight etudes of equal duration. Books I and II were completed between 1977 and 1980. Books III and IV were finished in 1990.

Tonight's soloist, János Négyesy, has had a close relationship with these compositions for over 20 years. He worked closely with Cage in preparing them, gave the world premiere of Books I and II in 1984 in Ivrea, Italy and the Books III and IV in Ferrara, Italy in 1991. The most unusual and challenging performance was in Ivrea, Already by the end of the first note, there was heckling, which continued for the work's duration. More than just shouts and booing, this heckling involved throwing of paper airplanes, toilet paper and - with only one page left to perform - a glass bottle, which landed only 2 feet from Négyesy, breaking and covering his pant legs in water. The heckling had not been spontaneous, however. Apparently, a few women, who had attended a previous avant-garde music concert had not liked what they had heard, and they paid a dozen school boys to come to this concert and heckle the performer of Cage's *Freeman Etudes* for its duration. After the last note, Négyesy quickly bowed and walked offstage. Cage thought it was wonderful and surprisingly told him to go back out on stage for a second bow. A few days later, Négyesy performed the same work in a concert hall in neighboring Milan, which out of fear of a possible riot was guarded by police with automatic weapons. That performance went smoothly, but Cage told Négyesy afterwards that he was disappointed that there had not been a riot.

The thirty-two *Freeman Etudes* last approximately 140 minutes. There will be no intermission.

- Peter Edwards

PERFORMER:

János Négyesy, violin

Wednesday, October 3, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall

For the Department of Music, Production Department:

Nicholas J. Patin, Event Manager

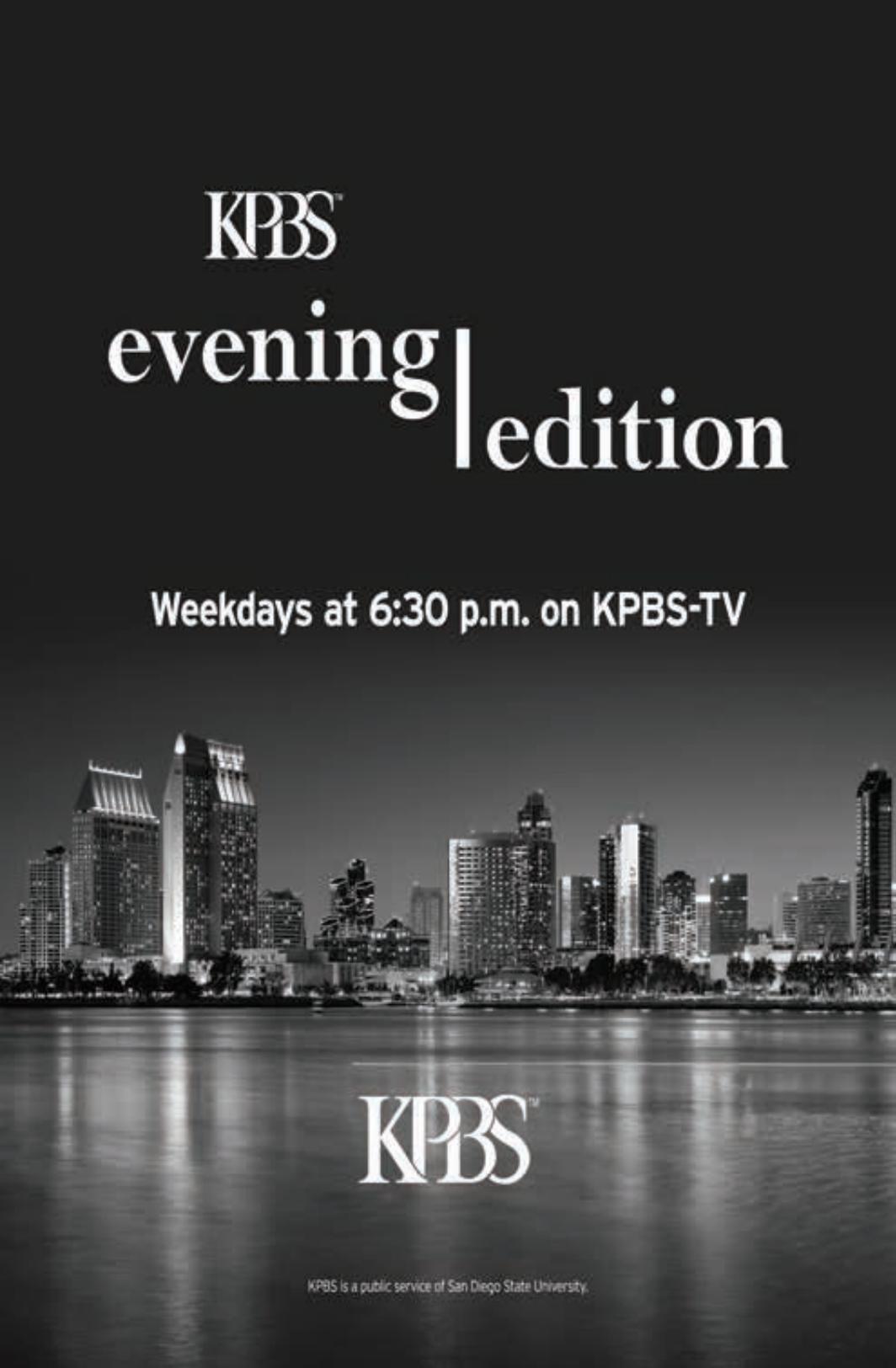
Josef Kucera, Recording Engineer

Recording Assistants: Michael Ricca & Aldrin Payopay

Stage crew: Susan Park & Jennifer Kim

Audience members are reminded to please silence all phones and noise generating devices before the performance.

As a matter of courtesy and copyright law, no unauthorized recording or photography is permitted in the Concert Hall.

A black and white photograph of a city skyline at night, with numerous skyscrapers illuminated and their lights reflecting on the water in the foreground. The sky is dark, and the overall mood is serene and urban.

KPBS[™]
evening | edition

Weekdays at 6:30 p.m. on KPBS-TV

KPBS[™]

KPBS is a public service of San Diego State University.

WEDNESDAYS @ 7

Karl Berger and Ingrid Sertso, Improv Jazz
October 10, 2012

Mark Dresser, Contrabassist
October 24, 2012

Palimpsest - Computer Music
November 7, 2012

soundSCAPE ensemble
November 14, 2012

Takae Ohnishi, Harpsichord
January 23, 2013

JACK Quartet
February 13, 2013

Lear on the Second Floor - Chamber Opera
March 6, 8 and 9, 2013

Roger Reynolds, Passages 9
March 13, 2013

Kartik Seshadri, Sitar
April 10, 2013

Susan Narucki, Cuatro Corridos
May 8, 10 and 11, 2013

Palimpsest - The Music of Elliott Carter
April 10, 2013