

re: **John Cage EARLY RECORDINGS** (collection),

Mac file document names: Cage Disks#1.doc
(Microsoft Word 98) Cage Disks#2.doc

In the early 1970s, John Cage and Merce Cunningham were living in an apartment several blocks from the Cunningham Dance Co. Westbeth Studio (the top floor of the old Bell Labs building). One afternoon, when I was at work at the Westbeth Studio (in the room that had much of our musical equipment), a phone-call from John asked me to come over to the apartment “as soon as possible, we’re having trouble with flooding and need help moving things out of the building”.

I went immediately ; they had already carried boxes out to the hallways and some to the street. They had help from a few other people (some from the Westbeth Studio). John gave me a box “some manuscript scores, just put them in the downstairs hallway”. Then he gave me cardboard box approximately 24” x 24” by 3”, with the cover label “FRAGILE -- Do Not Lay Flat” . I immediately recognized that they were old radio-format 16 inch recordings, and mentioned this to him. He replied: “take these with you to Westbeth, I don’t remember that I made copies of them”. He continued : “perhaps you should take care of them yourself, because they might get lost at the Studio. And now Merce is having the dancers perform in the music room for a video”.

I took them to the Westbeth music room, set them properly behind a desk at which I worked, then went back to John’s apartment to help them move other things. (As I recall, most of the important items belonging to John and Merce were rescued from the flood.)

Because we were busy with touring into 1973 (or 1974), I didn’t get a chance to see what those recordings were about, or to consider to the possibility of finding a place (of reliable quality) to do back-up copies . (I was at the time increasingly active in making recordings of our performances together, and with the Cunningham Dance Co., and was working heavily David Tudor in preparation for a New Hampshire summer session at Chacora, in which Tudor’s first large-scale production of RAINFOREST was to be done.

Later that Autumn, I left for the University of California (at Santa Cruz) to oversee the installation of new electronic music facilities. Long story short: I took the “ FRAGILE – Do Not Lay Flat” package with me, intending to search for restoration resources in California. But I got involved with teaching at U.C., and in spite of 20 years of inquiries in the relatively sophisticated West Coast and Bay Area, I was unable to find anyone (or any facility) that even understood what was necessary to copy these relics without damage.

Very little of my time went into this “restoration” project, because of my extensive commitments in teaching, composing, and performing. What may now seem curious is that I had never completely opened the package of recordings, and did not know exactly what had been recorded. I had only speculated that it had been music from the pre-mid 1950s (when this 16” diameter disk radio-recording technique had been used, until made obsolete by magnetic analog tape recording).

After departing academia in the early 1990s, and moving to a new house in Santa Cruz, I opened the package to make a “data-log” of the collection. I spoke to various people involved in research on John Cage’s creative work (e.g. David Bernstein, Rolf Dietrich, John Holzaepfel, Laura Kuhn, Julie Martin, and David Revill). Then in 1999, when Leta Miller’s article **Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle (1938-1940)** appeared in my life, I reformatted the documentation for these recordings, and engaged her in this project. That details concerning these 16” diameter recordings are in the following two documents, each of three pages.