

**Questions and Answers**  
John Cage and Dean Rosenthal

John Cage: *Nichi Nichi Kore Ko Niche*: Every Day Is A Beautiful Day

Dean Rosenthal: Isn't it?

JC: What if I ask thirty-two questions?

DR: You will have asked precisely one more than thirty-one and one less than thirty-three.

JC: What if I stop asking now and then?

DR: You will create pauses between your questions.

JC: Will that make things clear?

DR: No.

JC: Is communication something made clear?

DR: Sometimes, but not always.

JC: What is communication?

DR: The exchange of information by various means, for example, digitally, aurally, orally, visually, and so forth.

JC: Music, what does it communicate?

DR: Everything.

JC: Is what's clear to me, what's clear to you?

DR: Not always.

JC: Is music just sounds?

DR: No.

JC: Then what does it communicate?

DR: There are several or many ways to answer this, to wit, by the affect, the mystical, ideas, feelings, thoughts...

JC: Is a truck passing by music?

DR: Did you listen to the truck?

JC: I see it, do I have to hear it too?

DR: If you like.

JC: If I don't hear it, does it still communicate?

DR: Yes.

JC: If while I see it I can't hear it, but hear something else, say an egg-beater, because I'm inside looking out, does the truck communicate or the egg-beater, which communicates?

DR: Both do.

JC: Which is more musical a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?

DR: The truck going by the factory.

JC: Are the people inside the school musical and the ones outside unmusical?

DR: Not necessarily.

JC: What if the ones inside can't hear very well, would that change my question?

DR: No.

JC: Are sounds just sounds or are they Beethoven?  
 DR: They're Beethoven.  
 JC: People aren't sounds are they?  
 DR: No, they're not.  
 JC: Is there such a thing as silence?  
 DR: Isn't there such a thing as silence?  
 JC: Even if I get away from people, do I still have to listen to something?  
 DR: You have a choice.  
 JC: Say I'm off in the woods, do I have to listen to a stream babbling?  
 DR: You have a choice.  
 JC: Is there always something to hear, never any peace and quiet?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: If my head is full of harmony, melody, and rhythm, what happens to me when the telephone rings, to my peace and quiet, I mean?  
 DR: It's shattered.  
 JC: And if it was European harmony, melody, and rhythm in my head, what has happened to the history of, say, Javanese music, with respect, that is to say, my head?  
 DR: Nothing.  
 JC: Are we getting anywhere asking questions?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: Where are we going?  
 DR: We are going to come to a conclusion.  
 JC: Is this the twenty-eighth question?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: Are there any important questions?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: "How do you need to proceed cautiously in dualistic terms?"  
 DR: You needn't proceed; choose.  
 JC: Do I have two more questions?  
 DR: No, you have one left.  
 JC: And, now, do I have none?  
 DR: Yes.

## II.

JC: Now that I've asked thirty-two questions, can I ask forty-four more?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: I can, but may I?  
 DR: Yes.  
 JC: Why must I go on asking questions?  
 DR: Because you are looking for answers.  
 JC: Is there any reason in asking why?

DR: Yes.

JC: Would I ask why if questions were not words but were sounds?

DR: No.

JC: If words are sounds, are they musical or are they just noises?

DR: They are musical.

JC: If sounds are noises but not words, are they meaningful?

DR: Yes.

JC: Are they musical?

DR: They can be, yes.

JC: Say there are two sounds and two people and one of each is beautiful, is there between all four any communication?

DR: Yes, especially if you believe that "opposites attract."

JC: And if there are rules, who made them, I ask you?

DR: I ask you, who made them?

JC: Does it begin somewhere, I mean, and if so, where does it stop?

DR: No, and thus it stops nowhere.

JC: What will happen to me or to you if we have to be somewhere where beauty isn't?

DR: You'll faint. So will I.

JC: I ask you, sometime, too, sounds happening in time, what will happen to our experience of hearing, yours, mine, our ears, hearing, what will happen if sounds being beautiful stop sometime and the only sounds to hear are not beautiful to hear but ugly, what will happen to us?

DR: We'll shrug or adjust or leave.

JC: Would we ever be able to get so that we thought the ugly sounds were beautiful?

DR: Yes.

JC: If we drop beauty, what have got?

DR: Plenty.

JC: Have we got truth?

DR: We do.

JC: Have we got religion?

DR: No.

JC: Do we have a mythology?

DR: No.

JC: Would we know what to do with one if we had one?

DR: Yes.

JC: Have we got a way to make money?

DR: Yes.

JC: And if money is made, will it be spent on music?

DR: Yes.

JC: If Russia spends sixty million for the Brussels Fair, lots of it for music and dance, and America spends one-tenth of that, six million about, does that mean that one out of ten Americans is as musical and kinesthetic as all Russians put together?

DR: No.

JC: If we drop money, what have we got?

DR: Everything.

JC: Since we haven't dropped truth, where shall we go looking for it?

DR: Everywhere.

JC: Didn't we say we weren't going, or did we just ask where we were going?

DR: We just asked.

JC: If we didn't say we weren't going, why didn't we?

DR: Because we need money.

JC: If we had any sense in our heads, wouldn't we know the truth instead of going around looking for it?

DR: Yes.

JC: How otherwise would we, as they say, be able to drink a glass of water?

DR: Isn't that rhetorical?

JC: We know, don't we, everybody else's religion, mythology, and philosophy and metaphysics backwards and forwards, so what need would we have for one of our own if we had one, but we don't do we?

DR: We do, in fact.

JC: But music, do we have music?

DR: Yes.

JC: Wouldn't it be better to just drop music, too?

DR: No.

JC: Then what would we have?

DR: Everything.

JC: Jazz?

DR: Yes?

JC: What's left?

DR: Everything.

JC: Do you mean to say it's a purposeless play?

DR: No.

JC: Is that what it is when you get up and hear the first sound of each day?

DR: No, it isn't.

JC: Is it possible that I could go on monotonously asking questions forever?

DR: Yes.

JC: Would I have to know how many questions I was going to ask?

DR: No.

JC: Would I have to know how to count in order to ask questions?

DR: No.

JC: Do I have to know when to stop?

DR: No.

JC: Is this the one chance we have to be alive and ask a question?

DR: Yes.

JC: How long will we be able to be alive?

DR: Forever.

### III.

JC: What did I say?

DR: Nothing.

JC: Where is the “should” when they say you should have something to say?

DR: Between the “could” and the “would.”

JC: Three. Actually when you drop something, it’s still with you, wouldn’t you say?

DR: No.

JC: Four. Where would you drop something to get it completely away?

DR: In a gorge.

JC: Five. Why do you not do as I do, letting go of each thought as though it were void?

DR: Why not?

JC: Six. Why do you not do as I do, letting go of each thought as though it were rotten wood?

DR: Why?

JC: Why do you not do as I do, letting go of each thought as though it were a piece of stone?

DR: Stone is useful.

JC: Why do you not do as I do, letting go of each thought as though it were the cold ashes of a fire long dead, or else just making the slight response suitable to the occasion?

DR: This is a good question.

JC: Nine. Do really think that the discovery that a measurable entity exists, namely, the energy which can measure mechanical, electric, thermal, or any other kind of physical activity, and can measure potential as well as actual activity, greatly simplifies thinking about physical phenomena?

DR: No.

JC: Do you agree with Boulez when he says what he says?

DR: Yes, I do, mostly.

JC: Are you getting hungry?

DR: Yes.

JC: Twelve. Why should you (you know more or less what you’re going to get)?

DR: Do I?

JC: Will Boulez be there or did he go away when I wasn’t looking?

DR: Boulez will be there

JC: Why do you suppose the number 12 was given up but the idea of the series wasn’t?

DR: When was the number 12 given up?

JC: Or was it?

DR: It wasn’t.

JC: And if not, why not?

DR: Probably because it needs to be between 11 and 13. Or else?

JC: In the meantime, would you like to hear the very first performance of Christian Wolff's *For Piano with Preparations*?

DR: I think so, yes.

#### IV.

JC: What in heaven's name are they going to serve us for dinner, and what happens afterwards?

DR: Anything? And then more conversation.

JC: More music?

DR: Yes!

JC: Living or dead, that's the big question.

DR: Living.

JC: When you get sleepy, do you go to sleep?

DR: Yes.

JC: Or do you lie awake?

DR: I sleep.

JC: Why do I have to go on asking questions?

DR: Because you curious, John, and so inquisitive.

JC: Is it the same reason I have to go on writing music?

DR: No.

JC: But it's clear, isn't it, I'm not writing music right now?

DR: Yes.

JC: Why do they call me a composer, then, if all I do is ask questions?

DR: Questions help you compose.

JC: If one of us says that all twelve tones should be in a row and another says they shouldn't, which one of us is right?

DR: There isn't a good answer to that question.

JC: What if a B flat, as they say, just comes to me?

DR: What if it does?

JC: How can I get that to come to me of itself, not just pop out of my memory, taste, and psychology?

DR: Does it really make a difference now, John?

JC: How?

DR: Why "how"?

JC: Do you know how?

DR: Yes.

JC: And if I did or somebody else did find a way to let a sound be itself, would everybody within earshot be able to listen to it?

DR: Yes.

JC: Why is it so difficult for so many people to listen?

DR: Is it?

JC: Why do they start talking when there is something to hear?

DR: Do they?

JC: Do they have ears not on the sides of their heads but situated inside their mouths so that when they hear something their first impulse is to start talking?

DR: No.

JC: The situation should be made more normal, don't you think?

DR: Yes.

JC: Why don't they keep their mouths shut and their ears open?

DR: Why not?

JC: Are they stupid?

DR: No.

JC: And, if so, why don't they try to hide their stupidity?

DR: They don't.

JC: Were bad manners acquired when knowledge of music was acquired?

DR: No.

JC: Does being musical make one automatically stupid and unable to listen?

DR: No.

JC: Where are your thinking caps?

DR: In my ears!

#### IV.

JC: Is sound enough?

DR: No.

JC: What more do I need?

DR: Music.

JC: Don't I get it whether I need it or not?

DR: Yes.

JC: Is it a sound?

DR: Yes.

JC: Then, again, is it music?

DR: Yes.

JC: Is music-the word, I mean-is that sound?

DR: Yes.

JC: If it is, is music music?

DR: No.

JC: Is the word "music" music?

DR: Yes.

JC: Does it communicate anything?

DR: Yes.

JC: Must it?

DR: No.  
JC: If it's high, does it?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: If it's low, does it?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: If it's in the middle, does it?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: If it's an interval, does it?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: What is an interval?  
DR: The space between notes.  
JC: Is an interval a chord?  
DR: No.  
JC: Is a chord an aggregate?  
DR: It can be.  
JC: Is an aggregate a constellation?  
DR: It can be.  
JC: What's a constellation?  
DR: A group or cluster.  
JC: How many sounds are there altogether?  
DR: Sound is infinite.  
JC: One million?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Ten thousand?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Eighty-eight?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Do I have to ask ten more?  
DR: No.  
JC: Do I?  
DR: Not at all.  
JC: Why?  
DR: Why not?  
JC: Why do I?  
DR: Why does a hummingbird sing?  
JC: Did I decide to ask so many?  
DR: No.  
JC: Wasn't I taking a risk?  
DR: No.  
JC: Was I?  
DR: No.  
JC: Why was I?



DR: Why were you?  
JC: Will it never stop?  
DR: No.  
JC: Why won't it?  
DR: Why won't it, indeed?

V.

JC: Would it be too much if I asked thirty-three more?  
DR: No.  
JC: Who's asking?  
DR: Who isn't?  
JC: Is it I who ask?  
DR: It can be.  
JC: Don't I know my own mind?  
DR: No.  
JC: Then why do I ask if I don't know?  
DR: Do you wonder why?  
JC: Then it's not too much to ask?  
DR: No.  
JC: Right?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Then, tell me, do you prefer Bach to Beethoven?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: And why?  
DR: Why not.  
JC: Would you like to hear *Quantitäten* by Bo Nilsson whether it's performed for the first time or not?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Has any one seen Meister Eckhart lately?  
DR: No.  
JC: Do you think serious music is serious enough?  
DR: Yes.  
JC: Is a seventh chord inappropriate in modern music?  
DR: No, not unintentionally, at the very least.  
JC: What about fifths and octaves?  
DR: Of course, those are great intervals!  
JC: What if the seventh chord was not a seventh chord?  
DR: What if?  
JC: Does it seem silly to go on asking questions when there's so much to do that's really urgent?  
DR: Yes.

JC: But we're halfway through, aren't we?

DR: We are?

JC: Shall we buck up?

DR: Yes.

JC: Are we in agreement that the field of music needs to be enlivened?

DR: Hmm.

JC: Do we disagree?

DR: Do we?

JC: On what?

DR: Whaaat?

JC: Communication?

DR: No.

JC: If I have two sounds, are they related?

DR: Yes.

JC: If someone's nearer one of them than he is to the second, is he more related to the first one?

DR: Yes.

JC: What about sounds that are too far away from us to hear them?

DR: What?

JC: Sounds are just vibrations, isn't that true?

DR: Hmm.

JC: Part of a vast range of vibrations including radio waves, light, cosmic rays, isn't that true?

DR: For the time being.

JC: Why didn't I mention that before?

DR: Yes, why?

JC: Didn't that stir the imagination?

DR: Yes.

JC: Shall we praise God from whom all blessings flow?

DR: Not right now.

JC: Is sound a blessing?

DR: If you believe in blessings, in the sense that most people use that term, then yes.

JC: I repeat, is sound a blessing?

DR: Is sound in the stars?

JC: I repeat, would you like to hear *Quantitäten* by Bo Nilsson whether it's performed for the first time or not?

DR: Yes!

JC: It's getting late, isn't it?

DR: I think so, too.

JC: I still have two things to do, so what I want to know is: Would you like to hear *Quantitäten* by Bo Nilsson whether it's performed for the first time or not?

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to John.



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