

University of Vermont
Ithaca College
St. Lawrence University
Goucher College
Smith College
Mount Holyoke College
SUNY Geneseo
University of Rochester

"Describe a character in fiction, an historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence."

tacet: *verb*. Be silent. To a clarinetist in an orchestra, the command *tacet* signals a much appreciated break from a challenging symphony. Two summers ago, my music history teacher performed a piano concerto for my class, looking something like this:

MVT. I

tacet

MVT. II

tacet

MVT. III

tacet

That day marked the close of two weeks of musical immersion. Our emotions had been hijacked by the passion of Beethoven's symphonies, and our ears assailed with the dissonance of early 20th century music. Ushering us into the realm of the truly avant-garde, our teacher sat down at the piano, rolled up his sleeves, grinned at the anticipation on our faces, and ... placed his hands in his lap. Thirty young musicians sat around him. One minute passed, our faces shifted from expectant to bemused, and his smile got wider. Two minutes, and the occasional shuffling of feet had escalated into confused whispers, which became nervous giggles as the minutes ticked by. Finally, our teacher rose. Bowing, he announced that he had just performed one of the most famous modern concertos in the world: 4'33'', composed by John Cage.

"Composed?" a student asked. "Are you telling me he got famous for *that*?" However, our teacher was not to be deterred by our collective density of mind, and returning to the piano, he instructed, "feel it." So we sat in skeptical silence, except it wasn't really silence at all. The air conditioner roared. I shifted my position, and the floor beneath me creaked. Again, the minutes ticked by, and I felt the familiar expansion of awareness that music provokes in me, though this time, the soundtrack was the ringing in my own ears.

For me, the power of 4'33'' stems not from the composition itself, but where it leads. Seen as understandably absurd in its simplicity by some, I find it disarming for that very same reason. While the calculated expression of traditional music elicits a general emotional response, I can't imagine that this piece could ever be experienced the same way by two different people. It provides complete freedom for introspection, while also

centering the mind on what is often overlooked. The piece is a reminder that beauty can be found in the simplest of what is offered to us, and an invitation to treat our lives as such. My reactions to 4'33'' taught me the value of a second look, and the result of enthusiasm. After all, if four and a half minutes of my life equals a concerto, I can only imagine what else it has to offer me.