

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Performing Silence

Reframing Silence in Music through Three Japanese Aesthetic Concepts of
Ma, Seijaku, and Chinmoku

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

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PREFACE

In a conversation with Professor Steven Schick at the University of California San Diego, I gradually began to understand my relationship with silence. This discussion led me back to childhood memories of finding comfort in quiet environments. My elementary school in Saza, Nagasaki, Japan, was located in a valley surrounded by mountains. During lunch breaks, I would bring a chair to the hallway on the third floor, where I could look out over the untouched landscape. I remember being fascinated by the movement of wind through the trees and by the shifting shadows of clouds across the mountains. At the time, I could not explain what drew my attention away from the activity on the school grounds, but I now understand that it was silence that held my interest.

I identify this experience as *seijaku*, a Japanese concept of silence that differs from *chinmoku* and *ma*, both of which are also translated as “silence” in English. *Seijaku* represents serene, tranquil, and often solitary quietness found in natural environments. *Chinmoku*, by contrast, embodies speechlessness shaped by socio-political pressure or emotional tension. *Ma* refers to purposeful space or distance, charged with tension and suspension between objects, sounds, or events. The perception of silence shifts according to personal experience and attention, and these distinctions reveal that silence is not a single, fixed condition.

This study aims to present the stories and contexts behind different forms of silence and to propose a framework for understanding them through these three Japanese terms. Drawing on personal interviews, literary research, and musical analysis, I examine the varied meanings of silence across disciplines. Each chapter is organized around one of the terms, *seijaku*, *chinmoku*, and *ma*, in order to highlight their distinctive characteristics. At the same time, I acknowledge that definitions of silence are not absolute. Cultural background, historical context, and individual perspective all influence how silence is understood. Much like seasonal transitions, where one person may consider June part of spring while another sees it as summer, silence invites interpretation and variation.

Silence is more than the absence of sound. It is a space that invites imagination and reflection on what exists within or beyond that gap. My intention is to offer artists across disciplines, including music,

visual art, and theater, a broader perspective on silence by examining its different characteristics. I hope this research encourages artists to reconsider silence from their own viewpoints and to explore new ways of expressing it in their creative work.

Kosuke Matsuda

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I would like to thank my committee members, Professor Shahrokh Yadegari and Professor Victoria Petrovich, whose mentorship expanded my artistic and intellectual perspectives. Through their interdisciplinary course *Crossing Boundaries* in 2022, I had the opportunity to create *Gravebirth* as an artistic director. Their openness to experimentation encouraged me to pursue collaborative and challenging work that explores political silence in music and theater.

I am also grateful to Professor Wilfrido Terrazas for his guidance in musical performance and improvisation. His belief that "life is an experiment" resonates strongly with my research on silence, as both emphasize transformation through experience. I was fortunate to collaborate with him on his composition *caminar* (2025), which further developed my performative approach to silence.

This dissertation draws not only on musical works and literature but also on personal interviews with individuals who generously shared their knowledge and perspectives. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Roger Reynolds for his collaboration on *Sleight of Hand* and investigating the impact of silence, Aleck Karis for his insightful perspectives on silence in chamber and piano music, Akari Komura for her contributions to understanding Japanese language and collaborative work through ONOMATOPE, Michael Running for sharing his experiences in monastic and therapeutic contexts, David Espiritu for discussing his experience with hearing loss, and Jeremy Olson for offering perspectives on silence from the viewpoint of an audio technician.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family, Minoru, Kimiyo, and Takeshi Matsuda, who have supported me throughout my long educational journey and have always encouraged my musical aspirations. When I presented my solo debut recital in Tokyo in 2025, they traveled from Nagasaki to attend and support my performance. Their continued support has made it possible for me to complete my terminal degree in the United States. I am also deeply grateful to my life partner, Chase Vinsky-Matsuda, whom I met in San Diego, for his constant support in music and encouragement even when my educational journey has been challenging.

I am sincerely thankful to everyone who has supported me and cared about my work as an artist. I hope that this dissertation contributes, even in a small way, to others and serves as an expression of my gratitude.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performing Silence

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Performing Silence analyzes and explores the multifaceted meaning of silence in music performance and composition, using Japanese terms as a guideline to investigate varying contexts of musical silence. This dissertation uses *Ma*, *Seijaku*, and *Chinmoku* as chapter divisions to examine contextual differences in order to deepen interpretative approaches to silence.

The discussion of musical silence has been a significant part of twentieth-century music. Although those discussions offered an opportunity for artists to utilize the intentional absence of sound as a functional component in music, there is potential to further explore the contexts and textures of silence that suggest the connotation of musical silence. The context and background of the absence of sound convey contrasting characteristics and interpretations. I argue that knowing the detailed contexts and backgrounds of silence in music strongly affects performers' ability to execute music with diverse musical techniques, interpretations, and analyses.

This writing details the meaning and function of silence through interviews with composers, musicians, and a former monk who have used silence as a tool to express musical ideas or psychological reflection. Each chapter presents the meaning of silence through the exploration of Japanese terms, as well as the practical methods for performers to reconsider the musical approaches for performing silence. Understanding the texture and meaning of silence will assist artists who use silence as part of musical performance to precisely envision the function of silence and explore its diverse roles beyond the lack of sound.

INTRODUCTION

This writing explores varying contexts and meanings of silence through investigation of personal views in interviews with musicians and artists, as well as analysis of musical works that shape the varying performative approaches to silence.

Silence in music has been discussed by many twentieth-century musicians such as John Cage, Iannis Xenakis, Toru Takemitsu, among others. When Cage composed the piece *4'33"* in 1952, Cage challenged the world by arguing "there is no such thing as silence" by notating three movements of music only by rest marks (Revill 358). While many composers and performers realize the significance of silence in music, the main discussion of silence remains in the physicality of sound, in which silence only exists with the presence of sound. However, I believe that the purpose and significance of silence go beyond its functionality: silence can exist with or without sound. To examine various types of silence in music, this writing uses three methods of investigation to understand what types of silence exist: using Japanese terms, conducting interviews, and analyzing music.

1. INVESTIGATION OF JAPANESE TERMS

Japanese terms are used to divide chapters to discuss how each category of silence contrasts from one another. As a Japanese speaker, I use specific terms to describe the precise understanding of the contexts of silence. For example, *Chinmoku* is the word used to describe quietness or speechlessness in the suppressive power of authority (Watanabe et al. 1710). *Chinmoku* is not only recounting the absence of sound but also implying the existence of a forceful environment that makes someone speechless. On the other hand, *Seijaku* defines stillness, quiet, and tranquility in a natural setting (Watanabe et al. 1424). While both terms can be translated as "silence," the contextual differences are crucially distinctive; choosing the correct term is imperative to precisely characterize the purpose and meaning behind the silence.

2. INTERVIEWS

An issue in investigating the interpretation of silence is that the perspective and perception of silence can vary depending on one's experience. To make this research objective and useful for readers, I

have conducted interviews to collect differing points of view and perceptual judgments of silence from diverse demographics. Interviewees include Steven Schick, a percussionist; Aleck Karis, a pianist; Roger Reynolds, a composer; Akari Komura, a composer; David Espiritu Jr., a concert hall manager; Jeremy Olson, a theatrical production specialist; and Michael Running, a therapist and former monk. Diverse perspectives and experiences in exercising silence in their works enhance understanding of the meaning and impact of silence in musical works from multifaceted aspects. I included non-musicians in interviewers such as a therapist and production personnel to broaden the perspective in silence as I believe that silence exists beyond the musical contexts. Running shared his unique experience in a monastery where he observed emotional and environmental silence when he carefully listened to his teachers' lessons. And concert hall manager Espiritu shared his interchanging perception of silence in his experience with deaf. Diverse experience and perspectives in silence enhances the accurate understanding of the contextual difference in *ma*, *seijaku*, and *chinmoku*.

3. MUSICAL ANALYSIS

Musical analysis exemplifies the varying contexts and meanings of silence in each category. The analysis includes historical understanding of musical examples as well as composers' personal experiences that affected their approach to silence in their music composition. Music examples include John Cage's *Ryoanji*", Roger Reynolds' *Autumn Island*, Peter Garland's *Moon Viewing Music*, and Iannis Xenakis's *Psappha*. Each work presents silence in varying contexts and backgrounds of musical composition. Understanding the particular intentions of silence will not only offer analytical understanding of music but also performers' awareness and musical discernment by using different techniques and gestures.

CHAPTER 1 MA

Those who visited Japan might have encountered *ma* in traditional Japanese architecture, visual arts, or musical works. For example, within the vast precincts of a temple, each pagoda or religious gate (*torii*) is placed at an appropriate distance. This deliberate spacing between buildings is *ma* and constitutes an essential part of Japanese tradition. *Ma* is a multifaceted Japanese term describing the distance or interval between objects, the size of a space, or the duration of time between objects or sounds. According to *Kenkyusha's Japanese-English Dictionary*, *ma* is translated as “time; a while; an interval; a pause; rest” or “timing” (2437). None of these definitions explicitly translates *ma* as “silence,” although musicians may perceive the interval and space between sounds as silence. Instead, *ma* embodies the meaningful and purposeful space between sounds rather than the mere absence of sound in musical contexts. In music, *ma* functions as a medium that bridges one note to another, carrying tension, suspension, and monumentality between sounds.

This chapter examines various manifestations of silence related to the space expressed by *ma*. Part I, “Definition of *Ma*,” explores Japanese literature and an interview with composer Komura Akari to define the distinctive characteristics of *ma* in writing, architecture, and daily conversation. Part II, “*Ma* in Musical Context,” compares John Cage’s *Ryoanji* and Roger Reynolds’s *Autumn Island*, examining their contrasting uses of *ma* in musical composition. Part III, “Performing *Ma*,” proposes practical approaches for performers to realize *ma* through interviews with Professor Steven Schick and pianist Aleck Karis.

1-1. DEFINITION OF MA

The Japanese writing system, *kanji*, often incorporates meaning within the visual structure of its characters. Kanji are logographic and frequently suggest meaning through their visual imagery and component parts. The kanji for *ma* is written as “間,” a combination of “門” (*mon*), meaning gate, and “日” (*nichi*), meaning sun. I believe that the character visually evokes sunlight passing through a gate in front of a building.

Ma is applied in many forms of Japanese culture, including martial arts, literature, and traditional architecture. For instance, *ma* conveys a powerful sense of tension in hostile situations within Japanese martial arts. When I studied Japanese martial arts such as *aikidō*, *judo*, and *kendō* in middle school, my teachers emphasized the importance of maintaining appropriate *ma*, or more specifically *ma-ai*, the distance between oneself and an opponent. *Ma-ai* represents a distance that allows immediate engagement while preserving freedom of movement. *Ma* or *ma-ai* involves gauging the distance between oneself and one's opponent while waiting for the opportune moment to appear, at which point one quickly shortens the distance and subdues the opponent. In this sense, *ma* is a space charged with tension, strategy, and psychological exchange.

Ma also appears in traditional Japanese architecture. Many Japanese homes include a room with a *tokonoma* (床の間), a recessed alcove integrated into the interior wall. Often translated as “wooden floor space,” the *tokonoma* is an elevated area above the walking floor used to display hanging scrolls or flower arrangements. As the term *tokonoma* implies, *ma*—space—physically distinguishes *toko*, the wooden floor, by clearly articulating where the walking space begins and ends. My personal experience also illustrates the distinctive function of the *tokonoma* in Japanese homes. In my home in Nagasaki, Japan, a *tokonoma* occupied one corner of the *washitsu* (Japanese-style room). Built two to three inches above the walking floor, it displayed a vase and a Japanese ink-wash painting. The alcove always cast a faint shadow inside, so that the artistic objects were illuminated within slight darkness.

The Japanese author Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, who critically compares Japanese and Western traditions from his own perspective, argues for the indispensability of the *tokonoma* in traditional Japanese rooms because it creates dimensional depth through shadow:

In our rooms, there is a “*tokonoma*” where we display hanging scrolls and arrange flowers. However, these scrolls and flowers serve not so much as decorations themselves but rather to enhance the depth of the shadows. We value the harmony between the scroll and the wall of the “*tokonoma*,” in other words, the “*toko-utsuri* (floor reflection),” above all. (Tanizaki 33)

Tanizaki argues that the *tokonoma* is not merely a decorative alcove for visual art but a structurally essential element that maintains the balance of the room. The recessed alcove casts shadows as it blocks direct sunlight coming through the paper windows. Perceptually, the *tokonoma* offers dimensional depth by introducing varied surface levels on the wall and floor, and *ma* plays an essential role in defining a special space for visual expression. The uneven floor surface and shadows on the wall together create a distinctive Japanese aesthetic.

Ma appears not only in architecture and traditional culture but also in daily conversation. In this context, *ma* may refer to timing or pause. For instance, when someone remarks that “there was a good *ma*” in a conversation, it implies that the timing and pauses in speech were appropriate. Good *ma* enhances fluidity and engagement, whereas bad *ma* creates awkward interruptions. In an interview, composer Akari Komura argued that “*ma* is perishable,” emphasizing its fleeting momentum and the way timing and pause can alter the quality and delivery of speech (see app. A-35). A pause that is too long or too short changes the meaning of what follows, much as a comedian changes the meaning of the joke by missing the proper timing for a punchline. The misplacement or inappropriate duration of *ma* diminishes expressive effect. The traditional Japanese comedian (*rakugoka*) Utanosuke Katsura similarly describes encountering “bad *ma*” backstage:

We ourselves sometimes say backstage, “That guy has bad *ma*,” meaning someone with poor timing—for example, an apprentice who makes mistakes precisely when the teacher happens to be in a bad mood. In such cases, the word refers to unfortunate timing (Katsura 17-18).

In this context, *ma* implies inappropriate timing within the wrong situation, thereby changing the consequences that follow. Katsura also explains another meaning of *ma* in *rakugo*. Here, *ma* refers to the space between words and phrases, where comedians pause briefly before delivering the punchline. *Rakugoka* are particularly aware of the importance of *ma* in performance, and Katsura offers a specific example:

There is a line that says, “Do you have one of those... talking flowers?” A pause is placed before the keyword “talking flower.” If it is spoken continuously, it may simply pass by the listener unnoticed; however, by inserting *ma*, the audience’s attention is

drawn to it, and the phrase leaves a stronger impression. Moreover, during this *ma*, one holds the breath. If one breathes, the sense of tension disappears, and the pause loses its effect. Breathing and *ma*, therefore, are inseparably connected (Katsura 19).

This example underscores how a brief span of time and space between words can transform the listener's experience in comedy performance. I would argue that the concept of appropriate timing in speech extends beyond *rakugo* to all forms of speech delivery, including public addresses, political statements, and everyday conversation. *Ma* is an impactful space between words, phrases, or sounds that can alter intention and shape the flow of communication.

From the examples above, three characteristics of *ma* emerge:

1. A temporal and spatial interval charged with tension and intention.
2. A perceptual gap that creates dimensional depth in architecture.
3. A fleeting moment whose duration transforms meaning.

These characteristics of *ma* provide a foundational understanding of silence and its impact in Japanese aesthetics, architecture, and daily conversation. The next part, "*Ma* in Musical Context," examines how musical works incorporate the concept of *ma* and how performers can precisely understand the impact of silence in music.

1-2: *MA* IN MUSICAL CONTEXT

JOHN CAGE'S *RYOANJI* (1983-1985)

Ryoanji by John Cage is one of the musical works that incorporates the aesthetic aspect of *ma*, as the composition signifies his embrace of Japanese philosophy and reflects his personal experiences in Japan (Cage 88). Cage contributed significantly to transforming perceptions of silence in musical performance, particularly through his composition *4'33"*, written in 1952.

Although *4'33"* is among Cage's most prominent works highlighting the impact of silence, *Ryoanji* offers an especially valuable example for examining the concept of *ma*, as it closely resonates with the definitions discussed in the previous section. Cage composed the *Ryoanji* series between 1983 and 1985 after traveling to Kyoto, Japan (Cage 58). He was inspired by the stone garden at Ryōan-ji, where fifteen rocks are arranged upon raked white sand. I visited Ryōan-ji on a school trip, and the garden embodied a distinctive calmness and tranquility accompanied by subtle ambient sounds.

INFLUENCE OF JAPANESE TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN *RYOANJI*

Cage was directly influenced by the aesthetics of Japanese art and music, which often emphasize natural phenomena rather than overtly personal musical expression (Cage 70). One of the clearest influences can be observed in his notation system. The score employs three types of notation: graphic notation, conventional quarter notes, and quarter rests. Its rhythmic structure is simple, and the notation leaves considerable interpretive space for the performer.

The simplicity of instrumentation and rhythmic design resembles characteristics frequently found in Japanese traditional music. Musicologist Eishi Kikkawa argues that Japanese traditional music often favors simple, frequently monophonic structures rather than the architectural complexity commonly associated with Western music (191). This approach can also be seen in Cage's *Ryoanji*. As shown in Figure 1, Cage engages Japanese aesthetics through a notation system that values rhythmic simplicity and minimal ornamentation.



Figure1: Cage, John. *Ryoanji*. 1948. pp. 18.

Cage's *Ryoanji* suggests a direct engagement with Japanese aesthetic principles reflected in the landscape of Ryōan-ji. For example, Cage wrote in the composer's note that the accompanying part should be played as a "garden of sounds" (Cage, *Ryoanji* 1). Correspondingly, the musical structure of *Ryoanji* parallels the architectural design of the stone garden at Ryōan-ji Temple. The accompaniment consists of clusters of sounds organized in rhythmic groupings of twelve, thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen attacks (Cage 58–59).

The spacing between these sounds evokes the physical arrangement of the stone garden, where fifteen rocks are sparsely distributed across white sand. The raked sand visually connects the rocks through flowing patterns, yet each stone remains distinctly separated. In the same way, the gaps between notes in Cage's *Ryoanji* embody the characteristics of *ma* through intentional spacing and sustained tension. The garden is also referred to as the "Seven/Five/Three Garden" (Ryōan-ji Temple), reflecting the prominence of odd-numbered groupings culturally associated with success and fortune in Japan (Nishiyama 2). Similarly, Cage specifies grouped numbers of quarter notes and quarter rests, as shown in Figure 1, annotating totals such as twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. Just as the fifteen rocks are deliberately placed in the garden, Cage places notes in a similarly deliberate manner to represent the landscape of Ryōan-ji in musical form.

The spacing between musical notes in *Ryoanji* is not merely an absence of sound but a structured interval. Silence in Cage's *Ryoanji* sustains energy and tension between sound events, thereby evoking the concept of *ma*. One might ask how silence begins and ends. I would argue that the perception of silence

can shift depending on one's attention to background sounds, such as ambient noise, and foreground sounds, such as musical notes. *Ma*, however, sharply separates sounds or objects while sustaining the energy between them, thereby providing a clear sense of the beginning and ending of silence. In an interview, composer Akari Komura suggested that *ma* possesses a distinct presence: "I think *ma* is a divider of things such as sound or image. It's like something that has a beginning and an end" (Komura see app. A-36). This clear presence of silence invites listeners' expectation of what will follow next. As *rakugoka* Utanosuke Katsura suggests, the intentional pause before an important line draws attention to what comes afterward (Katsura 19). Similarly, *ma* in music functions as a divider of sound, holding suspended tension while inviting anticipation. This idea resonates with Tanizaki's discussion of the *tokonoma* in Japanese rooms. The *tokonoma* is visually differentiated from the living space, offering dimensional depth that is essential to Japanese aesthetics. In the same way, Cage notates quarter notes and quarter rests to distinguish sound from intentional silence, clearly articulating the beginning and ending of each silence. His rests function not merely as empty spaces but as delimitations between musical sound and purposeful silence. In this sense, rests are as meaningful as notes, sustaining tension between sounds. It therefore suggests that the silence in Cage's *Ryoanji* functions as *ma*.

INTENDED AND UNINTENDED SILENCE IN CAGE'S MUSIC

Cage was one of the first composers to distinguish between unintended and intended silences through his compositions. The quarter rests in *Ryoanji* function as *ma*—deliberate, suspended pauses rather than empty voids. Thus, the silence in *Ryoanji* may be understood as intended silence. Cage describes the distinctive roles of silence when it is intentional or unintentional as follows:

after convincing oneself ignorantly that sound has, as its clearly defined opposite, silence, that since duration is the only characteristic of sound that is measurable in terms of silence, therefore any valid structure involving sounds and silences should be based, not as accidentally traditional, on frequency, but rightly on duration, one enters an anechoic chamber, as silence as technologically possible in 1951, to discover that one hears two sounds of one's own unintentional making (nerve's systematic operation, blood's circulation), the situation one is clearly in it not objective (sound-silence), but rather subjective (sounds only), those intended and those others (so-called silence) not intended. (Cage 14)

Cage argues that the perception of silence shifts according to attention. Silence is not an absolute condition defined solely by the absence of sound; rather, what we call silence often consists of unintended sounds that enter awareness when attention changes. For example, a commuting bus or subway may feel silent after one has spent the entire day in a loud environment such as a percussion practice room. Because one is no longer focused on the surrounding noise, ambient sound recedes into the background and is often perceived as silence when it is not consciously attended to. In contrast, Cage notates intended silence as quarter rests in *Ryoanji*, distinguishing these structural and purposeful silences from ambient sound. Professor Steven Schick also illustrates this perceptual interchangeability of silence in an interview:

You're sitting in a concert. You're listening to a piece you really want to listen to. You're so focused. Behind you, the person is rubbing the program or maybe unwrapping a cough drop or something like that. Everybody else around you is looking around, saying, why are you making this noise? But you are focused, and you don't hear it at all. So is it silent? In a way, it is silent to you because the brain is a very powerful filter. Unlike the eyes, which cannot filter, we see what we see, right? But in hearing and in paying attention, so much is determined by what the brain determines is a relevant acoustical signal. (Schick app. A-11,12)

As Professor Schick points out, the distinction between noise and silence may depend on how listeners behave within the listening experience. Cage understood through his experience in the anechoic chamber that absolute silence, which is defined as the complete absence of sound, does not exist. When Cage notates quarter rests between notes, ambient sounds will inevitably occur, and these are often conventionally regarded as silence. However, the function of those rest marks is not to invite ambient sounds into the musical texture, but rather to establish boundaries and musical discontinuity through spatial placement.

When a composer actively introduces or directs listeners' attention toward unintentional ambient sound, as in Cage's *4'33"*, ambient sound becomes the foreground of the musical experience. It is no longer perceived as silence but as musical material. By contrast, the rest marks in *Ryoanji* represent intended silence and do not incorporate ambient sound as compositional material. Instead, the silence

connects preceding musical events to what follows. The musical space in *Ryoanji* sharply cuts the acoustic instrumental sounds, and the silence between notes sustains energy and intensity.

Although the intentional silence in *Ryoanji* reflects characteristics commonly associated with *ma*, it remains uncertain whether Cage fully understood the distinctions between *ma* and other Japanese concepts such as *chinmoku* or *seijaku*, which will be examined in later chapters. Musicologist Masaaki Ueno notes a possible conceptual contradiction between the Japanese understanding of *ma* and Cage's interpretation:

Regarding *ma*, John Cage stated in a 1978 interview, "'Ma' is 'Chinmoku.' It is space. It is like the sand in a garden." Concerning *ma* in music, he also remarked, "If one becomes preoccupied with the sounds themselves or starts thinking about how sounds ought to be, one risks forgetting 'ma.'" Cage thus regarded *ma* and "chinmoku" as equivalent. As for "chinmoku," he defined it as "sound that arises of itself within the environment." Therefore, a subtle difference can be discerned between what Cage calls *ma* and the concept of *ma* in Japanese music (Ueno 33)

Cage was aware of the various Japanese terms used to describe different kinds of silence, although he appears to have conceptualized both *ma* and *chinmoku* within a similar category. *Chinmoku*, however, refers to a form of silence shaped by social or suppressive forces rather than one that emerges organically from spatial or natural relationships. I will examine the concept of *chinmoku* more fully in the following chapter. Although *chinmoku* and *ma* do not represent the same type of silence, Cage's interpretation allows us to understand silence in his works as more than empty space; instead, it suggests a form of spiritual suspension. In the following section, I will compare how Japanese traditional music employs *ma* and how this concept may have influenced Cage's treatment of silence.

MA IN NOHGAKU

Ma plays a crucial role in Japanese traditional music such as *Nohgaku*. *Nohgaku* is one of the oldest theatrical traditions, established in the fourteenth century, and it typically depicts human drama, historical events, or heroic fantasy through the integration of music and choreography (Nohgaku Kyokai). One of its distinctive characteristics is the simplicity of its instrumentation and its emphasis on *ma*.

Japanese musicologist Eishi Kikkawa argues that Japanese music values simplicity of sound in order to leave adequate space between individual notes (Kikkawa 191). For instance, *Nohgaku* employs *taiko* drums to indicate timing and tempo (Nohgaku Kyokai). When a *taiko* performer strikes a note, a flute enters, followed by another *taiko* sound. The interaction between performers in *Nohgaku* resembles a form of conversation through silence. As the *taiko* player articulates individual notes, *ma* emerges between them, suspending tension and shaping directional flow for the other performers.

Unlike the Western classical orchestra, *Nohgaku* does not use a conductor. Flutists and dancers must actively hear *ma* as a cue in order to understand their place within the performance. *Ma* is therefore essential not only for functional coordination but also for aesthetics, much as Tanizaki emphasizes in his discussion of the *tokonoma*. *Nohgaku* musicologist Shozo Masuda explains that the function of *ma* is not merely spatial absence but a spiritual bridge between sounds:

The true essence of Noh sound lies in the space between each individual beating note. The current state of microphones indeed has not developed to capture the music of these *Ma*, the spirit beyond the vibrations of the air. It is not that there are *Ma* between sounds, but rather that sounds exist to confirm the presence of these *Ma*. (Masuda 30)

As Masuda suggests, *ma* in *Nohgaku* transcends measurable phenomena such as sound and silence; it sustains a spiritual connection between notes. He further emphasizes that *ma* is not a byproduct of music-making. Rather, in *Nohgaku*, the purpose of musical sound is to affirm and reveal the existence of *ma*. Cage similarly demonstrates an attitude toward silence that shapes musical intention through the space between notes and musical events:

For merely, silence was the time lapse between sounds, useful towards a variety of ends, among them that of tasteful arrangement, where by separating two sounds or two groups of sounds their differences or relationships might receive emphasis; or that of expressivity, where silences in a musical discourse might provide pause or punctuation; or again, that of architecture, where the introduction or interruption of silence might give definition either to a predetermined structure or to an organically developing one (Cage 22).

Cage intentionally used silence to alter the relationship between sound and silence. This purposeful silence, charged with tension, is commonly employed in *Nohgaku* performance as *ma*, and *Ryoanji* demonstrates a similar attitude toward silence by suggesting spiritual suspension between notes. In *Ryoanji*, Cage employs *ma* to articulate clear boundaries and durations between sound and intended silence. These intended silences are notated through quarter rests. At the same time, Cage's understanding of silence extends beyond purely musical contexts, as he incorporates unintended ambient sound into works such as *4'33"*. The silence in *Ryoanji* embodies suspended pause and purposeful expression in ways similar to the function of *ma* in *Nohgaku*. It is clear that Cage's music engages multiple forms of silence, including *chinmoku*, *seijaku*, and *ma*. Although the perception of silence may shift according to attention, as Professor Steven Schick observes, the silence in *Ryoanji* most strongly resonates with the Japanese concept of *ma*.

ROGER REYNOLDS

AUTUMN ISLAND

Professor Roger Reynolds' *Autumn Island* is another musical example that incorporates characteristics of *ma* through several distinct types of notation. I was privileged to conduct interview sessions with both the composer Roger Reynolds and Professor Steven Schick, who have collaborated for over decades. I draw upon their perspectives on silence in order to illuminate *Ma*'s function in *Autumn Island* and in Reynolds' broader compositional methods in silence. In my interview with Reynolds, he shared his views and attitudes toward silence, arguing that the function of silence may shift subjectively depending on the listener's attention (Reynolds app. A-2). This interchanging perception of silence parallels Cage's approach to silence, as this chapter further examines how silence operates through personal experience and individual perspective.

Autumn Island is a solo marimba work derived from *Archipelago* series for large chamber ensemble and computer sound (Reynolds *Autumn Island*). *Autumn Island* presents dense and complex layers of marimba sonorities through varied techniques and timbral approaches. One of the most notable aspects of Reynolds' compositional language is his differentiated notation of silence. For instance, he distinguishes among a comma, a fermata, and a square fermata—not merely to indicate duration, but to specify the intention and character of the space. According to his note on the score, the comma represents “a breath pause,” the regular fermata indicates “a break,” and the square-shaped fermata signifies “an extended hold” (Reynolds *Autumn Island*). In my interview with Reynolds, he described the relationship between silence as experience and its effect within musical structure as follows:

I tend to think of silence more in terms of its relationship to an experience that is grasped and that it helps the listener to grasp because it articulates. So as you know, in other pieces, *Autumn Island*, *Watershed* and so on, I have many different pause ideas. There's a comma. There's a comma with a fermata over it. There's a comma with a square bracket harmonic. There's this idea of a fermata that has a kind of tail with an arrow, which means stop counting and wait until this idea, this phenomenon has disappeared before you go on (Reynolds app. A-3).

It is evident that silence is structurally integrated into Reynolds' compositional practice and treated with the same precision and intentionality as sounded events. Each term “pause,” “break,” and “hold” corresponds closely to the concept of *ma*, as they imply tension, suspension, and the shaping of temporal space. The sensation of suspension created by these differentiated silences suggests the potential for emergence, transformation, or continuation. In this way, Reynolds' notational distinctions resonate with the conceptual dimensions of *ma* outlined earlier: silence is not an absence, but an energized and articulated interval that sustains meaning between events.

Examining each category individually reveals distinct perceptual and practical functions of silence and clarifies which of Reynolds's intentions most closely align with *ma*. The first type is the comma, signifying “a breath pause.” This implies a brief moment in which the listener anticipates something that will follow immediately. For example, a comma appears in measure 6, as shown in Figure 2.

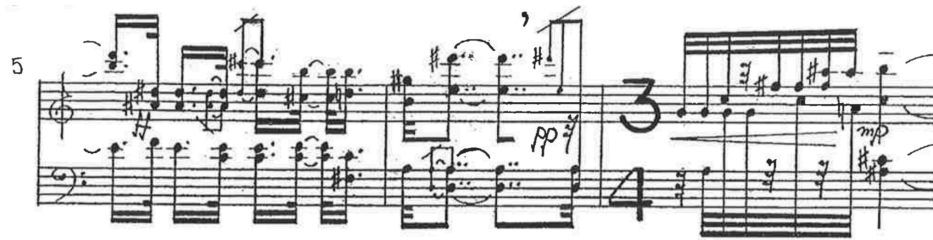


Figure 2 Reynolds, Roger. *Autumn Island*. 1989. Mm.5-7.

Measures 5–6 present a harmonic progression with widening intervals, creating a sense of rhythmic and harmonic closure. The comma interrupts this continuity through a sudden dynamic change from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*. The following notes maintain the harmonic structure while echoing the previous statement. In the interview, Reynolds described the purpose of pauses in his compositions as follows:

One reason for pausing might be that something complex or something not entirely clear has just happened and the listener needs a moment to think “well, what was that?” And then at the same time, you might say, well, OK, I get that. But I wonder where we'll go next. So there's this space of dealing with meaning that that occurs in the piece.
(Reynolds app. A-1)

Reynolds emphasizes that pauses do not merely divide sections; they give the audience time to process what they have heard. The brief interruption raises questions in the listener's mind about what will come next. From this perspective, the sudden halt of sound in *Autumn Island* resonates with the concept of *ma*: the pause invites speculation about musical direction and creates perceptual tension that carries forward.

Reynolds also employs standard fermatas under various conditions in *Autumn Island*. I would argue that these fermatas align less with *ma* and more closely with the concept of *seijaku*, which evokes tranquility and serenity with or without sounding events. According to *Grove Music Online*, a fermata is a sign “showing the end of a phrase or indicating the prolongation of a note or a rest beyond its usual value.” While this definition offers a practical understanding, performers must still interpret the composer's intention to grasp its expressive function fully. In *Autumn Island*, Reynolds characterizes the standard fermata as “a break” rather than simply a prolongation.

For example, at measure 74, a fermata appears over a single note; another occurs at measure 84, beat three, over a half rest. In contrast to the comma, which implies continuation, the break emphasizes the resonance of previous events without necessarily projecting forward.

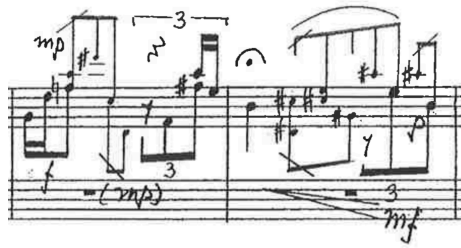


Figure 3: Reynold, Roger. *Autumn Island*. 1989. mm.74



Figure 4: Reynolds, Roger. *Autumn Island*. 1989. mm.84-85

The fermata at measure 74 encourages listening to the resonance of B4 without generating anticipation, and the fermata at measure 84 functions similarly. The phrase beginning at measure 85 introduces *agitato*, contrasting with the preceding section, where measures 60–84 are marked *pensively*. Here, the performer transitions between contrasting ideas, and Reynolds notes that whether the performer counts during silence influences the musical result:

If the player stops counting and the phenomenon continues and it becomes less and less distinct, less and less clear, less and less present, just as in the lengths of *Sleight of Hand* then the listener goes with that and you are freed of... [snapping fingers to indicate the speed] And music which is freed of that is pretty unusual anywhere in history or anywhere over time. And it's an interesting idea and so it's also related to how I use silence in my work. (Reynolds app. A-4)

Counting during non-sounded moments preserves the preexisting tempo and structure, whereas refraining from counting allows the music to interact more freely with temporal space. This subjective experience highlights the intentional force of silence, though such a function differs from *ma* because it does not necessarily create anticipation between events.

Reynolds also uses the square-bracket fermata to indicate an “extended hold” in *Autumn Island*. The term *hold* conveys suspended tension and a connection to what follows. I argue that the square-bracket fermata most strongly embodies the characteristics of *ma*, emphasizing the intentional use of space between notes to generate energy. Reynolds applies square-bracket fermatas at measures 210 and 260, both over notes performed with rolling techniques. This rolling connects one or more pitches through repeated strikes, extending resonance and sustaining duration.

Performers may vary the number of repetitions within the rhythmic value, thereby altering the density of the sound. The fermata functions as a holding of energy from one note to the next, creating momentum and propelling the subsequent gesture forward. In this context, *ma* encompasses not only the absence of sound but also the time and space charged with intentional energy between events. Although the square-bracket fermata appears over sounding notes, the sense of potency and forward drive it creates exemplifies *ma*. Analogous to the function of *ma* in Japanese rooms, as Tanizaki describes, the square-bracket fermata shapes dimensional depth by altering the density and texture of musical space.

CONCLUSION OF *AUTUMN ISLAND* BY ROGER REYNOLDS

Autumn Island by Roger Reynolds demonstrates the varied contexts and functions of silence through its use of the comma, half-circle fermata, and square-bracket fermata. The comma, which Reynolds describes as a “pause,” functions as a musical divider, separating gestures while creating intentional expectation for what follows. Reynolds emphasizes that these brief pauses allow listeners to process complex musical ideas. From this perspective, the comma in *Autumn Island* exemplifies the concept of *ma*, operating as a divider between musical events while implying the unfolding of subsequent material.

In contrast, the half-circle fermata emphasizes separation from preceding musical material without suggesting continuation. Reynolds characterizes these spaces as a “break” and notes that choosing not to count them is central to engaging with their effect. As such, the half-circle fermata does not fully align with *ma*, since it does not generate anticipatory tension between events.

The square-bracket fermata, however, performs a more distinctly *ma*-like function. It shapes speed and density by connecting one note to another through rolling techniques, transmitting energy across musical gestures. In this context, *ma* embodies the intensity and continuity carried between sounds. The square-bracket fermata in *Autumn Island* reflects this function by emphasizing dimensional depth within the musical texture, altering velocity and density while sustaining energy across successive events.

1-3. PERFORMING *MA*

This section discusses how performers can realize *ma* in musical performance, drawing on the preceding analyses and interviews with performers. As demonstrated above, understanding the specific roles of silence in each work provides a framework for interpretation. The precise notation of diverse silences, as seen in *Ryoanji* and *Autumn Island*, requires performers to approach silence with the same care and intentionality as sounding notes. Percussionist Steven Schick and pianist Aleck Karis offer similar perspectives on performing silence:

You asked me about *Autumn Island* first. It is the most complex of those pieces relative to silence. And so I think it's fascinating. And I think it's safe to say that there is no successful performance of *Autumn Island* without successfully understanding the role of silence. We tend to think that the most difficult thing of *Autumn Island* is playing all the right notes at the right time, and it is difficult. But that is a conventional kind of difficulty. The poetic difficulty in the piece is understanding what you are doing when you're not playing the notes. (Schick app. A-9)

Schick suggests that a successful performance of *Autumn Island* requires both technical and interpretive mastery. Practically, performers must understand rhythm, dynamics, and the duration of rests as prescribed in the score. At the same time, interpretive (or “poetic”) mastery requires internalizing the composer’s attitude and intention behind each gesture. Silence, therefore, becomes a central expressive element rather than a secondary absence.

One approach to realizing *ma* is to integrate the duration of silence into the shaping of musical intention. Because *ma* emphasizes purposeful silence charged with tension and energy, the connection between preceding and following sounds becomes crucial. When the length and quality of silence align with the musical context, the performance gains clarity and expressive force. Karis emphasizes the importance of actively listening to silence in the same way one listens to sound:

There's listening to the silence very actively, just really the way you listen to every sound you make. So, Steve (Schick) is a master at that, of just really thinking of color and creating, you know, just listening very carefully. But then also, when you get to a silence, just listening to that. Sometimes there's a little reverberation still, sometimes it may be just there's sounds in the hall. (Karis app. A-20)

As Karis suggests, different environments produce different listening conditions. A performer in a large concert hall must respond to resonance and ambient sound differently than in a practice room. Actively listening to silence allows performers to shape *ma* with intention, adapting to acoustics and extending musical awareness beyond sounded notes. Karis also highlights the importance of silence in recorded media:

The last thing I thought about was how important it is, if you make a recording, to pay attention to the space between the tracks, because I have to say most artists let the editor just do that, and I think that is a huge mistake, that's a, that's a lost opportunity, so when you have a longer track, or a more intense piece, you might have a longer silence before the next thing. (Karis app. A-21)

Karis emphasizes the impact of intentional spaces between tracks, suggesting that performers should take responsibility for shaping silence in recorded media as well. I interpret this intentional space between tracks as *ma*, since it functions as a performative tool that can be manipulated to convey musical meaning through silence. As Karis suggests, large-scale works may require longer silences before proceeding to the next section, allowing the audience time to process what they have heard. This perspective resonates with the compositional intentions of Roger Reynolds, whose use of silence often provides listeners with time to absorb complex musical ideas.

The purposeful use of silence in music also illustrates the “perishability” of *ma*, as composer Akari Komura notes: the impact and meaning of *ma* shift depending on the intention behind its duration. If the space is too long or too short, the audience’s perception and reception of the music can change significantly. Professor Schick further reflects on this idea through his experience performing Morton Feldman’s *The King of Denmark*, offering insight into how performers might approach *ma*:

a little woodblock note that goes like that [tap a table], and then you're moving [gesture]. Is that silence? It is on the recording. It will be silent, right, because you're not hearing any sound, but will it look like that on the video? No, because the energy that starts with the woodblock is being sustained through gesture, and if it's silent, it is at least another kind of silence than that. (Schick app. A-11)

As Professor Steven Schick suggests, performance gesture can embody the meaning of space. Even when such gestures are not captured in an audio recording, the intention behind the space between

notes can shape a performer's physical movements, connecting one sound to another with sustained energy. Percussionist Aiyun Huang argues this type of body movement is often referred to as an ancillary gesture in her writing *Percussion Theater*. According to her observation and analysis, the ancillary gesture is primarily used for artistic expression and as a performative cue for other musicians (Huang 130). Although ancillary gestures do not directly produce sound, their visual presence can influence how audiences perceive the continuity, tension, and expressive quality of silence.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Ma is the space and time between sounds that sustains energy and tension. As Jun'ichirō Tanizaki argues, *ma* is an essential concept in Japanese aesthetics. The alcove-style structure, *tokonoma*, in a Japanese room exemplifies *ma* by physically distinguishing spatial design. *Ma* separates the display area from the walking floor, creating dimensional depth through shadow.

Similarly, John Cage and Roger Reynolds treat silence as a functional space and a cutting action in music, separating notes, phrases, and structural elements. In their works, *ma* sustains tension and energy even in the absence of sound. Cage's *Ryoanji* presents two types of silence: intended silence within musical structure and unintended sounds that are often perceived as silence. Inspired by the stone garden at Ryōan-ji, Cage spaces sound and silence through quarter notes and rests, treating silence as equal to sound and thereby embodying *ma*.

Reynolds's *Autumn Island* similarly incorporates *ma*, particularly through intentional gaps that create tension and suspension. Reynolds employs three notational signs to articulate different types of silence: the comma (pause), the half-circle fermata (break), and the square-bracket fermata (extended hold). Among these, the comma and square-bracket fermata most clearly exemplify *ma*, as they create energized spaces that connect musical gestures and project forward motion.

The section "Performing *Ma*" explored performative approaches to embodying *ma* through interviews with musicians. Professor Steven Schick, a close collaborator of Reynolds, emphasizes that understanding silence is essential for performing the complex rhythms of *Autumn Island*. Pianist Aleck Karis further highlights the importance of listening to the resonance and color of silence in performance. The duration of space between notes is flexible and depends on the performance environment; performers must actively listen and respond in order to shape these spaces intentionally. In this way, sound and silence are treated equally, each contributing to the overall musical expression.

Karis also notes that recordings incorporate *ma* through the intentional spacing between tracks, which significantly influences the listener's experience. Performers, therefore, must carefully construct these silences in recording production. Furthermore, bodily movement plays a critical role in conveying

the energy of *ma*. Schick emphasizes that ancillary gestures—physical movements used for artistic expression—can visually communicate the intention behind silence. In performing *The King of Denmark* by Morton Feldman, even with short, resonant instruments such as woodblocks, he demonstrates how energy can be sustained between notes. These gestures create a perceptible sense of suspension, allowing the audience to perceive the performer's intention within silence. Such movements become an integral part of performance, reinforcing the expressive function of *ma*.

CHAPTER 2 SEIJAKU

Japanese speakers commonly use *seijaku* to describe a quality of ambient quietness associated with tranquility, serenity, and a sense of solitude. Unlike *ma*, which articulates clear distinctions or intervals in space and time, *seijaku* suggests a more ambiguous boundary between sound and silence. For instance, *seijaku* may be experienced as the stillness of a forest, where a quiet environment evokes calmness and introspection.

Seijaku encompasses psychological associations such as tranquility, stability, and stillness within a subdued sonic environment. Understanding *seijaku* offers a broader perspective on how artists approach silence in musical practice. It is not only a functional interval between sounds, as in *ma*, but also an experiential and perceptual state shaped by individual interpretation.

2-1 DEFINITION OF SEIJAKU

Kenkyusha's Japanese-English Dictionary defines *seijaku* as a serene and isolated quietness in nature, such as that found in deep forests or mountains (Watanabe 1424). I argue that *seijaku* implies not only low dynamic levels of sound but also an emotional state associated with serenity and solitude. The definition of *seijaku* therefore shifts according to individual experience and perspective. Because *seijaku* reflects both environmental and psychological stillness, it is important to examine specific cases that illuminate its interpretation through lived experience. This chapter draws on interviews and Japanese literature to contextualize the meaning of *seijaku*.

In an interview, composer Akari Komura states, “When I hear *seijaku*, I feel the quietness of the dark night. And I feel like something is soft and tender. That’s how I feel” (Komura app. A-30). From her perspective, *seijaku* conveys not only sonic quietness but also a sense of fragility or emotional unease. She further associates *seijaku* with specific locations, noting, “I feel like it’s a sacred feeling. When I hear the word *seijaku*, I think of a church or a temple, or some kind of ritual relationship” (Komura app. A-30). In this sense, *seijaku* can be understood as the quietness found in sacred spaces such as shrines and temples, where stillness is closely tied to contemplative emotional states.

My own experience also highlights the connotations of *seijaku* in both sonic and emotional terms. When I lived in my hometown of Nagasaki, Japan, my house was surrounded by deep forest, where ambient sounds were constantly present. Sitting on the balcony, I heard birds singing, leaves rustling, and insects moving in the background. Although the environment was not silent, I experienced a strong sense of tranquility and calm. I describe this condition as *seijaku*, as it reflects both environmental quietness and emotional stillness. While *seijaku* may be translated as silence in English, it often evokes natural ambient sound together with a sense of serenity.

Japanese artistic practices such as flower arrangement, the tea ceremony, and calligraphy also incorporate *seijaku*. Musicologist Eishi Kikkawa suggests that the tea ceremony and traditional Japanese music share this aesthetic, which emphasizes emotional quietness grounded in simplicity and solitude:

In my view, “jaku”, one of the guiding maxims of the spirit of the tea ceremony, is not something limited solely to tea ceremony, but is also an extremely important aesthetic principle in music, just as it is in flower arrangement and the poetic arts. “Jaku” is the *jaku* of quiet solitude and stillness—the *jaku* of quietness and tranquility—and it is a term that expresses the character of Japanese beauty through qualities such as serenity, wabi-like austerity, pathos, loneliness, dimness, austere refinement, and simplicity (Kikkawa 89).

According to Kikkawa, *seijaku* encompasses quietness intertwined with fragility, pathos, loneliness, and simplicity. It represents an emotional condition rather than merely the absence of sound. *Seijaku* does not signify emptiness; rather, it describes a state filled with subtle, often unintentional ambient sounds accompanied by emotional calmness. In the following sections, I further examine *seijaku* through Japanese literature, personal experience, interviews, and musical examples in order to clarify its role in shaping the perception of silence.

KANJI FORM AND JAPANESE LITERATURE

Seijaku is composed of two kanji: 静 (*sei*) and 寂 (*jaku*). The character 静 (*sei*) denotes quietness and calmness (Hayashi 504), and it can be used independently to indicate acoustic or environmental stillness. In contrast, 寂 (*jaku*), which may also be read as *sabi*, conveys meanings of loneliness and

isolation (Halpern 1049). Together, *seijaku* encompasses both audible quietness and an emotional sense of solitude.

Because *seijaku* carries both environmental and psychological dimensions, it is frequently employed in Japanese literature to articulate the relationship between nature and human emotion. One notable example appears in *Nikkō Shōhin* by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa. This text is based on his travels in the Nikkō region of Japan, an area characterized by landscapes that remain largely untouched by human civilization (Fujimoto 23). In the following passage, Akutagawa uses *seijaku* to convey both natural stillness and emotional solitude:

In Musashino, the bush warblers are still singing, the bul-buls are singing, and the sprouts of corn in the fields have emerged. While the pale purple flowers of soybeans faintly shimmer in the shadow of the leaves, this place shows the winter scenery. Standing among the frost-covered grasses of white birch, adorned with thin yellow round leaves fluttering, it evokes a feeling more lonely than quiet...I don't know why the view of this plain, which had nothing particularly special, captivated my interest, but the *Seijaku* of this plateau, especially under the thinly overcast cloud, somehow brought me a sense of joy. (Akutagawa 1950)

In this passage, Akutagawa juxtaposes vivid, active imagery of the natural environment with an emotional state he describes as “more lonely than quiet.” At the same time, *seijaku* is not presented as purely melancholic; rather, it evokes a subtle sense of pleasure or contentment within solitude. This interpretation aligns with Komura’s understanding of *seijaku* as a condition that connects environmental stillness with emotional reflection. *Seijaku*, in this sense, represents a form of natural quietness that profoundly shapes human emotion, particularly a contemplative loneliness that is not inherently negative.

2-2. SEIJAKU IN MUSICAL CONTEXT

GARLAND *MOON VIEWING MUSIC*

Peter Garland's *Moon Viewing Music* (2016) is a six-movement solo percussion work that embodies the sense of *seijaku*. The music evokes tranquility and serenity through sustained, quiet sounds. I performed *Moon Viewing Music* in a courtyard at the University of California San Diego Music Department. Because the performance took place outdoors, ambient sounds were integrated with the instrumental sounds, further shaping the listening experience. In what follows, I explain how Garland's work expresses *seijaku* through stillness and tranquility.

Garland composed the six movements of *Moon Viewing Music* for three knobbed gongs and one large tam-tam. Both instruments produce rich harmonics and timbral complexity, although gongs tend to have a more defined pitch compared to the tam-tam. Depending on their size and dynamic level, these instruments can resonate for one to two minutes after being struck. As a result, the audience perceives a continuous field of sound throughout the piece.

Although the music sustains sound over long durations, I argue that it nevertheless conveys a distinctive form of silence associated with *seijaku*. This effect arises from the meditative resonance of the gongs and tam-tam, as well as the work's cultural associations. Garland notes that *Moon Viewing Music* is connected to the Japanese tradition of autumn moon-viewing events (Garland, *Moon Viewing Music*, 2.) In Japanese culture, the autumn season has long been celebrated through rituals and artistic practices linked to the harvest and the appreciation of the moon. Many writers, both historical and contemporary, have composed poetry inspired by these events. Garland incorporates this tradition by including six poems, one for each movement, to suggest the thematic atmosphere of the music.

Below are the poems associated with each movement, as cited in the score:

1. Living alone in the woods
few visitors cast shadows.
How clean the moon
gleaming in the sky
Ryokan
2. Even more so

because of being alone
the moon is a friend.

Buson

3. Only the moon
high in the sky
as an empty reminder - -
but it looking at it, we just remember,
Our two hearts may meet.

Saigyō

4. As I look at the moon
my mind goes roaming,
till I live again
the autumn that I
knew long ago.

Saigyō

5. When I die
what I shall see will be
the lustrous moon.

Hyakuri

6. I cleansed the mirror
of my heart - - now it reflects
the moon.

Renseki

(Garland, Peter. *Moon Viewing Music*. 2016. pp.4-8)

The poems Garland cites in *Moon Viewing Music* suggest mysterious, eerie, and nostalgic atmospheres, pointing to his compositional inspiration in moonlit landscapes. *Seijaku* can be understood here as a persistent emotional silence, one that holds both natural quietness and psychological stillness. Garland explicitly connects this emotional stillness to his musical language, particularly in his description of winter moonlight:

There is a unique light and intensity in a winter moon, as it rises in the darkest days (nights) of the year, and shines on a landscape of trees stripped of their leaves and of white snow that amplifies and reflects the moonlight, often creating an eerie sense of daylight - - further reinforced by the shadows cast on the snow (Garland *Moon Viewing Music* 2).

Garland suggests that autumn moonlight evokes nostalgia, while winter moonlight conveys loneliness and a more unsettling stillness. This sense of eeriness is reflected in his selection of Japanese

poems, which contribute to the work's sustained atmosphere of quiet introspection. For example, Hyakuri's poem, "When I die what I shall see will be the lustrous moon," combines nostalgia with solitude, and *seijaku* can be understood as embodying this dual emotional state within a quiet environment.

The title of the work further reinforces Garland's perspective on stillness as a central theme. He subtitles the piece "Inscrutable Stillness Studies" (Garland 3), suggesting that stillness is not merely the absence of sound but also an expressive emotional condition. Garland associates different emotional states with seasonal environments, noting:

There is also a special silence because of the extreme cold, and the absence of animal, bird and insect sounds. If autumn is the moonlight of nostalgia, winter is the moonlight of loneliness, and inscrutable stillness. (Garland 2)

According to Garland, winter produces a distinct kind of silence shaped by absence and isolation, while autumn carries a more reflective, nostalgic quality. These emotional conditions parallel the perspectives found in Japanese poetry. I argue that *seijaku* encompasses both of these dimensions, functioning as a sustained stillness that is present throughout the resonance of the gongs and tam-tam.

Professor Steven Schick also notes that *Moon Viewing Music* contains very little literal silence because of the long-lasting resonance of the instruments (Schick app. A-11). The continuous sound of the gongs and tam-tam leaves few moments in which the instruments fully cease vibrating. At first, one might conclude that the piece contains no silence at all. However, I argue that the work conveys a continuous form of silence, understood as *seijaku*.

The sustained, meditative soundscape produces a sense of emotional calmness and psychological stillness. In this way, even within continuous sound, *seijaku* emerges as a perceptual and affective condition. The listener experiences not the absence of sound, but a state of quietude shaped by resonance, atmosphere, and introspection.

2-3. PERFORMING SEIJAKU

This section discusses how performers can realize *seijaku* in musical practice by examining performance perspectives on *Moon Viewing Music*. Both Professor Steven Schick and I have performed the work in outdoor environments, where musical sound blends with ambient noise. Because *seijaku* expresses both emotional and environmental quietness, outdoor performance offers insight into how audiences perceive silence.

On October 7, 2025, I presented a “Moon Viewing Concert” at the courtyard of the Conrad Prebys Music Center at the University of California San Diego. The program featured works associated with Japanese traditions such as moon-viewing festivals. I performed a solo *taiko* work, *Kanade* by Masayuki Sakamoto, along with *Moon Viewing Music* by Peter Garland. One reason for presenting the concert outdoors was to perform under moonlight. Another was to allow the audience to experience the interaction among music, noise, and silence in an environment where ambient sound is constant.

Garland’s *Moon Viewing Music* is notated at relatively soft dynamics such as *mezzo piano* and *piano*, and performing outdoors naturally invites surrounding ambient sound into the performance. As a result, the listener’s focus on music, noise, and silence becomes fluid. When a listener concentrates on the musical sound and filters out external noise, ambient sound may be perceived as silence. Conversely, when attention shifts toward the environment, those same sounds may be perceived as noise rather than silence. I argue that *Moon Viewing Music* exemplifies the performance of *seijaku* because it allows listeners to engage with this shifting perception of sound and silence. Schick addresses this perceptual variability in an interview:

In hearing and in paying attention, so much is determined by what the brain determines is a relevant acoustical signal. When you are doing *Moon Viewing Music* outside, a person who has just come from playing the music of John Cage would say, oh, no, listen to all of the birds and the trucks and someone else who is listening inside the piece to the point of concentration that everything else is being filtered will say, no, it was silent. (Schick app. A-12)

As Schick suggests, the listener’s attention shapes the experience of silence. Some musical works explicitly anticipate ambient sound, such as John Cage’s *4’33”*, in which performers remain silent for the

duration of the piece while environmental sounds become the focus (Cage, 4'33"). Cage describes this openness as "opening the forest of the music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment" (Cage 7). In this context, what is typically considered background noise becomes the primary musical material. However, listeners who filter out ambient sound may still perceive silence within the same performance.

This openness to unintended sound offers a performative approach to *seijaku*, one that incorporates natural ambient noise and invites a sense of emotional stillness. Unlike *ma*, *seijaku* does not clearly articulate the beginning and ending of silence. Instead, it encompasses both physical quietness and emotional atmosphere. Garland's *Moon Viewing Music* reflects *seijaku* through its connection to Japanese poetry, its evocation of loneliness and stillness, and its sustained, meditative sound produced by gongs and tam-tam.

Performing *Moon Viewing Music* in an open-air setting allows audiences to experience *seijaku* through both sound and environment. Performers can realize *seijaku* by embracing the integration of ambient and musical sound, treating them not as separate elements but as parts of a unified sonic and emotional experience.

CHAPTER THREE: CHINMOKU

3-1. DEFINITION OF CHINMOKU

Chinmoku consists of two kanji: 沈 (*chin*) and 黙 (*moku*). *Chin* means “to sink,” “to submerge,” “to go down,” or “to be depressed,” and can also imply taciturnity. *Moku* is defined as “silent,” “taciturn,” “to shut one’s mouth,” or “to leave something unattended” (Halpern 148). Each kanji can function independently in different contexts. For example, *chin* may describe a sinking object or a psychological state of depression, while *moku* may refer to a person refraining from speech by suppressing emotion or action. When combined, these characters suggest a form of silence marked by psychological restraint and emotional conflict. According to *Kenkyusha’s Japanese-English Dictionary*, *chinmoku* is defined as “silence, a hush, quiet, inaction, immobility, [and] lack of action” (Watanabe 1710). However, *chinmoku* extends beyond environmental quietness to include inner struggle and tension.

This layered meaning is exemplified in the work of Shūsaku Endō, particularly in his novel *Silence (Chinmoku)*. Endō, who studied in France and Tokyo, published the novel in 1966, addressing the historical persecution of Christians in seventeenth-century Japan. The title itself conveys not only quietness but also the oppressive and emotionally charged atmosphere of the period. Japanese readers may immediately recognize that *chinmoku* implies both external silence and the internal pressures that compel it.

The novel was first translated into English in 1969 under the title *Silence*, and later adapted into a film directed by Martin Scorsese in 2016. Set in Nagasaki, the narrative portrays the torture and persecution of Christians under a government that sought to eradicate the religion. Throughout the story, Endō emphasizes the emotional conflict of a Christian protagonist who struggles to maintain faith but ultimately renounces it to survive. The central question—why Christ remains silent while believers suffer—captures the essence of *chinmoku*. Here, silence reflects not peace but the tension between outward submission and inner turmoil.

This understanding of *chinmoku* as emotionally charged silence is also reflected in contemporary perspectives. In an interview, composer Akari Komura describes *chinmoku* as associated with anger, loneliness, and sadness:

It's surprising, but it suggests anger. For example, when someone is angry or fighting, Chinmoku comes to my mind. And it also suggests loneliness. Definitely not happy. Anger, sadness, and then...anger. Anger comes to my mind first. (Komura app. A-30)

As Komura suggests, *chinmoku* is not merely the absence of sound but a condition shaped by emotional conflict. It may describe situations of social or political oppression, in which individuals are forced into silence despite intense internal expression. In such cases, silence operates paradoxically: while outward speech is suppressed, inner emotion becomes more intense. *Chinmoku* thus represents the tension between external quietness and internal unrest, embodying a silence filled with psychological resistance and struggle.

CHINMOKU IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Below, I examine how personal experiences can exemplify *chinmoku*, highlighting emotional conflict and internal struggle within silence. In an interview, Professor Steven Schick recalls his experience of the September 11 attacks, describing a form of emotional silence in an oppressive context. He characterizes the atmosphere on September 11, 2001 as a “sonic vacuum,” in which traumatic events rendered people speechless. He notes that many turned on televisions, creating a constant presence of sound while still experiencing an overwhelming silence:

what people did here was to turn on the television, so there was a constant, the silence was filled. Otherwise, I think we would have felt completely like in a vacuum, sonic vacuum. (Schick app. A-17)

As Schick suggests, traumatic experiences can profoundly shape the perception of silence. Although I was a teenager in Japan at the time of the attacks, I vividly recall television broadcasts repeatedly showing the same images. Even as sound filled the environment, the intensity of the event rendered viewers speechless. I interpret this condition as *chinmoku*, a form of suppressed silence in which emotional shock restricts one’s ability to process or respond to sound.

I encountered a similar sense of *chinmoku* in Nagasaki, Japan. During an elementary school field trip, I visited the atomic bomb memorial in Nagasaki to learn about the history of the war. At ground zero, I saw a solitary pole marking the exact location where the bomb detonated. The pole stood in stillness within the urban landscape. *Chinmoku* felt like the only term capable of expressing the silence experienced at a site where countless lives were lost.

Today, Nagasaki has been extensively rebuilt. Surrounding the memorial, highways and buildings generate continuous noise. Yet, standing before the marker, I felt detached from the surrounding city. My attention shifted away from the ambient sounds, and I experienced a profound sense of *chinmoku* shaped by historical memory. The silence did not arise from the absence of sound but from an overwhelming awareness of loss, which rendered me speechless and produced a deep sense of isolation.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL RUNNING

Chinmoku also plays an important role in daily life and conversation. It can describe a mental state of quietness that invites deep reflection. In an interview with therapist and former monk Michael Running, he discusses the presence of *chinmoku* in both monastic practice and therapeutic settings. Running studied in a monastery in Taiwan, where he also learned Mandarin Chinese. Reflecting on the characters associated with *chinmoku*, he interprets the term as evoking “depression, anxiety, or speechlessness” (Running app. A-43).

Running recalls a personal experience that illustrates this emotionally charged silence. He describes the moment when his mother passed away, referring to a sense of “heavy silence.” He explains:

The gap between the inhalation and exhalation gets longer and longer until another inhalation or another exhalation doesn't come. And so there's, I mean, it's a really interesting use of silence because you're listening. Is another breath going to come, right? Is she going to breathe in or exhale out? And at one point we were listening and nothing came. And so then the awareness of, okay, the death has happened or death is happening. (Running app. A-43)

This experience demonstrates how the surrounding context, particularly the imminence of death, can shape the perception of silence. Because Running carries personal memory and emotional attachment,

the silence becomes meaningful and significant. I interpret this condition as *chinmoku*, since it conveys emotional suppression and tension in response to an overwhelming event.

Running also describes how silence functions in monastic and therapeutic contexts. In the monastery, he listened to teachings delivered by his instructor and recalls experiencing a heightened sense of clarity and openness. He describes the speech as “clear” and “sharp,” noting that “nothing else was added,” and that he could perceive both the words and the silence simultaneously (Running app. A-41). In this situation, silence directs attention inward, creating a mental space for reflection and understanding.

I argue that this form of silence can also be understood as *chinmoku*, as it invites deep thought through an emptied or focused state of mind. Although sound is present in the environment, *chinmoku* operates internally, shaping perception and enabling concentrated awareness.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ESPIRITU

The interview with David Espiritu reveals how concepts of silence can shift depending on physical conditions such as deafness. Espiritu, Concert Hall Manager at the Conrad Prebys Music Center, began experiencing sudden hearing loss in 2022. Each morning, before wearing his hearing aids, he experiences near-complete deafness. He describes a form of imposed silence that I interpret as *chinmoku*, emphasizing the emotional discomfort that arises when silence is not chosen but enforced:

I choose to be silence in the mornings. I can choose to be silent whenever. Like if someone's talking, I don't want to listen to them. I can just take them off. Being forced to be in silence, I think that's where it goes back to the uncomfortableness, because I think people are not totally okay with that. (Espiritu app. A-49)

When he does not wear his hearing aids, Espiritu primarily perceives tinnitus generated by the brain. This enforced silence reflects a key aspect of *chinmoku*: a condition in which external sound is inaccessible, often producing discomfort, anxiety, or disorientation. In such cases, silence is not neutral but shaped by physical limitation and emotional response.

At the same time, Espiritu's experience demonstrates how one's perception of silence can evolve. As he gradually accepted his condition, he began to use these quiet periods intentionally, removing his

hearing aids in the morning to create a controlled silence while performing daily activities such as exercising, eating, or showering:

Every morning I start out deaf. I don't really put them on right away. So I have about, you know, two hours of getting, you know, doing my morning routine, yoga, doing some workout, eating, showering. I do that completely deaf. So I don't hear anything. In the shower, I hear a little bit in this ear, but for the most part, I don't like to hear anything. I have a very loud fan. I don't hear it. I have the TV on, but I don't hear it. So I guess that would be the silence emotionally, because it's, which is, I guess, kind of nice because you're starting your day off, you know, you're kind of slowly going into it. And I just start, I'm woken up and I don't have to hear right away. It's not my favorite thing because it can be a little dangerous. If something's happening, I can't hear. (Espiritu app. A-47)

Initially, Espiritu's deafness imposed a form of *chinmoku*, characterized by forced silence and emotional unease. Over time, however, his intentional use of silence introduced a different quality, one that approaches *seijaku*, marked by calmness and gradual awareness. His experience demonstrates how silence is not fixed in meaning but can shift depending on perception, intention, and context.

This example highlights the fluidity between *chinmoku* and *seijaku*. While *chinmoku* often emerges from imposed or restrictive conditions, it may transform into a more contemplative state when individuals reinterpret and adapt to their circumstances.

INTERVIEW WITH JEREMY OLSON

Theatrical Production Specialist, Jeremy Olson also shares the impact of silence in both music and daily life that influences his work as an audio technician. Olson's background stems from audio mastering and technical support at Petco Park stadium in San Diego, where he controlled hundreds of speakers and microphones for the large capacity venue. He is currently working as an audio specialist to provide technical support at Experimental Theater at Conrad Prebys Music Center at University of California San Diego.

In the interview, Olson discusses how silence functions within large performance spaces. He argues that a venue such as a baseball stadium can feel unsettling when it lacks the expected presence of spectators and ambient noise. He recalls this sensation during the COVID-19 pandemic, when stadiums were empty:

it's eerie being in a space that large without hearing people talking or anything. It's really quite challenging to be there for people. (Olson app. A-53)

The absence of crowd noise in a space designed to hold thousands of people produces an uncanny and oppressive atmosphere. This condition aligns with the concept of *chinmoku*, as silence here is not peaceful but shaped by external circumstances that create discomfort and emotional tension.

Olson also notes that athletes became more aware of this silence during games without spectators. In the absence of crowd noise, players were exposed to sounds that are normally masked, such as footsteps, equipment noise, or voices from the dugout. He describes this silence as “a weighted blanket,” adding that it made players feel “lethargic and not really enthusiastic” (Olson app. A-54). This example illustrates how *chinmoku* can affect not only emotional perception but also performance, as silence intensifies awareness and creates internal pressure.

To address this issue, organizations such as Major League Baseball and the National Collegiate Athletic Association introduced pre-recorded crowd noise into empty stadiums. These sounds were intended to recreate an energetic atmosphere and mask the silence that highlighted otherwise unnoticed noises. Coverage by National Public Radio also noted that broadcasts incorporated artificial crowd sounds to enhance the viewing experience (Block).

In this context, recorded crowd noise functions to obscure *chinmoku*. Although unintended ambient sound may be perceived as silence when ignored, as John Cage suggests, artificially introduced sound can also suppress the psychological weight of silence. Olson's example demonstrates the fluidity of silence as a perceptual phenomenon. The same environment can shift from oppressive *chinmoku* to a more familiar sonic atmosphere depending on how sound is introduced and perceived.

CONCLUSION OF PART I: DEFINITION OF CHINMOKU

Chinmoku consists of two kanji characters. The first, *chin*, means “to sink,” “to go down,” or “to be depressed,” and can also imply taciturnity. The second, *moku*, refers to silence produced by shutting one's mouth or by a state of stillness resulting from inaction. Together, these characters suggest that *chinmoku* is not merely silence, but a condition shaped by external forces such as authority, oppression, or

trauma, which in turn generate internal emotional conflict. Even when the surrounding environment appears quiet, *chinmoku* contains psychological tension beneath the surface.

This layered meaning is clearly illustrated in Shūsaku Endō's novel *Silence (Chinmoku)*, which portrays the persecution of Christians in seventeenth-century Japan. The protagonist struggles with faith under conditions of social oppression, ultimately confronting the silence of Christ while witnessing the suffering of others. In this context, *chinmoku* reflects not only external suppression but also the inner turmoil of belief, doubt, and survival.

Personal experiences further demonstrate how *chinmoku* emerges in response to trauma. Professor Steven Schick's recollection of the September 11 attacks shows how fear and shock can diminish one's awareness of sound. Although the environment was filled with the noise of television broadcasts and news reports, the emotional weight of the event rendered observers speechless. I experienced a similar response when visiting the atomic bomb memorial in Nagasaki. Despite the surrounding urban noise, my awareness shifted inward, and the historical context produced a profound sense of silence. In both cases, *chinmoku* arises not from the absence of sound but from an overwhelming emotional response that suppresses outward expression.

Emotional silence can also emerge in moments of personal loss. Michael Running, a therapist and former monk, recounts the experience of witnessing his mother's final breath. The silence he describes is not simply acoustic but deeply connected to grief and awareness of death. This form of *chinmoku* reflects how traumatic or melancholic events can generate a silence that is internally experienced rather than externally defined.

Physical conditions may likewise produce forms of *chinmoku*. David Espiritu, a concert hall manager, describes how sudden hearing loss forced him into silence, creating discomfort and emotional strain. Unlike chosen silence, which may feel meditative, enforced silence can generate anxiety and disorientation. His experience demonstrates how external conditions can impose silence and intensify internal conflict.

Similarly, audio technician Jeremy Olson observes how empty stadiums during the COVID-19 pandemic created an eerie atmosphere. In venues designed for large crowds, the absence of expected sound produced discomfort for both players and technicians. To counter this effect, organizations introduced recorded crowd noise to restore a sense of normalcy. This example shows how silence, when shaped by absence and disruption, can negatively affect emotional and physical performance. The reintroduction of sound transforms the perception of the environment, shifting silence from an oppressive condition to a more familiar sonic context.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that *chinmoku* is not simply a lack of sound. It is a form of silence shaped by external forces and internal emotional responses, often marked by tension, suppression, and psychological conflict.

3-2 CHINMOKU IN MUSICAL CONTEXT

Chinmoku embodies emotional conflict within forms of enforced silence, often shaped by socio-political oppression or physical conditions such as deafness. This section examines how the relationship between emotional and physical silence is reflected in musical works, particularly in *Psappha*, a solo percussion composition by Iannis Xenakis.

Xenakis experienced significant personal trauma during World War II and the Greek Civil War, events that deeply influenced his compositional approach. His music often reflects intensity, conflict, and structural tension, which can be interpreted through the lens of *chinmoku*. I have performed his *Psappha* a couple of times, and I have always witnessed the impact of the silence in his music, which creates tension between notes. Just as his traumatic experiences influenced how he composed music, *Psappha* also creates moments of silence that invoke a sense of suppressed emotion, much like how *chinmoku* embodies the socio-political oppression underlying silence. In the following section, I analyze how his experiences during wartime might have influenced his identity and musicality, and compare the meaning of silence in his music through the Japanese concept of *chinmoku*.

XENAKIS AND SILENCE

Silence permeates the works of Iannis Xenakis, whose musical language was profoundly shaped by his experiences during World War II and the subsequent turmoil in Greece. In his compositions, silence often articulates intense suspension between sonic events, particularly within contexts of physical violence and disruption. Sylvio Gualda, who premiered *Psappha* in 1976, describes silence in the work as “an intense silent passage” (Gualda 163). This characterization suggests that silence in *Psappha* is not an empty gap but a charged moment that sustains momentum and tension in performance. In Xenakis’s music, both sound and silence are essential structural elements that contribute to an architectural conception of composition.

To understand this approach, it is necessary to consider how Xenakis’s musical ideas were shaped by his lived experiences. During the war, he joined the Greek Resistance against Nazi occupation. The urban environment was filled with chaotic soundscapes, including demonstrations, gunfire, and

explosions (Slabihoudek). Xenakis lived amid extreme emotional conditions, where anger, fear, and grief were constantly present. He was severely injured in 1945 when shrapnel from a tank explosion caused permanent facial disfigurement (Slabihoudek). As a young adult, he was exposed to the sounds of warfare and human suffering, experiences that later informed his compositional voice. Roger Reynolds offers a vivid description of the sonic environment Xenakis might have encountered:

It is an event of great power and beauty in its ferocity. Then the impact between the demonstrators and the enemy occurs. The perfect rhythm of the last slogan breaks up in a huge cluster of chaotic shouts, which also spreads to the tail. Imagine, in addition, the reports of dozens of machine guns and the whistle of bullets adding their punctuations to this total disorder. The crowd is then rapidly dispersed, and after the sonic and visual hell follows a detonating calm, full of despair, dust, and death. (Reynolds 47)

This description highlights the abrupt transition from overwhelming noise to a haunting stillness. The suppression of voices by violence and the resulting aftermath evoke a form of silence aligned with *chinmoku*, in which external oppression produces emotional conflict and internal tension. Xenakis himself acknowledged that his compositions were influenced by these experiences, even stating that he sought to recreate the sound he heard when shrapnel struck his face (Slabihoudek). The alternation between explosive sound and sudden silence in his music reflects these traumatic memories.

At the same time, Xenakis's compositional method is not primarily expressive in a conventional emotional sense. Rather, it is grounded in mathematical and architectural principles (Gualda 163). He constructs musical structures by precisely organizing sound and silence, much like an architect designs space. From this perspective, silence functions as a calculated interval, similar to *ma*, serving as a structural and temporal articulation between events.

However, the silence in Xenakis's work cannot be reduced to a purely functional role. It also carries the historical and emotional weight of his experiences. The stillness that follows violent sound evokes the oppressive quiet that emerges after conflict, aligning with *chinmoku*. Thus, silence in Xenakis's music operates on multiple levels. It functions as a structural element, as in *ma*, while simultaneously embodying the psychological and historical resonance of *chinmoku*.

SILENCE IN *PSAPPHA* AND SAPPHO

Iannis Xenakis composed *Psappha* in 1976, and it was premiered the same year in London at the Roundhouse by Sylvio Gualda (Gualda 161). The work was immediately influential, inspiring percussionists worldwide, including Professor Steven Schick. While much scholarship has focused on performance practice, physical demands, and instrumentation, this section examines the role of silence in *Psappha* through the concepts of *ma* and *chinmoku*, alongside its relationship to the poetry of Sappho.

The title *Psappha* derives from Sappho's name. Born around 630 BCE on the island of Lesbos, Sappho is known for lyric poetry centered on love and personal expression. However, much of her work survives only in fragments due to the deterioration or destruction of papyrus (Carson ix). In Anne Carson's transcription, missing portions are indicated by brackets:

]
] nor
] desire
] but all at once
] blossom
] desire
] took delight
(Carson 153)

The square brackets represent missing or torn portions of the text, and Anne Carson preserves the spatial arrangement of these gaps in her book *If Not, Winter*. Sappho's poems have been physically fragmented over time, yet their expressive vitality remains intact because readers can imaginatively reconstruct what is absent. Carson notes that these brackets "imply a free space of imaginal adventure," inviting readers to engage with the silenced portions of the text. The missing words create spaces that encourage reflection, and I interpret these silences as instances of *chinmoku*.

Similarly, Iannis Xenakis embodies Sappho's fragmentation in his composition *Psappha*. In music, rest notation represents the duration of space between sounds. For example, a quarter rest at a tempo of 60 BPM corresponds to a one-second pause between the preceding and following notes. Because rests instruct performers not to produce sound, they create moments of silence within the musical structure.

However, *Psappha* departs from conventional Western notation, which typically relies on standard rhythmic values such as quarter, eighth, or sixteenth notes. Instead, Xenakis employs a graphic, pictographic notation system that visually organizes rhythmic patterns, dynamics, and articulations. Within this system, silence is not merely an absence of sound but an integral structural element that shapes the temporal and expressive design of the work.

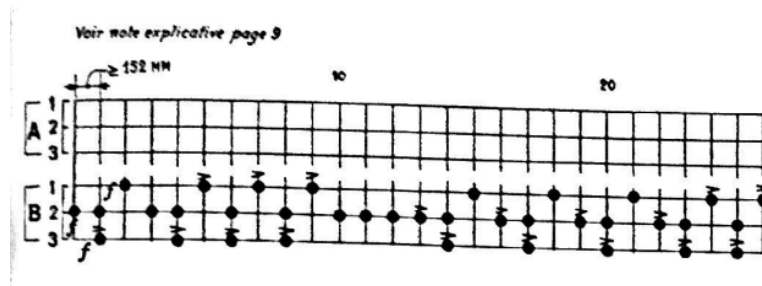


Figure 5: Xenakis, Iannis. *Psappha : pour percussion solo*. Salabert Editions, 1976. pp.1

This first page of the score indicates rhythmic speed, dynamics, and articulation. Xenakis marks “152 MM” to specify the tempo, indicating the rate of pulsation between beats. Conventional dynamic markings, such as *f* for *forte*, are retained, and accent symbols identify emphasized articulations across specific beats and groupings. Rest values are likewise represented within this visual notation system, integrating silence into the overall structure.

A particularly significant moment of silence occurs around bar 519. At this point, instruments from Group C—designated for low-register sounds such as a bass drum—are introduced with triple-*forte* emphasis. Xenakis describes this sound as “overwhelming or crushed (*écrosée*), a very large (*très grandes dimensions*), slack (*flasque*), very deep (*très profonde*), bass drum (*grosse caisse*).” The prominence of this timbral shift, combined with detailed instructions for instrument selection, underscores the importance of this passage within the work’s sonic architecture.

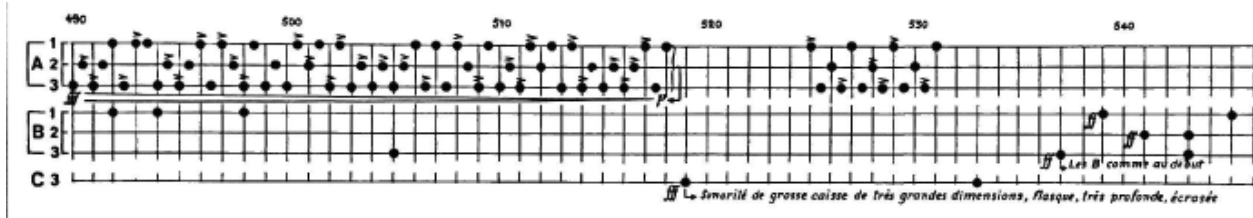


Figure 6: Xenakis, Iannis. *Psappha : pour percussion solo*. Salabert Editions, 1976. pp.2

The dynamic shift between bars 380 and 520 indicates a dramatic development in the musical phrase. A sustained crescendo leads to a sudden decrescendo, culminating in a single bass drum attack at bar 519 marked *triple forte*, followed by a five-bar pause. This sequence marks a decisive change in musical direction and sonority. The abrupt introduction of low-register sounds from Group C, combined with the immediate silence that follows, intensifies the sense of tension and suspension.

I interpret the interval between bars 520 and 524 as embodying both *ma* and *chinmoku*. The bass drum attack creates a forceful interruption, and the subsequent silence sustains psychological suspense. As discussed in Chapter One, *ma* functions as a purposeful and structural space between events. In Xenakis's composition, silence operates with the same importance as sound, contributing to the architectural design of the work. In an interview, Professor Steven Schick describes Xenakis's use of silence as follows:

The reason that Xenakis' silence works to me is that because it is another way of looking at saturation. It is 100% filled with nothing. That sort of sense of it being the most extreme sonic state means that you can almost trade complete noise for complete silence and have it function in the same way in a piece of music. (Schick app. A-18)

This perspective reinforces the idea that silence in Xenakis's work is not empty but fully charged. *Ma* emphasizes the indispensability of space between sounds, contributing to the balance of the overall artistic structure, much like Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's discussion of the *tokonoma*. At the same time, this silence evokes *chinmoku*, as its intensity reflects the historical and emotional context of Xenakis's experiences during wartime, as well as his engagement with the fragmented poetry of Sappho. The radical shifts in dynamics and discontinuity of musical gestures parallel the ruptured structure of Sappho's surviving texts.

Another instance of *chinmoku* appears between bars 990 and 1202, where extended gaps between notes create some of the longest silences in the piece. These intervals produce a striking contrast in timbre due to the limited instrumentation. Between bars 999 and 1107, Xenakis employs only two instrument groups: Group A, producing high-pitched sounds, and Group C, producing low, resonant tones. The extreme contrast in pitch, timbre, and resonance heightens the sense of opposition and fragmentation. Xenakis further emphasizes this contrast by describing Group C sounds as “very heavy and huge... possibly produced by the foot,” underscoring the physical and sonic weight of these events.

In these passages, silence does not merely separate sounds but intensifies their contrast and meaning. The extended gaps suspend musical motion and direct attention to the relationship between sonic extremes, reinforcing the dual function of silence as both structural (*ma*) and emotionally charged (*chinmoku*).

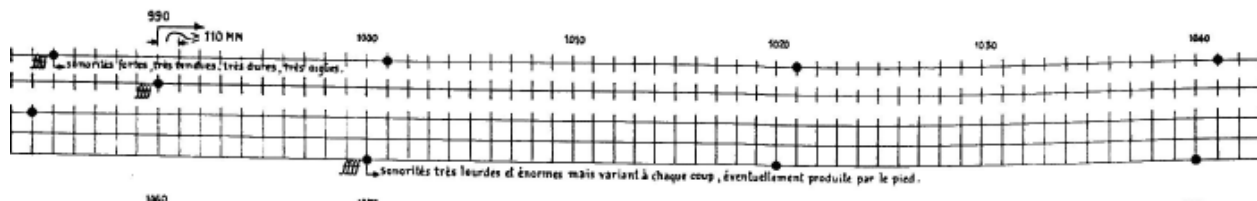


Figure 7: Xenakis, Iannis. *Psappha : pour percussion solo*. Salabert Editions, 1976. pp.4

In my previous performance, I selected a concert bass drum to emphasize the “heavy and huge sounds” specified by Iannis Xenakis for Group C. In contrast, I chose a purpleheart wood plank for Group A, valued for its sharp attack and high-register resonance. These contrasting timbres accentuate the spaces between notes, heightening the sense of tension and making the silence perceptually vivid.

I find a strong connection between the significance of silence in the poetry of Sappho and Xenakis’s *Psappha*, as both present abrupt discontinuities. The fragmentation between phrases invites readers and listeners to interpret the meaning of what is absent. In Sappho’s poetry, physical damage has interrupted the continuity of the text, leaving gaps that must be imaginatively reconstructed. In *Psappha*, Xenakis similarly suspends sonic energy through sudden pauses that interrupt musical development.

In both cases, silence functions as a generative space rather than a passive absence. It encourages reflection and invites the audience to engage with what is missing. I therefore argue that silence in both Sappho and Xenakis can be understood as an instance of *chinmoku*, as it reflects a suppressed or interrupted condition that carries emotional weight and prompts deeper contemplation.

3-3: PERFORMING *CHINMOKU*

Chinmoku can be understood as a form of sonic inactivity that evokes emotional suppression shaped by external forces such as political oppression, physical trauma, or abrupt disruption. Parts I and II outlined its definition and functions through personal experiences—such as trauma and deafness—and through artistic examples including the works of Iannis Xenakis and Sappho.

This section examines how performers can express *chinmoku* in *Psappha* by considering interpretive approaches and performance techniques. It draws on perspectives from performers such as Sylvio Gualda and Steven Schick, as well as insights gathered through interviews. Through these viewpoints, *chinmoku* is approached not merely as silence, but as an expressive condition that performers must actively shape and communicate within the musical experience.

MUSICAL INTERPRETATION

Sylvio Gualda, who closely collaborated with Iannis Xenakis and gave the world premiere of *Psappha*, emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding in bridging the relationship between performer and composer:

Any reading of a musical text implies an interpretation, which, in essence, is an attempt to minimize the distance between the performer and the composer, between the instrument and the score. (Gualda 159)

Gualda argues that musical texts such as writings by composers and musical notation are essential elements for understanding the composer's intentions and purposes. Because Xenakis was directly influenced by the soundscape of violent environments in Greece during World War II, performers can interpret the representation of musical sound and silence by attempting to establish a meaningful relationship between the composer's history and the musical work. Xenakis's oppressive silence in *Psappha* connotatively relates to Sappho's fragmented poetry. Not only the structural patterns but also the expressive qualities are present in both Sappho's and Xenakis's works.

Professor Steven Schick suggests that the monophonic melodic line in *Psappha* recalls Sappho's poetic voice, similar to songs addressed to a beloved:

After all, the name *Psappha* itself refers to the poetess Sappho. Xenakis uses matrical structures from her poetry — and by extension the strength of narration — as a basic building block for *Psappha*. In the right hands the approach of unifying material comes close to reflecting the power and singularity of the human voice as it might have been heard intoning the work of Sappho (Schick 197).

As Schick suggests, performing *Psappha* requires not only comprehension of musical ideas in the score but also a poetic understanding of Sappho's work and its relationship to Xenakis's musical gestures. Although Xenakis constructs *Psappha* through architectural and mathematical procedures, he also reflects his own listening experiences and his engagement with Sappho's poetry. In other words, while Xenakis's music may appear non-emotional in its structural design, it contains lyrical and expressive dimensions rooted in personal and historical context. Percussionists must therefore deepen their understanding of the music from a comprehensive perspective and apply that understanding in performance. Schick further argues that each performer's individuality contributes to a successful interpretation:

At its best *Psappha* exists in that rare stage of grace where personal force is united with musical force and the vehicle of the score is synonymous with the vessel of a human being who seeks to embody and communicate it (Schick 203).

Even though the music is constructed through systematic methods, it should not be performed mechanically. Just as music reflects the composer's personality, performers should seek their own interpretive voice through engagement with the score.

SUSTAINING THE ENERGY THROUGH CHINMOKU

Chinmoku invites deep thought and reflection by sustaining energy in the absence of sound. Xenakis's *Psappha* demonstrates a similar suspension of energy through abrupt discontinuities following intense sonic events. Gualda describes the role of silence in *Psappha* as a process of containing energy rather than concluding phrases:

It became clear that it was a question of *containing* the energy within. Sound should evoke silence and not abolish it. My strokes were not to smash the skin of the drum but to lead us, through retentive control, to infinity. The final bang, so unexpected, should arrive like a question mark, not like a period. That's why I let it bounce because this final blow throws us into a space that is both closed and open. (Gualda 164)

Gualda points out that body movement carries contextual differences in the meaning of silence. When a percussionist strikes a drum, the rebound from the drumhead naturally prepares the performer for the next stroke. This motion allows the performer to continue playing with minimal energy and efficient technique. However, when no note follows immediately after a stroke, the performer must decide whether to stop the motion or to allow the rebound to continue. If the performer stops the arm motion immediately after the stroke, the gesture suggests the end of a phrase. If the performer continues the motion despite the absence of sound, the audience can perceive a continuation of energy and an intention to sustain the phrase beyond the audible event. Gualda intentionally maintains this rebound motion in order to carry energy forward even during silence.

Gualda argues that *Psappha* contains many silences, yet it does not convey a sense of definitive closure. He suggests that sound is often interrupted after reaching a point of intensity, leaving gestures incomplete. These interruptions do not terminate the musical flow; instead, they sustain it through silence. Even in passages with extended gaps, such as measures 990 to 1202, the energy of the music continues. This condition resembles the fragmented poetry of Sappho, in which missing phrases invite readers to imagine what is absent. In a similar way, Iannis Xenakis uses silence to preserve energy and encourage the listener to engage with the implied continuity of the music.

Chinmoku can be understood as one of the imaginative aspects within this continuity. The silence emerges from interruption and carries the weight of suppression, which reflects Xenakis's historical experience and its socio-political implications. At the same time, the perception of this silence may vary depending on the listener's background and level of engagement.

Professor Steven Schick recounts a performance of *Psappha* in Australia during which a young woman entered the concert hall in the middle of a silent passage between measures 990 and 1202. This moment raises questions about how silence is perceived when a listener lacks contextual awareness of the work.

I always wondered, what did she feel? First of all, the funny thing is, what did she think was happening? But secondly, could she, at that moment, walking in with no context, feel the silence in that room? That's the interesting thing, I think. And I hope that she could. It might have meant that she didn't feel comfortable staying, because it was such intensity. (Schick app. A-13)

He questions whether there was a shared perceptual understanding between the woman and the other audience members when she entered the hall. Because she arrived during a silent passage, she did not experience the preceding musical development and encountered the space without context. She faced a situation in which the audience remained completely still, holding their breath and avoiding movement so that no unintended sound would interrupt the performance, while the performer was actively presenting silence.

This example highlights the ability of performers to generate intense energy without producing sound. Silence, in this case, is not passive but actively performed. Performers sustain energy during silent passages, and this condition reflects the qualities of *chinmoku*, in which silence is controlled, intentional, and emotionally charged.

In musical performance, performers can communicate this condition by maintaining energy through physical means. This may take the form of choreographic stillness or the continuation of motion, such as the rebound gesture described by Gualda. These performative choices allow the audience to perceive the performer's intention, even in the absence of sound. Through these approaches, silence becomes a shared experience shaped by both performer and listener, reinforcing the expressive power of *chinmoku*.

CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER THREE

This chapter has explored the distinctive role and meaning of silence through the Japanese concept of *chinmoku*. *Chinmoku* embodies both environmental quietness and emotional stillness shaped by external forces such as political oppression, personal trauma, or historical tragedy. For example, the September 11 attacks illustrate how traumatic events can produce what Professor Steven Schick describes as a “sonic vacuum,” a metaphorical silence in which overwhelming experience renders individuals speechless. Unlike *seijaku*, which often arises in natural environments and conveys serenity or tranquility, *chinmoku* represents a controlled or imposed silence that generates emotional tension and conflict.

Iannis Xenakis’s *Psappha* exemplifies this suppressive silence within a musical context. The work reflects Xenakis’s experiences during wartime, his engagement with the fragmented poetry of Sappho, and his use of abrupt discontinuity in musical structure. Roger Reynolds suggests that the violent soundscape of Greece influenced Xenakis’s compositional voice, and that silence in his work may evoke death, despair, and destruction. Xenakis himself acknowledges that his wartime experiences shaped his musical thinking. In a similar way, the fragmented condition of Sappho’s surviving poems, in which large portions are missing, requires readers to imagine what lies between the words. Both *Psappha* and Sappho’s poetry employ discontinuity within phrases, and the resulting gaps function as controlled silences that evoke suppressed or interrupted expression, consistent with the concept of *chinmoku*.

Understanding the contextual background of a musical work is essential for performers. As percussionist Sylvio Gualda argues, interpretive depth depends on the performer’s ability to connect the score with its historical, cultural, and expressive dimensions. This understanding enables performers to approach both sound and silence with intention, shaping silence not as an absence but as a meaningful and expressive component of musical performance.

CONCLUSION

Silence in music carries the personal stories and experiences of composers, and understanding the nuance of these artistic silence is as important as learning the notes themselves. This study has explored varied contexts and meanings of silence through three Japanese concepts: *ma*, *seijaku*, and *chinmoku*.

Ma refers to intentional and purposeful space inserted between spoken words, architectural elements, or musical gestures. In Japanese traditional music such as *Noh*, *ma* sustains tension between sounds, while in architecture, structures such as the *tokonoma* create dimensional depth through spatial articulation.

Seijaku embodies environmental and emotional stillness. It is associated with quietness found in natural settings such as forests, oceans, and riversides, where ambient sound contributes to a sense of tranquility, serenity, or solitude. Peter Garland's *Moon Viewing Music* exemplifies this relationship between emotional calmness and natural soundscapes, allowing listeners to experience the shifting perception between sound and silence.

Chinmoku, by contrast, represents suppressive silence shaped by external forces such as socio-political oppression, traumatic events, or personal tragedy. It conveys emotional tension and internal conflict even in the presence of outward quietness.

Although silence in music is often considered a non-audible element, the space between notes does more than articulate rhythm. It also conveys the intellectual and expressive identity of the musical compositions. As percussionist Sylvio Gualda suggests, examining a composer's writings and historical context is essential for narrowing the distance between performer and composer, enabling a deeper understanding of artistic intention. Performers must therefore consider not only how sounds are organized but also what meanings emerge between them. Recognizing whether a silence functions as *ma*, *seijaku*, *chinmoku*, or another form allows for a more nuanced interpretation of musical works.

Perceptions of silence vary according to individual experience, and they are closely shaped by personal, cultural, and historical contexts. This dissertation has expanded the understanding of silence in music by examining diverse examples through interviews and literary analysis. While Japanese

terminology has provided a framework for this study, future research may further broaden this perspective by incorporating additional languages and cultural viewpoints, allowing for a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of silence in music.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

INTERVIEW WITH ROGER REYNOLDS

Professor Roger Reynolds is a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and University Professor at the University of California, San Diego. I collaborated with him on his multimedia work *KNOWING / NOT KNOWING* in 2024 and participated in its recording in 2025.

August 27th, 2025

10:30 AM

UCSD CPMC 351

Matsuda During the recording session, one of the things we discussed a lot was duration of the silence and how we insert or like how we create the silence which works better in the piece. Like, for example, like when we do dissipating the rhythm and the patterns, like the amount of the pauses between the patterns were very critical. In your opinion, like how you analyze or how you approach those silence in that particular piece, "Sleight of Hand," compared to, for example, like "Autumn Island," you put a lot of commas between sections.

Reynolds Right. So I think a very important place I could start in talking about that aspect of my music is with the teacher who was my hero. And this was a Spanish composer named Roberto Gerard, who lived the major part of his second half of his life in England. He had originally been, of course, in Barcelona in Spain. And during one of our lessons, he was he was a really extraordinary man. I just, I mean, almost the word worship is almost not enough. Right. How highly I valued him. So he used to sit right next to me when we were at the piano when he would look at the scores that I brought him and so on.

And I remember him leaning up and leaning down and looking up at me. And he said, you're afraid to pause, aren't you? And what he was noticing is that the music that I was writing then, this was particularly a string quartet sketch, that there were no there were no pauses. The music just went on and on and on. And so what he drew my attention to and he didn't he didn't, you know, drive this point in and explain in detail. He just raised into my mind the the awareness that music needs to leave spaces during which we process what we have heard. So sometimes a pause and I'm going to for a moment say silence and pause are the same. That's not quite true. But so if we pause, then one way, one reason for pausing might be that something complex or something not entirely clear has just happened and the listener needs a moment to think, well, what was that? And then at the same time, you might say, well, OK, I get that. But I wonder where we'll go next. So there's this space of dealing with meaning that that occurs in the piece.

And and I that comment of Roberto's really alerted me to that. There was another occasion quite a bit later when my first composition teacher who was at the University of Michigan, Ross Lee Finney, he knew that, I, I made these sort of what I call opportunity maps of the structure of a piece before I start to actually write it. And he pointed out something quite amazing to me because he had never spoken to me about my formal procedures, how I prepared to write a piece. And he said, you know, Roger, when I listen to this piece, I can hear you waiting for the next unit. Right. And so this was quite a subtle and interesting idea is a little bit different than you're afraid to pause because it means, OK, you know where you are, you know where you're going, but you're maybe taking too long to get to the next thing because you have this obligation to a design.

So I realized I had to really rethink my attitude about those things. And they all had to do with this same issue of a gap or a pause, which is, I think, phenomenologically, it is a silence of a sort, but it has many different functions, depending upon whether you're thinking of a detail in the moment or you're thinking of the impact of an entire form. Right? And there's a different scale. So I think I need to mention along the way that Cage thought about silence in a very unique and, I think, insightful way, which was a silence is a time during which no intended sound happens. So if a truck goes by, it's a part of silence because you didn't ask a truck to go by. And I thought that was very intriguing. And, of course, he, Cage, did this famous four minutes and 33 seconds piece. And I happened, because I was with the C.F. Peters publisher, I happened to see that Cage had made, I think, at least three different attempts to try to make a score for that. Because even for him, it was a kind of strange idea. And I wondered now, and I didn't wonder so much then, what influence did David Tudor have on that piece? Maybe he had collaborative, maybe he had suggested something to Cage.

Anyway, I don't know about that. So if we go to Archipelago, my idea in Archipelago was to explore the musical phenomenon of theme and variation. Because I decided I had an extraordinary opportunity to go to IRCAM facility in Paris in 1981 through 83. And I thought, OK, I should take this time to rethink what I'm doing.

So what is the most internationally and over time frequent, like, musical tactic or musical strategy formally? And I thought, is theme and variations. So there's something to work with, maybe an Indian raga or a Bach, you know, canonic subject or whatever. And then this little unit, this nugget of sound, then has different forms that follow it. And often the theme and variations is like a train. So the engine is the theme and the box's cars after it are the variations. I've thought of it that way. And so then I thought, OK, why is the engine at the front? Why can't the engine be at the back? So it pushes forward. Or why couldn't it be in the middle? So I decided with the work that I first did at IRCAM Archipelago that I would make a kind of scattered composite of, I think there were four solos, three duos, two quartets and one quintet. And the idea was, if it was a duo, let's say, it would have a certain duration. The core form, the basic core form, and then it would have different variations.

Some of the variations would be preliminary to it and others would be carrying it further. So that became my project for two or three years in Paris, working on that piece. And in fact, I wrote a scale model of that piece at half speed. So I had a whole score for the piece, but it was only half as long. Right. And I just did this to make sure that I was

understanding the problems that I would face when I made the full version. And so the basis of this idea of themes and variations, it was kind of like a mosaic, right? So there'd be a theme and then some variants before, some after. And these could stretch out over like 20 minutes. But there were so many of them that it became quite dense. And so the question to me was, what would be the unit that I use to count the positioning of all this? And I decided that three seconds would be a sensible thing. And then I realized if I use three seconds, I would have like 24 second silences or 48 second silences. And I thought about me as a younger American composer being performed in Paris before these sophisticated people. I assume they were sophisticated. And I thought, I can't risk that. It's just too big, the silences. So then what I did was to cover the silences with other kinds of drones and so on. So I kept the structure, but I filled in like an undemanding way the periods between fixed materials, right? And I was happy with that.

But when I came to the ACTOR project that you know about, this seven-year program that was initiated at McGill in Montreal, the idea was that we would write pieces, little eight-minute pieces that would explore particular perceptual issues. So the aim of these pieces, of course, we expected they would be musical, but it wasn't the usual kind of aim for a piece, which is, let's say, some kind of an emotional arc or some kind of an experience that is musical and expressive and so on in nature. In the case of these ACTOR etudes, the substance was not so much that, but testing ideas, right? So the idea that I wanted to test was if I have three layers of sounds going on at the same time, and this was similar to Archipelago, but in Archipelago I had like 12. So here there would just be three, and they would have timings similar to archipelago, similar to "Sleight of Hand," but using numbers, using durations in a different way. And in this piece, this ACTOR etude, which I called co-existence, meaning together at the same time, right? There are really long silences at the beginning, and I think those long silences are actually, they turn out for me to be musical, even though their origin is not expressive, but intellectual. So I'm testing boundaries of how far things can be apart and still be heard as related. This is tricky territory. It's hard to decide. And so in writing that piece, I then had many people from the ACTOR program who could hear it and could comment and critique my idea, right? And the whole idea of the piece is to go from very open, very explicit things to more and more dense and complex textures, which end in a kind of mist.

So I keep working with the idea of silence, but I think of it more in terms of being spaces that either are specified or are not specified, during which listeners can orient themselves. But in the case of *Sleight of Hand* and maybe "Co-existence," sometimes these silences are perplexing rather than being devoted to comprehension. They're like inexplicable. Why is it such a long wait, right? So I think that I tend to think of silence more in terms of its relationship to an experience that is grasped and that it helps the listener to grasp because it articulates. So as you know, in other pieces, Autumn Island and so on, Watershed, I have many different pause ideas. There's a comma. There's a comma with a fermata over it. There's a comma with a square bracket harmonic. There's this idea of a fermata that has a kind of tail with an arrow, which means stop counting and wait until this idea, this phenomenon has disappeared before you go on.

This idea of having a performer not count turns out to be really, really difficult. And I worked with a violinist, Mark Menzies, on a piece called Kokoro, which is from the Japanese master, what's his name, Daisetsu Suzuki, used that word a lot. And it has many different meanings. And the idea there is that certain times I wanted the progress of the piece to just be like suspended. And Mark would play one of those moments and it would be longer, but it didn't feel like it was teasing me. It didn't feel like it was asking me to change the way I was listening. And If the player stops counting and the phenomenon continues and it becomes less and less distinct, less and less clear, less and less present, just as in the lengths of *Sleight of Hand* then the listener goes with that and you are freed of... [snapping fingers to indicate the speed] And music which is freed of that is pretty unusual anywhere in history or anywhere over time. And it's an interesting idea and so it's also related to how I use silence in my work.

Matsuda Yeah, like those differences like signs and like writings, it's just not like the duration of the silence, but like the meaning and the purpose of the silence.

Reynolds Yes, exactly.

Matsuda Yeah, that's like a part of like reasons I'm doing research because like in Japanese words like "ma" is ,for example, one of the terms to describe the silence, which is a pause. It's not just like the emptiness, but it's just like it could be the preparation for something happens next. Or like "Seijaku," which is like silence in the forest, which like what... Actually, there's a sound but still feeling some serenity and the tranquility and the quietness. So there's like a different terms and describe different meaning and different purposes. And then, to me, like that each, you know composers and performers has a different approaches to those questions. And then, to me, you have very specific ideas like how you can approach those questions from [your] perspectives, and it's very intriguing.

Reynolds Well, yeah. Thank you. I hope so. You you [sic] always also wanted me to speak a little about personal experience.

Matsuda Yes. Let me double check [cameras]. It's because it's just keep going. Thanks, Great.

Reynolds] So this was quite interesting to me because I realized that both both in terms of the second question you ask in the third it's not so easy for me to answer those questions much harder than the first question. And and so I I had a lot of trouble thinking of a time which was special and involved silence. And finally, I did think of one and my wife and I had gone several times to a wonderful resort in Zihuatanejo in Mexico and it's that the resort is called Casa Que Canta, which is "the house that sings." And I would there it's on a steep hill and there are apartments and so on and then steps down to the ocean. And in in the area that we were, we were lodged at, there was a pool next to the ocean not not the ocean and I would get up early in the morning and I would go down there with bare feet and my swimsuit and I would just float in the pool And you know, it was maybe sun

coming up and just looking at the sky, hearing the little very very quiet unintended unintentional sounds of the water. And that was a very precious experience and I was very relieved when I found one at least.

And I think that if we take the idea of silence, and say that one of its functions is waiting. That silence in some sense has, I mean we know from our what we were talking about earlier now that there is a silence of consideration of what happened in the silence of anticipation. But if the silence is waiting, right? Then there was a time in 1989, when I was around the music department in the old building and somebody from the music office came out very excited and they said National Public Radio is on the phone wanting to talk with you and I had no idea "why would they be calling me?" right? And so that was a moment of it wasn't silence, but it was suspense, right? And of course I got to the phone finally and they told me I had won the Pulitzer Prize. And so, that was that was one occasion where I had that kind of experience.

The other was not so happy when I had had a biopsy and I was waiting the news from the surgeon about the outcome of the biopsy, and the same kind of thing. I was on the phone and waiting. It was silent for him to tell me that the biopsy had been malignant, so I was going to have to have an operation. And, so that was another, you know similar thing. I don't think it quite fits with what you were seeking. But I think part of this has to do with something that I experienced as a child with other kids that I knew and I realized the way I put it was in regard to Christmas presents, right? Some kids want to find the presents that are wrapped and hidden somewhere, right?

But I wanted to know where they were, so I would not find them, right? And, I called the people who were too curious "peekers" they wanted to peek, you know, beforehand and I wanted the surprise. So I wanted not to know, you know, and that maybe that's not quite related but it's a kind of thing that that I think you psychologically, there are probably specific ways of testing that issue. And people in general, like some people are extroverts, some people are introverts, there are people who are surprise hungry, and people who are surprise resistant. Yeah.

Matsuda I like the the word "waiting silence" because waiting means like you expect something, like there's an expectation to do something or to get something. And then, there's always a stress or tension. Like it's kind of connection, like kind of bridge to something happening next.

Reynolds And sometimes it's a it's waiting for something that you don't know the nature of. And other times, it maybe you know the nature of it and you don't know they the valence positive, negative and so on. Yeah and it's really interesting to me how strongly our individual personalities shape the meaning of things like silence and waiting. Because it's not one size fits all.

There are a lot of different ways of looking at it. So, okay, so you asked if I had favorite places to go for quiet and serenity. And I have to admit that I probably don't. And this is, I feel, I understand objectively that this is a really big failing, right? I just need to get on, I need to move, right? And the idea of saying "Oh, it would be wonderful to have a time of peace" and so on. I recognize that of course. But it's not a high enough priority.

so I pay much attention to it. So then, I tried to figure out, you know, what would be relevant to that. And I think that, as I said the idea of a peaceful time when serenity and quiet are around you, is very appealing abstractly, but it's not appealing enough so that I change my life and maybe I still will yeah I hope so. So I have a close friend, who is a cellist and a French cellist named Alexi Descharmes, and he has performed probably all of my cello music.

And in fact, he recorded a CD of two CD set of all the cello music that I've written a lot of it for him and he's a wonderful person and I I've just he's been a dear friend for decades. So I had a project which I think you know about called "persistence," which was a piece for solo cello and turned into a film and so on. And, so we had we invited him to come to San Diego maybe three or four years ago in the summer and I thought when he was here we should do things that would be particularly enjoyable for him. And one of the things that I always like to do with people who have not experienced the desert is to drive out to the Anza Borrego desert which is as you know about an hour and three-quarters drive in inland to east. And we got there and it was of course as it always is very hot. And there's a particular formation ground formation The Anza Borrego the town is like in a valley Right? And when you drive in the main road, it's a tiny little community, you see at the as you look up the road you see this rise and a sudden drop. This has a particular name. It's called "Font's Point" and at that moment when when the ground drops off there is what is called the badlands and badlands mean I could explain in a moment, but basically it's where a lot of very rapid water has flown And it's carved like labyrinthine patterns in the soft stone and when the settlers first came west in the u.s seeking to get to the Pacific and so on the the Dakotas South and North Dakota were impassable because there are many badlands there. So they're called badlands because the wagons couldn't couldn't travel they had to go way south of the badlands. So this is called badlands and and so I always like to take visitors there if it's possible and it's often not possible because it's miles of driving over sand. And if the sand has been wet recently the car tires can sink and then you're trapped. Right? And you can't get out so it was possible this time and we went to Fonts Point and Alexi was literally standing at the edge of this and usually for me in my experience of the people I've taken it like Kaija Saariaho the composer we took her there with her kids and usually it's a visual experience, right? This huge expanse of turbulent land and so Alexi was standing there. He wasn't saying anything. So I thought I'll just go back to the car and wait. And so he was there a long time, maybe 15 or 20 minutes and then he came back and he didn't say anything. So we drove and we stopped to get some food as we were coming back to Del Mar and he said, you know, every year if possible I try to find silence.

I try to find a place where there's no sound and I can kind of clean my head and clean my ears and he said that was this year, right? Because when I was standing there, I couldn't hear anything. It was completely silent and so it switched modalities for me, right? I thought it's space and he thought it was silence but that was really really meaningful. And I couldn't feel the same way but I could certainly you know understand what he said and I ended my you know preparations for our interview here by looking in my files for a picture of the sunset that I see each night from my home from my windows as you know, there's a deck at the back and we can look out many many nights, of course,

it's just gray. It's just black. But many other nights there are rich colors and so on. So I gave you this image and I sent you the image so you could actually put it in. I think this is just amazing. Yeah, right? And never the same. So it's it's a moment of tranquility. Then the question you could ask me is "how long do you look at that?" And of course a good answer would be 10 minutes 20 minutes, but the real answer is 30 seconds. I look at I register it, I feel it, but I don't stay there. Too bad for me [laugh]

U.S [Find a location]

Matsuda But how that's you are very active. Yeah, I should be like that for sure. So you would say like this is one picture of moment of the silence you can think.

Reynolds Yeah, it's a moment of tranquility. Oh, maybe there's one other thing that that it would apply to particularly and that is I was always interested in time. Of course, we didn't speak about time as such but when I studied with Roberto Gerard, he had a particular way of dealing with time structure and rhythm and so on in his composing and so I adopted what he what he had shown us and I realized after some years that it wasn't working for me that his approach didn't work for me and I happened to be traveling from Japan back to Europe and I was in Hong Kong and I was going down those steep streets and there were every once in a while.

There's an English bookstore so I saw this bookstore and I went in and the first book that my eye hit was the psychology of time and it was a translation from a book written by a French scientist named Paul Fraisse and it described the history of research into temporal perception up to that time and so it's not a current book, but it's a very very powerfully summation, let's say powerful summation of what was known up to then and one of the issues that interested him was what he called the perceptual present and what that meant in my understanding was you're in this moment and that moment does not have the trail of what happened before and it doesn't have an expectation of what might happen next. It's just now, right, and he said that the dimensions of that perceptual present were about seven to nine seconds and so that's for me an example of a perceptual present, right? You don't, I mean you look at it and everything else disappears. You're not analyzing it. You're not saying how did that happen? What will happen next?

Matsuda I think it's connected like the philosophy of the Zen-like. Cage mentioned a lot about like the presence. It's like the matter of like what he's doing and his music like what is going on now It's more important than what it's like one step before or one step forward. And then last question and then speaking about Cage like he also mentioned about the time and space because there's a perception and a concept of the silence are affected by time and space. You or like your experience is kind of influenced by how you perceived silence. Would you think now, you're 91. Looking back when you were like 20 or younger age, do you think or feel the silence differently? throughout the experience as a composer. Has it changed?

Reynolds

Well, I guess the break point would be Gerard's question. You're afraid to pause so I think probably I think my youth was unusual in one way in particular and that was that in my house my home there was no art there was no music. There was no literature. There was no painting because of my presence there there was a little impact and so my mother I remember bought a quite beautiful print by a French artist that she put up on the wall but before that, I don't think there was anything and and so that the the idea of emotional value or investing in in experience or understanding experience. I, for example, and I've discussed this with several other friends.

Actually quite recently I never read anything. That was fiction because I wasn't interested in anything. That was just imagination. Why would I I [sic] mean I wanted to know about truth. I wanted to know what what are the facts. So I read lots of books regarding science and and things like that but I I [sic] read my first novel when I was 19 years old so I had no experience with fiction before then and so I think that the idea of taking the experience that I was having as phenomenologically as meaningful was probably ah not very strong. I was forward directed right like what's happening? Why is it happening? Etc. And of course for me, I think I've said this in many other interviews and probably you already heard it but when I was about 14 I heard a recording of the Russian pianist Vladimir Horowitz playing a Chopin Polonaise and it was for me as I've said often it was literally like being struck by lightning because the things that I felt as I listened to that was just, you know, I I had never had any feeling remotely like that It opened up a whole range of potential that during my first 14 years never entered my mind there's a moment. Yeah, that was a turning point, right?

INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN SCHICK

November 26th, 2025

1:00 PM

UCSD Warren Music Center

Professor Steven Schick is a Distinguished Professor of Music in Percussion Performance at the University of California San Diego. Professor Schick and I worked closely through research, applied lessons, and various musical projects. In the interview, he shared his insights and experiences as a professional percussionist, including how he incorporates silence into his musical practice as well as his daily life.

Schick So all right. In answering your question about Reynolds' Autumn Island, so first of all, you know that Roger composed passages of seed material. So this was what he did at the beginning, and that's clearly marked in the score. And then through two processes that he also talks about in the score, he cuts them apart and reorders them. So silence, in a way, is the result of the cutting action of the original material. The original material does not contain silence, but Roger takes it apart and places it apart in space so that there is silence between them. And so in a way, the question for the performer is, is this a dramatic kind of silence? Is it embedded in the material, or is it a pause, or is it a muting of material that you would otherwise hear? And so it goes directly to your concepts of silence because I think there are three different ways you could understand the silence as sort of dramatic parenthetical silence, like *ma*, because, of course, when you interrupt and then you go on, there is a dramatic effect. There is also a *chimoku* kind of silence, in other words, a being silenced. Do I have that right? Is it *chimoku* that is the... It's a suppressed. Suppressed sound. Yes. Because, of course, when you have material that you might otherwise be hearing, there is a suppression of that sound. And then there are moments where there is a calm atmosphere.

Matsuda Seijaku.

Schick Seijaku, and a calm atmosphere in a sense that silence is helping define the environment. Oftentimes those things are simultaneous, or at least sometimes they are simultaneous and overlapped in the piece. You have to understand this as a mixture of *seijaku* and *chimoku*, for example, or *ma*, but with a kind of emotional quality of *chimoku*, for example. So I find it... You asked me about Autumn Island first. It is the most complex of those pieces relative to silence. And so I think it's fascinating. And I think it's safe to say that there is no successful performance of Autumn Island without successfully understanding the role of silence. We tend to think that the most difficult thing of Autumn Island is playing all the right notes at the right time, and it is difficult. But that is a conventional kind of difficulty. The poetic difficulty in the piece is understanding what you are doing when you're not playing the notes. I will stop talking now. So you don't have to write. It's great, yeah.

Matsuda Also, I'm happy to write.

Schick Yeah, yeah.

Matsuda Thank you for bringing up three words, ma, chimoku, and seijaku. And then in the piece, particular piece, different duration are inserted in different sections. As you said, there's one section and it's mixed, and then it's kind of going back and forth in different sections based on the mathematical procedure. But I see, like, sometimes it's just a comma, sometimes a fermata, or a different shape of the fermata. How do you approach it?

Schick Well, Roger is very specific. So obviously there is, if you can imagine a scale of specificity, and he thinks very carefully about this, probably the most specific kind of silence is one that is written out in metered time. Because you know this is two and three quarters long, or something like that. It's not up for debate about what this is. Another kind of, maybe the second on the scale, is a full-stop fermata, a fermata in which you do not go on. And that is not determined, so it's not very specific, but there is a practice around that, helps us understand what that means. The two that are harder to interpret, or where there might be more latitude in interpretation, are the fermata that he has, and does he have this in Autumn Islands? And I know he does it in other pieces, considered fermata, in other words, a fermata that has an arrow or a way that you stop, but you then go ahead. I may be getting confused with another piece. He certainly has that in Here and There. And very much so in "Watershed." We'll get to those in a second. But the comma, and the comma is a very standard notation, obviously, for pause. But what does it mean? Does it mean to take a breath? Does it mean to stop, but don't come to a complete halt? And I don't know the answer to that, but I do know that in the original coaching that I had with Roger, and this would have been 1991, he kept asking for more space in the commas. It was probably my eagerness as a player at that point, but it was very clear to me that these commas were not optional, and they served the purpose as, well, here's what it could be. I just thought about this. In the way that Roger takes sonic material and divides it up, he may actually be taking silence and dividing it up in the same way that he uses the sound. I don't know. You would have to ask him whether he thinks that makes sense.

Matsuda Yeah. Yeah, one thing he mentioned about the silence in particular, that music is like, or not only that music, but whenever he asked for silence to performers, performers tend to count. It's hard to ask performers, just take silence, just be.

Schick Well, I don't count anyway, so he doesn't have that to worry about me.

Matsuda] No, definitely.

Schick I should probably count more.

Matsuda So do you change the duration or approach to the commas?

- Schick Well, the question is, the question is when does silence begin? Does it begin the instant you play the note? No, because the note is still in the air. Do you have to wait till the note is finished? I don't know. Or is it the sense that the energy of the action completes and then that becomes the silence? Or is it when you, in physical gesture, come to a stop? So when is there silence? In another piece, and I think I mentioned this to you, I was talking to Peter Sellars[Check the spell], the director, about working, and we worked together, well, many times, but in Tyshawn Sorey's piece, "Monochromatic Light (Afterlife),"and Peter at some point made an aside about, oh, all the silence in the piece, and I thought, but there isn't a silence in the piece. It's like Feldman. There is stillness in the piece, but rarely is there a moment where really nothing, no one is moving, no one is acting, and I realized that, of course, this goes right along with your research, that silence can mean a sudden drop of intensity below the normative expectation, and then it feels silent because there is less going on. We feel this calmness. We feel this pause, but a gong will still be ringing. A timpani will still be ringing. A piano chord will still be ringing. So silence, as a decibel reading, doesn't exist, but silence in terms of bringing the energy vector of a piece to a stop does exist.
- Matsuda Right, yeah. I mean, it's a great point. I like that you brought the word stillness and then tranquility in that music, and then is it counted as a silence? That's the question I am asking myself through this research.
- Schick I'm writing an article, or I don't know what it is. I'm writing something on The King of Denmark. You play a little note, say a little dry note, a little woodblock note that goes like that[tap a table], and then you're moving [gesture]. Is that silence? It is on the recording. It will be silent, right, because you're not hearing any sound, but will it look like that on the video? No, because the energy that starts with the woodblock is being sustained through gesture, and if it's silent, it is at least another kind of silence than that.
- Matsuda Yeah, there's a tension to connect one to another. Yeah. Interesting. And then moving to different music.
- Schick Yes.
- Matsuda But it's not the music you listed now, but the *Moon Viewing Music*, I recently performed it, and then I think we both have a similar situation. We played outside, and then there's always noise compared to what you're playing on gongs. In that situation, from your perspective, what is silence? What is the music you're playing? How does that change the perspectives? Like do you see or feel any silence from that particular music, *Moon Viewing Music*?
- Schick Yeah, there are lots of examples like that. That's a very good one. Let me approach this in another way. You're sitting in a concert. You're listening to a piece you really want to listen to. You're so focused. Behind you, the person is rubbing the program or maybe

unwrapping a cough drop or something like that. Everybody else around you is looking around, saying, why are you making this noise? But you are focused, and you don't hear it at all. So is it silent? In a way, it is silent to you because the brain is a very powerful filter. Unlike the eyes, which cannot filter, we see what we see, right? But in hearing and in paying attention, so much is determined by what the brain determines is a relevant acoustical signal. When you are doing *Moon Viewing Music* outside, a person who has just come from playing the music of John Cage would say, oh, no, listen to all of the birds and the trucks and someone else who is listening inside the piece to the point of concentration that everything else is being filtered will say, no, it was silent. So one thing about silence, and this is what I like about your research, is that you don't talk about silence in terms of decibels. You talk about it in terms of human labeling. What does it feel like to a human being, these different kinds of silences? And that's the way to do it because, of course, every mind is different and every mind will then either hear or literally not hear something like the paper being unwrapped behind. So when you played it for me, and I was the only one there, it was probably more silent because I wasn't. There weren't sounds of human beings, but there was a bus that went by, and I think there was an airplane, and for those moments I noticed that, but partially because the bus had the same pitch as one of the gongs or something like that. And so all of a sudden that became part of the acoustical experience. It was not silent at all. But in *Moon Viewing Music*, are there moments, let me ask you, are there moments where the gongs simply don't ring anymore?

Matsuda Before starting.

Schick Before and after, but I mean during the movement. I think there is gong sound in the air all the time. Another interesting way of, another piece that might be relevant is *Inuksuit*, the John Luther Adams piece, because it is a piece that starts by listening in silence, but you're outdoors, and so it's not silent at all. You're not in an anechoic chamber in Princeton or elsewhere. And so there's wind, and there's birds, and people, etc., and then the piece starts kind of from that noise. And it gets quite loud, and then when it comes back, there are these moments where there's a little glockenspiel part, bird song, piccolo, something, nothing, nothing, and all of a sudden you realize you're listening so hard because you're listening to music that the sound of the birds is extremely vivid and extremely musical to your mind because at that point in the piece, you're bringing the musical attentiveness that you have cultivated for an hour into the sounds of the environment, and it becomes, in essence, really quite loud, even though no one is playing.

Matsuda Yeah, definitely. When you perform inside-outside differently, do you approach differently as a performer, or do you observe that as an audience more?

Schick Well, some of those pieces, I think *Moon Viewing Music* and *Inuksuit* are very special because they propose a way of encountering the outside. If you were to do a late Beethoven quartet outside, a piece that wasn't intended to be played outside, there's not a performance practice for it to be played outside, etc., etc., then I think that's a more

complicated question, and maybe you could generalize about that. But in each of these pieces that we're talking about, the composer proposes a relationship with the outside sounds, and that relationship involves hearing the sounds of the environment as part of the piece. And so it really, um, it doesn't allow the same kind of analysis of silence because there's the presumption that there is no silence.

Matsuda Yeah, definitely. And then different music, for example, *Psapha*, it has a long duration of the silence in the middle of the music, and then as a performer, I'm sure you played a thousand times.

Schick Yep, something like that.

Matsuda And then I'm sure you observed different kind of the silence. Are you controlling the silence, or are you just...

Schick Oh, yeah, sure, you're absolutely controlling the silence. Sometimes things happen that are out of your control, but there is the attempt, at least, to say, to me, this is what this silence means, because that silence is not absence, it's presence. As John Luther Adams said that Alaska was the last great resource, reservoir, he said, Alaska is the last great reservoir of silence. As though silence were a thing, it could be found someplace, it could be found in Alaska, and it is threatened everywhere else in the world. So I think that that statement is very, very interesting. So it's a thing, at least in John's statement. And so to me, that's the same thing in "*Psappha*." It is the presence of something and not the absence of something. It has a very powerful force. Gosh, I hate to even tell you these stories, because you'll have to write them down. Well, feel free not to. But, well, I'll tell you the one that happened in Australia, I can't remember if I told you this, where I ended a program, this was in 1986, and so it was relatively early for *Psappha*. People had heard it in Australia, but not a lot of students were playing it. So I played it in Melbourne, and it was the last piece on the concert, and the hall was, this little hall was full, and right at the beginning of the first silence, "whoosh, dakk"[imitating the music], the door opened, and someone came in to try to find a seat in the concert. Even though the concert was almost over. And I was just counting, and that person, this young woman, looked around, saw me, saw the audience, couldn't find a chair, left, and then the next stroke came, boom, stop, and I was counting. So I was going to play it when I was supposed to. I wasn't waiting for her, but I always wondered, what did she feel? First of all, the funny thing is, what did she think was happening? But secondly, could she, at that moment, walking in with no context, feel the silence in that room? That's the interesting thing, I think. And I hope that she could. It might have meant that she didn't feel comfortable staying, because it was such intensity.

Matsuda Yeah, for the audience that's staying there from the beginning, they have some kind of sense of building up, and then there's some moment that all of a sudden stops, almost feels like pressure to be silenced in the audience seat. But for some people, just entering

the room without knowing any context, musical context of building up, it's just like, what's going on?

Schick And that experience might not be possible today, because people know the piece. A lot of people coming into that concert, especially if you knew contemporary music, would think, oh, it's the middle of "Psappha," we know where we are, I'll just wait. But that person, for sure, did not have any idea what was going on.

Matsuda Yeah, definitely. And then, like, because you're playing that piece for a long time, do you have any feeling or approach difference from when you were a little bit younger compared to now, like, or it's been the same? Like, how do you approach to silence?

Schick Well, I'm different. I am different. I was, I don't know if this is relevant, especially to silence, but when I first started playing it, I was so militant, because I thought, you are either playing new pieces of contemporary music, or you're wasting your time. I really, that's what I thought. If you're not making new pieces, new music, commissioning, or performing newly composed pieces, then you are doing something that you shouldn't be doing, you know? And so I would judge, and I judged myself probably the hardest. And so when I look back on those performances, and there's a one recording of me from the 80s of playing "Psappha," 86 or 87, something like that, I can't remember. And it's very, very severe, very intense, no rounding. And so the silences are very sharp. It's like almost being in a place with no echo, where it stops, and the energy of the piece is very brutally cut, and then started again. And over the course of the years, I've changed as a person. I don't feel that way anymore. I feel that people can play what they want to. Any musician who is acting in good faith and pursuing something that is meaningful, that's fine to me. I don't have a list of things I think people should do. And I think likewise, my stance towards those pieces has softened a little bit. I hear "Psappha" more as voice now, and less as rhythm, less as a sort of percussive piece around verticality. And so the way in which a voice will trail off, or the sound will stop in a kind of more ragged or rounded way, also informs how I think of those silences. I move differently now in those silences in "Psappha." And I just come to rest. And so I'm not doing it on purpose, but I noticed the last couple of times that I do that, and then I sort of come to rest in my gesture at about the same time that the echo stops in the room. So it feels like I'm aware of more than just the point of attack. So silence is a more nuanced and more complex thing as I've played the piece longer.

Matsuda What do you think changed yourself? Is it because you know better the music, or you know the composer better, or what could be the reason?

Schick You know, a piece like that that you play for a really long time, I started playing Psappha the first time 49 years ago. And it becomes a kind of journal as opposed to a piece of repertoire. You inscribe it with your views of music at any given time, your views about your life. And I've played it in good times and bad times. Psappha has been a friend when I really needed it. Psappha has been something that, it's probably the most reliable

companion I've had over the longest period of time, except maybe for members of my family. But it is a longer-term friend than nearly anybody else I have. And so that kind of fluid relationship where you change and you expect the relationship to the piece to change, and actually the piece changes in its way because musical notation is not very, is specific but not exact or something. I don't know quite the right word. Yes, we know what he wants, but that can mean a couple of different things. And so as I change, I understand it differently. So when I see YouTube clips of especially very good performances of those pieces by younger players that have, you know, maybe they've played it 15 times, right? Then I notice, oh right, there is a kind of biblical adherence to the text and that I just don't have that anymore. I couldn't even if I wanted to, but I don't want to.

Matsuda Yeah, to me, when I'm still young, I think, but in general, when people are younger, people are kind of afraid of silence and then taking time. And then that is kind of making people think like, I want to go through this, you know, uncomfortable silence. And then maybe it changed your perspective, like you're kind of enjoying the silence or more observing the silence as like between a performer and a listener.

Schick I live my life in a fair amount of silence. It feels funny to say that because look, the room is full of instruments. But I choose moments, several of them a day, very specific, and I do them every day where there's no sound. And so that's a really important kind of thing that I need to touch every day. And so I wonder how much silence a 22-year-old musician has experienced in their lives right now. I think less than I did. I mean, I grew up and worked on a farm where there was just, you'd be out in a field and it would just be, you know, that was a big part of my childhood. And it still is. I sit outside every night in a kind of moment of prayer, meditation, and I don't listen to music and I don't try not to think about anything. And so I do this two or three times a day for short periods where it is silent.

Matsuda Nice. I'd like to move to some non-musical sense now because you travel everywhere in the world and I'm sure you experienced a different environment. You felt some tranquility or some stillness in a quiet situation, which you could define as a silence, but most of the time you're hearing the sound. I'd like to hear the location or your favorite place, like you felt different kind of silence, if you don't mind sharing your perspectives.

Schick Sure. Well, two things come to mind. One, because, you know, you're Japanese and you know how much I like to be in Japan. We were in the Kinosaki Onsen, which is on the western coast of Japan near Kyoto, so maybe an hour and a half away this summer, and it was very hot for one. And so this was not tourist time, you know. A lot of things were closed. It was a quiet time. But there was a day that Brenda and I decided to climb this, well, I will call it a mountain because it took two hours to, you know, it was a big hill, you know, in a hard climb. And what we wanted to do was to take the tram up. The tramway up is very steep, but of course that day the tram was closed, but we wanted to go. And so then there was no one on the mountain at all, and that you were just completely engulfed and surrounded by what you would call silence, but then you would

realize that, of course, it's also the middle of the summer, so there are birds and there are insects and there's every once in a while a little wind and things like that. So that's very recent memory of being in silence, natural silence like that. Yeah, there was a moment in Australia, but I think that, I think let's say that the Kinosaki Onsen, that moment, and also late at night in the bath, right, you know, you're alone in this particular company. There wasn't really never many people there, and yeah, there's the sound of water and the sound of a lot of things, but because you're not doing anything, you can't do anything. It feels silent. The other silence that comes, and these are just being, these are tourist memories, not musical memories, and this is something that Brenda and I do every time we're in Rome. The Roman Forum is a huge tourist attraction in Rome, if you go at two o'clock in the afternoon in June, good luck. But if you're there in December, and you can go at like I think at 7 30 in the morning, if you buy a special kind of ticket, you can go in before it opens, and if you're right there, and you know kind of where you can go, you can be alone for a really long time in this place that has such a weight of history, where literally you're walking where Caesar walked, or you're literally walking where Cicero walked, and obviously Marcos Aurelius, and people that actually had lived that nearby, not Aurelius, but I'm sorry, I'm blanking on names. It's easy enough to find out, and so the combination of the expectation that a lot of people will come there, but you found a time where there was no one, and the enormous number of voices through history, which are now silent because they're gone, this sense of conflict and contrast I think is very, very powerful.

Matsuda You've had some awe or like some kind of aspiring.

Schick Yes, absolutely. And early in the morning at a time, and so we've always had sort of like they've been cold days, but very clear. It's just quiet, and that's really astonishing in the middle of Rome, which is not known for being a quiet place. Well, it's not. It's not a very quiet place.

Matsuda One more thing I'd like to hear is a feeling of chimoku, which is a suppressed or depressed feeling, and a quiet moment. For example, my case is like when I lost someone I care or even pet. One time I lost one of the cats. She just ran into the forest, and I could not find her for a night, and then there's just like, you know, I stayed there, I don't know, five, six hours to try and find her, but like dark night came, and then just like my mind is just like so depressed, and I almost felt like my circulation going in my ear, and it felt so depressed while I hear the silence in that moment. If you don't mind sharing that kind of experience, if you have something like that.

Schick Yeah, of course. By the way, there is a physiological basis for this, that with the production of cortisol, which is the hormone that is released under stress, everything focuses. You have to focus your energy like this. It's a survival moment, and so quite literally, you do not see very much, and one of the exercises that you can do to calm yourself, sometimes a little anxiety, not very bad, but the exercises I've learned to calm myself involves eye exercises that expand my peripheral vision, because the natural thing

that happens when you're under stress or feel anxiety is that things shrink. You're very aware of that in the visual sphere, like I remember being conducting, and all of a sudden, I just realized I can't see anybody. I can barely see my score, because I'm just like that, so that kind of stress will do that, but it also exists with other senses. I think that you do not hear widely. You don't sense widely. You're not aware of emotional environments very widely when you're under stress, so I think that sense of being silenced, and at the bottom of what you're saying is that an event that is so powerful and usually powerful in a kind of terrible way makes it impossible for you to have a kind of normal sensory experience of sound and sight and emotion and things like that. I'm old enough to have had all of those experiences. When my brother call to say my father had died, and phone rang and he said he died. I remember being not in this room, but in my old office when my brother called to say my father had died, and he had had a heart attack. I thought, oh he'll live and he'll change his life, and the phone rang, and I expected it to be like when my brother said he's gone, and I thought the whole world went like that, so yeah, I think there is the silence that comes from personal emotional trauma, which is a hard one, because I walked out. I took a walk. Everyone else was having a normal day, and I wasn't, so how, by the way, it was my second day of work here, like bang, and I was just getting ready to record Rodger's, a piece of Rodger's, and I didn't want to tell anybody, and I just figured out how to, but that whole sense of I can't, I'm not, I can't even understand what people are saying, so personal trauma does that, but it's a very different kind of thing when it's a collective trauma, like for example, it's September 11th. What was that like to have had that powerful silencing experience, but have it shared with everybody, and you notice what people did, or you're a little too young to remember, but what people did here was to turn on the television, so there was a constant, the silence was filled. Otherwise, I think we would have felt completely like in a vacuum, sonic vacuum, so those two things come to mind. Of course, if you were at a very important part, spot, like something that you associate with someone who is no longer there, or even like when Brenda travels, we go every morning to this little spot on the Pacific Ocean, and I know that she's just traveling for work. I'm not upset by it, but being there at a spot that I share with her by myself has that same sort of sense of it being silent.

Matsuda Yeah, definitely.

Schick I don't know if those are good answers.

Matsuda Great, because it's a personal experience, and I'd love to hear that kind of experience, too. I think I got everything. How long did I ... Yeah, it said 40 minutes. Yeah, 36.

Schick I wonder if there are other pieces that I'm working on that might be ... I think it might be worth, if you don't mind, you can decide whether you want to transcribe this or not, but Watershed has a very different kind of approach to silence than Autumn Islands does, because Rodger fills those comma moments with events in boxes, really loud gong strokes, and they're kind of out of time. They don't exist in the metrical structure. You're playing in time. The whole thing is written out in notated music, and then you come to a

[imitating exploding sounds]... and you have to suspend the time. It's just inputted right there. In a way, it functions like the comma does in Autumn Islands, except that instead of it being silent, it's saturated with noise, which I think is the interesting counterpart to silence. The reason that Xenakis' silence works to me is that because it is another way of looking at saturation. It is 100% filled with nothing. That sort of sense of it being the most extreme sonic state means that you can almost trade complete noise for complete silence and have it function in the same way in a piece of music.

Matsuda Then I guess there's different approaches to the silence. For example, John Cage. John Cage is highlighting the silence, which does not physically possible.

Schick Which doesn't exist.

Matsuda Right. I've never played a piece, but yeah, I guess I should.

Schick You want to, because I'm slow going.

Matsuda Yeah, I should. I should.

Schick I was starting six months ahead of time, because I know how slow I have to take it.

Matsuda Are there any other thoughts you currently have?

Schick It's kind of interesting. I'm so sorry to add more, but it is sort of interesting. My life has changed in quite a number of ways. One of the things is that I'm doing bigger projects and many fewer of them. When I was at your stage and maybe a little older than you, like in my late 30s and 40s, so older than you, I was playing so many concerts, it was just ridiculous. My head was spinning. International travel at least every month and this kind of thing. Now, I spend so much more time, 10 times, 15, maybe 20 times more time in preparation for a concert than I used to do. I played well. I don't think I was playing badly, but I think there is a kind of quality of stillness about preparation. I come in early, I mean early-ish, 8 o'clock, something like that. I set things up. I meditate and the meditation, I think we were talking, I sweep the room every day as a part of the meditation. Then I sit for a while and then I start. I never used to surround my work with silence in the way that I do right now. Also, a piece like Watershed that I will have spent seven months learning and I have played it. That is a kind of, there is a silence threaded into the learning process that, first of all, pleases me, but I also think will be heard in the final performance.

Matsuda The process affects how it's performing.

Schick Begin how you wish to continue.

Matsuda Yeah, it's interesting that you start with a sweep in the floor.

Schick Every day.

Matsuda Yeah, that's like my childhood. Japanese education is kind of different here. We clean the room either before or after class.

Schick] Yeah, I do kind of both. I make sure that it looks the way I want. For me, the moment that I open the door and come in is really, really important. If there's stuff that's around, I'm not happy, but if I come in, well, I'm getting ready to go after the conducting class, and so it is almost ready to leave. You can see everything's put away. The mallets are straight on the stands. There's not stuff around. That's really important, but before I play, I light some incense, and I sweep the room, and I sit in just silent meditation, not for very long, six or seven minutes. It's not a half an hour of meditation. I don't have that much time, and so this is really, really important, and I think it is not very American. When I walk into a practice room, things are looking good at CPMC now, but even so, I get bothered if things are not.

Matsuda That's a part of the practice of the silence.

Schick It is. It is. It is a version of silence, right?

Matsuda Right. Yeah, it is. Totally.

INTERVIEW WITH ALECK KARIS

October 27th, 2025

2:00 PM

Aleck Karis's House in La Jolla, San Diego

Professor Aleck Karis is an Emeritus Faculty member in Piano Performance at the University of California, San Diego. Before his retirement from the full-time faculty, I collaborated with him on various projects, and he performed numerous musical works. He emphasizes the impact of silence in musical practice and argues that silence can change the impression of a musical performance.

Karis I like that you talk about literature and the cultural aspect. It reminded me of how, like, Inuit people and people who live in the far north have many words for snow more than we do, you know, and it's just because it's important. And I guess in Japanese culture, just the idea of listening to silence. Serenity, meditation.

Matsuda Yeah, exactly. And then one thing I noticed is, like, the term is very short. Like, *ma* is just one single, you know, sound. And *seijaku* is also one, like, two kanji, like, two characters, but just it, and *chinmoku*, different terms. It's quite short, concise, while it tells a story. And then I thought that was very interesting, and then I felt some kind of connection to the music, too. So I wanted to ask you your, you know, observation and how you incorporated silence in your work, and yeah, how you see silence from your perspective.

Karis Well, I don't know if I have that much to offer, but the thoughts that came to my mind were, like, in your paper, I thought it was beautiful and poetic. But I would have liked a little more discussion of just your, as a performer, in a very specific way, how you use silence. For instance, there may be a piece in which you've thought about, you had a silence that you could either stretch or tighten, and thought about, like, what happens to the emotion of the listener? What is the effect of the piece, and how has it changed? Because I think that's really interesting for us to, you know, for us to share how we see it. And what I see, like, a lot of times when I hear young pianists play very difficult works, say, by Chopin, that the tendency, what one of my most frequent criticisms, is a tendency to lose concentration when there's silence. As if, oh, I didn't practice this part. I didn't need to practice it. You know, so you work so hard on all these difficult passage work, and those places are, you know, very thought-out. And then there's a silence, and sometimes people stop counting, for instance. And so the silences are not accurate, or you lose the pulse, because the rhythm, the internal rhythm, just, the concentration isn't just not there. So I think that, really great performances, the concentration has to be even stronger during the moments of a fermata, or even a rest, you know. And it's like two different things to me, two different basic ways to approach silence in music. There's listening to the silence very actively, just really the way you listen to every sound you make. So, Steve is a master at that, of just really thinking of color and creating, you know, just listening very carefully. But then also, when you get to a silence, just listening to that. Sometimes there's a little reverberation still, sometimes it may be just there's

sounds in the hall, but active listening, and then also counting, is I think it's, I've just, more and more as I get older, I just believe in very rigorous counting, especially when nothing is happening, supposedly, because of course that's never true, something is happening, the time is continuing. So I often make a big effort to count through the rests, and you know, I feel like, like I heard a performance that was very, very, you know, impressive in some ways, of the Chopin Fantasy, and the middle section is this...[play a piano] rest, [play a piano] short break, [play a piano] and this person did this beautifully [play a piano], and then just didn't count that rest, and it, to me, the whole passage was kind of ruined. It just, it didn't create, I mean, the first two chords, okay, that's very important, but it's that that pause, and then you think, well, okay, is it just exactly in time, or [playing while counting the beat] or is it maybe even a little longer, do you stretch it a little, and that is something that is worth thinking about, but to compress it, that's just careless, that's just not paying attention, you know, and I think obviously there's, there are silences that are huge, like a fermata, where you might really take time, and then there's just even the little silence between phrases that aren't even necessarily written, but that can create the feeling of breath, for instance, you know, like you can create a feeling of vocal line in the music. And then the last thing I thought about was how important it is, if you make a recording, to pay attention to the space between the tracks, because I have to say most artists let the editor just do that, and I think that is a huge mistake, that's a, that's a lost opportunity, so when you have a longer track, or a more intense piece, you might have a longer silence before the next thing, and it's very much like when you play, for instance, if a pianist plays these Schumann sets, or it could be a Kurtág set, or any set of a series of miniatures that add up to one bigger piece, the space between can't be the same always, and then so what is it? What determines whether you let it just sit longer, or whether you keep the, keep the tension and go in pretty quickly to the next, you know, it's the same when you play a sonata, and the pianists always are playing three or four movement sonatas, and it, the piece doesn't end until it's really over at the end of the last movement, so I saw a play last night, and the actor was a master, masterful actor, John Rubinstein, who's great, but he used silence so effectively. Everybody was just, he had us in the palm of his hand, and he used it in a rather extreme way. There were times where it was a one-man show, and there were times where he just stopped in the middle of the sentence, almost where you felt a little uncomfortable, like has he, has he forgotten his lines, but we knew he hadn't, but it was almost as if the character had stopped, and he was portraying thought, you know, that's maybe some different currents of internal struggle or disagreement with himself, and it was really well-timed. I mean he, he manipulated us in a good way, which I think is what musicians do.

Matsuda

That's very interesting, because most of the time you talked about the content and the act of listening, I see that you take the silence as some kind of function that connects one note to another, so that there's a tension, there's an intention of the space, and then sometimes that is executed by content, exactly what you want to do. My question, another question is like what if there's a music you're not supposed to count? Like there's a silence, which does not need to be so precise on timing, or need to be so intentional with the space between notes, just that thing that happens.

- Karis Yeah, I think you have to respect that too, and so you, it's just listening. It's just listening and somehow using your intuition and also trial and error, you know, because you may just feel that you decide, okay, I'm going to, I'm going to make these on the shorter side, and then you may feel at the end no, it just lacked, it needed more space to breathe. And the other thing is I was interested that some of your examples were of silence, but they weren't, there was a sound, and it's true on the piano that it's a, it's a, it's a long tradition that you could have a rest, but you might keep your pedal down so that your hands come up, but the sound is still ringing. And so do you count or do you feel the silence starting from when the note should have ended, or from when there actually is silence? I mean, those are just open questions.
- Matsuda Yeah, one thing I noticed or I observed from the recent concert when you played Ravel, the first movement, I don't know if, I'm sure it was intentional, but you, I thought you used like a minimal amount of the pedal. I heard there's so much space between the voice, so the individual voice was more, not square, but like a one line and another line, and it's very individual. And then in the moment of the second movement toward end, you put the very much of the pedal, which made like the sound kind of cloud. Like, do you in turn, I don't know, intentionally control the sound, duration of the sound, to make that happen? Like what is the intention?
- Karis Yeah, well, that's a good, very good observation, a good question. The piano, the pedal is so important, and you can pedal constantly, and it doesn't necessarily sound like you're pedaling if you're changing with the harmonies carefully. And then, yeah, you can purposely let the pedal blur harmonies together. In the piano, you tend to do that more the higher the music is. And of course, the very top notes on the piano have no dampers, so they're always ringing anyway. But yeah, I mean, I think my feeling about that piece, the Ravel Sonatine, is that the rhythm of it, you said square, but yeah, it almost is. To me, it has to be very, very simple, and not overly interpreted, because it's so beautiful and lush anyway. And if it's a kind of a French thing, really, to have a kind of restrained emotion, but it's still extremely deeply felt. And you know, he'll write very expressive in certain places, but then, you know, what is, what are we, how do we do that? You know, I mean, sometimes, like, my ideal would be as if it could just, the tone could be ringing more, so I might even pedal a little bit more, but not necessarily distort the rhythm, you know? But I mean, yeah, how wet, how much pedal? There are places where I feel that I'm purposely pedaling more than my instinct. I want it to be wetter, but what the audience hears, maybe they don't hear it as being as wet as I do, you know? I mean, the first movement, you're pedaling always, but yeah, if you're changing enough, it may not sound very pedaled. It may sound relatively dry.
- Matsuda Yeah, I felt it was a very clear sound.
- Karis Yeah, well, yeah, clear. Yeah, that's definitely how I hear it. It should be clear. It should be, when you have these shimmering textures, those cannot be dry, so you pedal every

harmony or every melody note if they're slow notes. And if they move faster, you pedal groups of them, but yeah, it changes everything how you pedal.

Matsuda Because to me, like the percussion sounding and then piano sounding, sometimes kind of similar. Once you hit it, it either rings or you mute it. So there's no way like you kind of make like, you know, crescendo in a way fits inside. You have to always activate the sound. So just like I was fascinated by the control of the ending of the mute sound, like each sound or voice had a precise ending that was like, make me think like, oh, is it like something that relates to silence or yeah.

Karis But you have a pedal in the vibraphone.

Matsuda Right.

Karis But the problem is you don't, you have either a dry sound that ends immediately or you pedal.

Matsuda Yeah.

Karis Whereas we sustain and decay or we pedal in which it sustains and decays, but in a very different way. So sometimes people have written a crescendo after a note. And what I almost always do is I'll play the note without pedal and then put the pedal down and it does open up. So it's, relatively speaking, it's almost as if there's a crescendo on the note. So yeah, the pedal can be used to create that illusion. But yeah, I mean, sometimes I will use the middle pedal so that I can just sustain a chord, but only those pitches.

Matsuda Right.

Karis Sometimes I use the right pedal, but then at the end of the chord, if I wanted to taper a little quicker, I might have the pedal down for quite a while and then lift the pedal. So the sound of a chord or a note ending, that's just picking up your fingers, you know, having the damper come versus picking up the pedal where all the dampers. Very different.

Matsuda Yeah.

Karis And sometimes when you use the pedal and you damp it, you'll get a little buzz. You'll get little unwanted sounds, or maybe they are wanted. They could be nice. But you're right. I think that there's lots of ways a note can be extinguished.

Matsuda Yeah.

Karis You know, and the final notes of pieces, like how long, and I mean, there's a famous recording of Michelangeli, who all pianists kind of bowed down to, because this control of sound is so mind-boggling. But he's playing a Brahms Fourth Ballade, and it's all just

very hypnotic. It's very slow. It's all two against three, and it's just going and going and going. And it's just this incredible concentration, and you feel stoned listening to it. And so this is live performance, and at the very end, he just lets it ring. And he's going to let it ring until it really is almost gone naturally. And somebody in the audience just can't resist breaking it. It's like, oh, you've ruined the recording. Not really, but you do. It's a great example of how sometimes just letting it ring is... But you have to earn that. I think it's almost presumptuous to let it ring a really long time if the performance wasn't maybe that inspired. Yeah.

Matsuda Yeah. One thing I'm interested in, speaking of letting it ring, it's like, once you hit a ring, there's a natural decrescendo, and then it becomes the listening ability, edge of the listening ability. Is that silence to you, or has silence happened even before? To you, what is the distinction between silence and sound?

Karis No, I think it's a different... To me, it's a different thing. But the decay is... It's so interesting to play a chord, and then as it decays, you play another chord that matches where the decay is. Or the second theme of that Ravel Sonatine is one melody note and three chords underneath it, and the chords have a diminuendo. So ideally, the melody and the chord diminuendo all decay together. It's almost impossible to really do it, but I try to hear that. I try to hear what I'm talking about. This... [play a piano] So this [play a note] is stronger, and then less.

Matsuda So you match the dynamics.

Karis You try to listen to the decay and match the decay. And of course, for that, you really need to practice a lot on the concert instrument. So that's... You have an advantage, because you can play the concert on your own instrument, and we have to adjust to a different set of different decays. And that's also dependent on the acoustics of the hall. But I don't know. I don't hear it that... Yeah, I don't think of that... That was very provocative in your paper, the idea of a broader definition of silence. But to me, it's a big deal to me whether I put... Insert little silences between phrases, or whether I keep it connected, keep the sound connected. But I think of that as silence, these very short, like a breath. And certainly, a fermata or a big space, those can be the most dramatic... To me, one of the most moving moments in all of 20th century music, it's one of my favorite pieces, is Orpheus by Stravinsky. And the whole story, the climax of the whole story, is when he's leading his Eurydice out of the underworld, and his eyes are bound. And so she's right behind him, and he knows he cannot look back. And the music is more and more dissonant and painful. And then there's that sudden moment where there's a crescendo, and he turns to see, is she still there? And of course, she fades, she's gone forever. And that's silence. And even describing it, I get the goosebumps. Because there's nothing he could have... There's no sound that could have expressed that complexity of the horror of that moment, that sort of shock of that moment. It builds, it builds, it's harder, it's harder, it's harder. And to be able to express that, all that whole complex

scene... And of course, the ballet is magnificent. It's a Balanchine ballet, and Noguchi did the sets. But yeah, that is a magnificent silence.

Matsuda So when you compare that silence with the intense horror silence, compared to that with pauses, like the fermata, what are those differences to you?

Karis Oh, so it's different.

Matsuda Do you still count?

Karis I don't think I would count that silence. If I were conducting that piece, I wouldn't count that silence. I would probably watch the dancers and stretch it as long as I could. Because then there is another phrase. So it's like it goes up, it stops, she's gone. And then there's an extremely tragic final ending phrase. So yeah, that's just how long can you sustain it? If you sustain it too long, and he's just frozen there, that's... Oh, let me turn this off. Yeah, I don't think counting helps.

Matsuda But you're still actively listening to what's going on there.

Karis Sure, sure. Yeah, no, I mean, there's so many other important... Like in Beethoven, where you have these very dramatic pauses, and some of them maybe don't have to be counted. I'm trying to think of examples. But I guess, yeah, I guess there is a difference if it's a fermata, and you want to just give yourself some spontaneity. And then you just judge it by what you hear and feel. But then there's a lot of silence that's notated silence. And those are the ones that I... Like the Chopin that I played, where it's a very expressive silence. And it's a little bit like the classical idea, where you have sentence structure, where you have an idea, a shape, it stops to a period, and then you stop as if you're thinking, and then you go on to the next idea. And that... Like Mari did a beautiful performance of a Haydn sonata. And again, it's very conversational, and it's like, well, we could do this, or we could do that. And all of her silences are really well judged. And a lot of times, counting is a good way to control that, and not just assume that they're going to be... I don't know. Some people probably wouldn't agree with this. They'd say, oh, counting. That's only when you're practicing. I find it helps me keep focused sometimes.

Matsuda Yeah, I agree. The silence, like the intentional pauses, to me it's ma. And, for example, the Stravinsky example, that stressful, some sudden stop, where the tension is chinmoku. So, to me, it's two different things. One other thing I...

Karis That makes sense to me.

Matsuda Yeah, and a fascinating thing to one of the Japanese term is called seijaku, which is silence you hear in nature, like forest by the river, by the ocean. Most of people don't think that as silence, but if you see that as a person who exposes music all the time, and then all of a sudden go to the nature, and then you kind of seek for silence, for example,

which is hard to attain recently because of noise pollution. But that can be silence for a human being. Do you have any kind of experience or perspective? It's not totally no sound.

Karis It's funny because I love that you talked about your life. But I can tell you right in my life right now, where we live is very quiet. We don't have a lot of airplanes. We don't hear the freeway. And so, sometimes, to me, what's just wonderful is if it's a little windy, to just sit on the patio and listen to the sound of the leaves moving. However, I have a neighbor who has chimes, wind chimes, that they think are nice. I think they're ugly chimes. I think they're like sugary. But it's also the same damn notes over and over and over again. Very nice for 10 minutes or even for an hour, but all day long. I have to hear that when all I really want to hear is this incredibly beautiful, just abstract sound of the wind in the trees. The fact that there are musical notes in a chime and random wind-generated musical notes could be beautiful, but that's 24 hours. That's all the time, especially when the wind is blowing. I never get to hear the part that I think is even more beautiful, which is just the natural sound. Just the sound of the palm tree. Every tree, of course, makes a different sound. You have this extremely complex mixture of different white noises. They go up and down, crescendo, diminuendo, depending on the strength of the wind. It's a sore spot for me. I actually asked the neighbor if he could mute them. I said, you know, you could put a rubber band around the ringer. He was very offended. Too bad.

Matsuda For example, John Cage's 4'33" is one of the music that highlights that silence is not nothing of the sound, but full of perception. What is silence? That's the question he has in his score to me. Do you have experience playing that piece, for example, or some kind of piece like that?

Karis Actually, when Cage died, because he came out here many times, I think Rand Steiger said we should have a moment of silence, but 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence. In a context of a faculty meeting where people are just talking and talking and talking, that was a long time. That really was the longest 4 minutes and 33 seconds ever. I did perform it, and I got criticized by a professor from San Diego State who said, well, I just sat very careful, very still, listening very hard for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. I had a timer. He said, well, the piece is in movement, so you should have actually, he implied anyway, that I should have delineated the movements, which to me would have been a little bit more like a performance art where I turn a page or something at a certain, because it is an interesting idea that it is not just 4 minutes and 33 seconds, but it is 3 movements that are, the silence is divided into 3 silences. I think I had read that, who played it? It was Tudor.

Matsuda David Tudor.

Karis] I think he just sat there for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. It is challenging because again, you have to almost role model for the audience and listen for that amount of time. I think some people do a little theatrical, like close the music rack. I didn't do that. I just sat there. But I think I only played it the one time, or performed it, I should say.

Matsuda So that silence is a little different from other silences you talk?

Karis Yeah.

Matsuda Where it is kind of similar to you?

Karis It is similar in the sense that you are actively listening to a silence and just receiving and being very present. I just feel like it goes against my intuition to let my mind wander, for instance, but to try to actually just experience it as an artwork. So in that sense it is like other types of silences but obviously it is an extreme case. I was very glad that you ended with Cage. I hope I can go to that temple when I am in Kyoto.

INTERVIEW WITH AKARI KOMURA

October 9th, 2025

3:00 PM

The Wind Garden, the Sound Installation by John Luther Adams

at the University of California San Diego

The interview was conducted in Japanese and translated by Matsuda.

Akari Komura is a Japanese composer pursuing a PhD in Music Composition at the University of California San Diego. Komura composed *Onomatope* for flute and percussion in 2025, which we premiered in the same year. In the interview, she shared her understanding of various Japanese words that can be translated as “silence” in English. Her perspectives and insights contributed to further investigation of the meanings of these Japanese terms as well as their musical relationships.

Matsuda First of all, could you introduce yourself? What you do and what you study. Could you give me some basic information?

Komura I'm in my fourth year of PhD, and I'm studying composition. Before I came here, I was a master's student at Michigan University. I studied composition. Also, I studied voice performance and vocal music at UCI. I received classical training. I didn't do contemporary or new music at that time. When I was in my third year, a living composer came to the residency and introduced me to experimental singing for the first time. I was interested in new ways to produce sound and voice. I studied composition in contemporary music as a master's student. My works are interdisciplinary. I'm not only interested in sound, but also dance, video, movement, and poetry. I'm interested in combining various media.

Matsuda Before you came to UCI, were you in Japan?

Komura Yes, I was in Japan. When I was 12 years old, I moved to Indonesia. I was there for my father's job. I spent four years in Jakarta, Indonesia, between my middle school to high school. Then I came to Japan for two years where I studied at an international school. Then I came to UCI.

Matsuda How old were you?

Komura I was 18 years old.

Matsuda How long have you been in the US?

Komura It has been 10 years this year.

Matsuda How do you feel about it?

Komura Time passes so fast. I was in Japan for 14 years. Half of the time I was in the US. I have spent 14 years in the US and Japan. Now it's exactly half of my life. It's a bit of a duality. Japan is my home country. I've come to realize that my culture and way of thinking is influenced by the Western culture in the US. I realize that my roots and the traditional Japanese way of thinking are reflected in my work.

Matsuda Can you give me a couple of composers or experiences that influence your approach in music?

Komura What I've been thinking lately is that music is not directly related to life in Japan. It's not about life, it's about everyday life. I try to focus on small moments in my music. For example, when I play a musical gesture, I try to play it like a tree is rustling its leaves. I play the tremolo like a tree is rustling. I try to incorporate the visual aspects of everyday life, like sound, touch, and tactility. It's hard to say about the smell, but I try to incorporate those little things. It's not only unique to Japan, but I try to focus on everyday life. I think Buddhism is connected to it, like Zen. I think that's one example. The concept of life. I can't translate it into English. I think it's a little different from just living or lifestyle.

Matsuda It's half-and-half between Japan and the US. For example, compared to Western music in the US, I feel that Japanese music and music made in Japan have a lot to do with nature and life.

Komura I've heard a lot about Takemitsu. I think they have a balance with nature. For example, Yoko Ono, and the composer of FRAXIS, Mieko Shiomi, I've studied them a lot in my research. I think they grew up in nature intentionally. I feel that there is a lot of influence from animism from Shinto in music. People believe that an object has a soul. I feel that Japanese music makes a lot of sense in harmony with nature.

Matsuda When you look at your work objectively, do you have a tendency like that?

Komura I think there are a lot of things. When I was young, I liked hiking and being in nature. That's a fundamental thing. But for some reason, the bark of the tree, the design of the tree bark, the clouds, and the moon, I feel that there are a lot of works that have been influenced by the flow of the natural cycle.

Matsuda Speaking of nature, I'm working on the topic of silence now. Silence has a lot to do with nature. For example, in Japanese, there are words such as *seijaku*, *shinkan*, and *chinmoku*. I feel that the balance and relationship between people, nature, and sound are influenced. I'd like to ask you one by one. For example, when you hear the word "seijaku," from either Japanese and American lifestyles, what kind of image do you have when you hear the word?

Komura For some reason, I feel like it's night. When I hear Seijaku, I feel the quietness of the dark night. And I feel like something is soft and tender. That's how I feel. And I feel like it's a sacred feeling. When I hear the word Seijaku, I think of a church or a temple, or some kind of ritual relationship, and I think of the silence of the dark night. I think of the Seijaku of the dark night.

Matsuda So it's a relatively dark environment, and it's weak, so it's a little smaller in dynamics.

Komura And for some reason, I feel like it's weak. And it's a sacred feeling. It's like a ritual.

Matsuda For example, in your music, or in the works of composers you've heard in the past, can you think of *seijaku* in those songs? Like you used the concept of *seijaku* in your song. If you could think of it, I would love to hear it. If not, don't worry about it.

Komura But what I just thought of was John Cage's Crumpling Paper in the red fish blue fish performance. When you did that, I remembered the feeling of Seijaku. It's not that there's no real sound, but the situation where the sound is made is also *seijaku*. I think I just remembered the silence of the fact that there is a quiet sound.

Matsuda That's right. For example, there is a mysterious silence, and there is a silence at the core. If you compare it to *chinmoku*, how do you feel about it?

Komura First of all, *chinmoku* can be a lot of people, or it can be a few people, not just one person. Or it can be between conversations. Or it can be after the conversation is over. Or it can be when there are a lot of people on the train and it's quiet. It's a good state to talk, but it's silent. Maybe it's because there's a feeling of silence in it. When it comes to "moku," even during COVID-19, in Japan, people didn't talk when they ate. It's a rule-like silence. It's like an imposing silence. It's a little different from *seijaku*. I feel like there's a little unnatural atmosphere in *chinmoku*. *Seijaku* is natural. It's okay to have real sound. But *chinmoku* is a state in which there is no sound. It's a state in which there is no sound allowed.

Matsuda It's like a little pressure.

Komura Yeah, yeah. It's like a pressure to shut your mouth. There are a lot of people. Is it called *chinmoku* even if you're alone? It's flowing, but it's a little tighter. There's tension. It's quiet.

Matsuda It's a social place. For example, if you add an emotional aspect to that *chinmoku*, what kind of feeling will it be?

Komura It's surprising, but it suggests anger. For example, when someone is angry or fighting, Chinmoku comes to my mind. And it also suggests loneliness. Definitely not happy. Anger, sadness, and then...anger. Anger comes to my mind first.

Matsuda I'm going back a little bit. For example, if you apply the same category to *seijaku*...

Komura It's pretty calm. It's peaceful. But I don't think it's that scary. Compared to *chinmoku*.

Matsuda Compared to *chinmoku*. There are a few more Japanese words. This time, *mu-on*. When you hear the word "Muon," what kind of situation, what kind of atmosphere do you think of?

Komura When I hear *muon*, I think of technology. For example, turn on the TV and turn it silent. Or turn it silent with a sound that can be controlled. It's completely different from the first two. Or turn it silent with a sound that can be controlled. Or turn it silent with a sound that can be controlled. It's not a situation, it's a smaller object. I think it's *muon*. Like an object not making a sound. For example, the refrigerator is silent now. Turn the TV silent. Or turn it silent with a sound that can be controlled. It's different. I think it's possible to describe silence.

Matsuda What kind of atmosphere do you think of when you hear the word, *mu-on*?

Komura *Mu-on* is in the same category as *chinmoku*. For example, silence where people don't speak. I think that's social silence. *Muon* is a technical term. I think the word inorganic is the best. I think it's a term to describe descriptive words.

Matsuda For example, can you apply it to music?

Komura I'm not sure... *Muon*...I think something is happening. Absolute silence is like an anechoic chamber. It's like a controlled room, but it's not music.

Matsuda For example, Cage's music. In Japanese translation, it is called *muon-music*.

Komura Oh, I didn't know that. Like 4'33"? But it's just a sound that doesn't exist.

Matsuda For example, if you raise 4'33" as *Muon* music, When you take it as a concept, for example, when you take music style or composition itself as *muon*, is it still silent? If it's a performance, is it still *muon*? If it's another term, what would it be?

Komura Oh, I see. But as a concept, I can understand it. But as a concert, in Japanese, it's *muon*. But it's not *chinmoku* like the first two. Oh, but the *chinmoku*... Oh, it's not quiet. Oh, but it's going to be *muon*. I don't want to call it *muon-music*. What should I call it? Silence... Oh, but when I think about it, it's surprisingly *muon*.

Matsuda The emotional or essential part of the words is relatively inorganic. It's a situation where there's really nothing. But for John Cage's 4 minutes and 33 seconds, the result is not like that.

Komura Oh, it's like there's some kind of sound coming out. But I don't want to use the word "mu." I don't want to use the word. I'd like to see something empty or blank. I'd like to see something potential happen like *Ma*. I'd like to see something potential happen.

Matsuda So when you say muon, for example, So when you say silence, for example, Is there an emotional phase? Is there an emotional phase?

Komura I think it's a neutral feeling. It's not calm or angry. It's like an artificial feeling. It's like it's been created. It's like an unnatural environment.

Matsuda I see. I feel the same way. Have you ever heard of the word, *shinkan*?

Komura Oh I've never heard of it. But looking at it from a kanji perspective, it's like a forest. It's like a deep, foggy image. I think that's what it means. Just from a kanji perspective. I've never heard of it. But does that mean it's quiet?

Matsuda Yeah. It's like a deep silence in a forest. And the second kanji, Kan-san, There are two ways to use kanji. There's the forest version and the deep version. Basically, they're the same. As far as I know, the way to use it is, for example, in a shrine, or in a kabuki theater, where there are a lot of people, when it's early in the morning or late at night, it becomes a deep silence. There's a word for it, and it comes from the kanji.

Komura Oh, I see. So it's like a deep silence.

Matsuda Yeah. It becomes quiet like water. That's deep silence.

Komura Oh, deep kanji. The kanji you just used, was it kan-san? Yeah. The kanji with kan-san? Yeah. Oh, I see. But kan-san is also silence. Oh. But that's also related to the forest. But it's just kanji, but it's the deep kanji of the forest.

Matsuda Yeah. So I think there are a lot of words that are related to nature.

Komura But it also feels a little lonely, as an emotion. Like a solitude silence.

Komura It's like there's no one there, but you're just there alone. That's the impression I get.

Matsuda That's true. The next two are a little similar, but *heisei* and *heion*.

Komura Oh. I've heard of hei-on, like peaceful days, but I've never heard of *heisei*. What does that mean? That's *heisei*, right? Yeah.

Matsuda *Hei* is flat and quiet.

Komura Oh. So it's a little more emotional than silence. Yeah.

Matsuda For me, it has a big impact on my emotions. But to feel peaceful, I think I need a quiet situation.

Komura So it's not affected by anything?

Matsuda Yeah. For example, keeping calm (heisei). When you say keeping calm, do you mean calm emotionally? Or angry, but calm?

Komura Oh, like you're holding something back. Oh. Like you're surprised. Yeah. Like you're surprised, but keeping calm.

Matsuda Have you ever experienced that? It's a word, but keeping calm, feeling calm, that kind of emotion, that kind of situation.

Komura Oh, but that's like when I did TA for the first time, I was nervous, but I kept calm. I was like, it's okay. I was like, don't rush it that much. Something like that. I don't know. I haven't experienced it recently, but when I did a voice performance, or before a stage performance, I was nervous and kept calm. Maybe nervous. Maybe it's related to keeping calm.

Matsuda Contrast.

Komura Yeah. But that's emotional calm. Yeah. But what was it, *Hei-On*?

Matsuda *Hei-On*

Komura *Hei-On* is also... I think the current two are quite interesting. The idea of taking it as a category is also interesting. It's an emotional thing. I often think of stillness and silence as one thing. There is no movement, and there is a visual silence. For example, the sound of snow falling outside. Even if the white snow is visible, I feel a lot of silence. It may be different from *Hei-On*, but I've been thinking about visual silence. What was the question?

Matsuda *Hei-On*? About *Hei-On* and *Hei-Sei*.

Komura But *Hei-Sei*...

Matsuda For example, if you use the word *Hei-Sei*, are there examples of music related to it that come to mind in your work. I see.

Komura Is that what you just said? To keep something?

Matsuda Yes.

Komura Oh, that's it. I often write, like, "listen to your breath or heartbeat," which is influenced by Oliveros. And then I write, "make that heartbeat a pulse and a sound." Or, like, "listen to your inhale, and when you exhale, add color to your breath." I often focus on performer's breath. It's like an invitation. I often do that in my works. I think it's because I do breathing meditation, but also I want my performers to be in a relaxed mode. I also do workshops with my audience, regardless of whether they are performers or not. I want them to be physically and mentally relaxed. In that sense, I wonder if *Hei-On* and *Hei-Sei* are related.

Matsuda For example, when you include activities like deep breathing and heartbeat, would you imagine creating a relatively quiet environment?

Komura Do you mean the performance?

Matsuda Yes, when *Hei-Sei* and *Hei-On* are present, would you imagine a quiet environment.

Komura I often expect soft sounds. I often hear soft sounds. In my songs, I frequently indicate piano and pianissimos. It sometimes goes beyond the quietness, but in general, I focus on the quietness of the breathing section. I focus on the quietness of the breathing section. I'm also interested in the internal experience of sound. I'm also interested in the internal experience of sound. I'm more interested in the process than the result.

Matsuda I see. I'd like to ask you about another word. Do you have any experience when you say *Hei-On*? I mean, the interpretation of words.

Komura When I'm spacing out, for example, when I'm walking on the beach, my head is empty. Like when I spend time with my family or friends, it's just peaceful. It's like that kind of situation. And, I guess it has to do with people. Well, and I imagine like looking at the sea and not thinking. A state where my mind is stable. An environment with warmth. I guess that's when it feels like *Hei-On*. I guess that's when it feels like peace. It's like peaceful days. When I think about those days, peaceful days continue. Like in dramas and movies. I guess that's the impression.

Matsuda For example, music... or how do you feel when it comes to emotional aspects?

Komura Well, it's not really a joy, but it's like a sense of security. And it's like peace. But I feel like I want it to continue. But basically, it's a sense of security and stability.

Matsuda Do you have any musical examples?

Komura Peaceful days... I have my own pieces. I did a sound ceremony in Michigan. It started with a three-breath deep breath. People started humming. It was an outdoor park. People started to translate the humming into their own instruments. It was like a sustained long tone. Some people brought yoga mats. Some people came to see it with their family. It's

not just about the music, but it's also about the situation. I feel like I can connect that piece with peace. I feel like I can connect that piece with peace.

Matsuda It's about balancing the environment.

Komura Yes. The sounds that were made were also from their internal breathing cycles. The sounds that were made were also from their internal breathing cycles. I feel like I'm doing it for the sake of peace. I feel like I'm doing it for the sake of peace. Sound baths and music therapy are connected to the healing of the body. Oliveros also said that the healing of the body is the goal of deep listening. Especially in sonic meditation. I sometimes think about it. In many ways, restorative and healing. It's the same for performers and the audience. It's a little difficult, but it's a vibration. I don't know what healing means. Maybe it's connected to mental healing.

Matsuda Emotions and healing are relatively peaceful.

Komura Yeah, I think so.

Matsuda So, would you say the sound is relatively quiet?

Komura Yeah, it's quiet. But I feel like there's something about it that makes it peaceful. I think *hei-on* exists as a contrast to chaos, big sound, or mental crisis. I feel like there's a sense of peace because of that.

Matsuda Like peace comes.

Komura Yeah, it's not something that always happens.

Matsuda So when you say *hei-on* as peace, what would be opposite?

Komura I feel like there's some kind of chaos, crisis, imbalance.

Matsuda The last word I want to ask is *ma*. What do you think of *ma*?

Komura I'm most interested in *ma*. It's connected to what I said first, I thought it might be related to my roots in Japan. It's connected to that. There's a potential for something to happen. Recently, I've noticed that there's a difference in the quality of the sound. There's a difference in the type of silence. For example, there's a difference in the contrast between the visual noise and the real silence. I think *ma* is the potential of emptiness. *Ma* is very interesting. There are many other things besides sound. For example, the *ma* of conversation. Or the *ma* in comedy or play. You can't just attain the sense of *ma* through training. It's not just a few seconds, but it's something fresh and improvised at that time. It's not something you can learn right away, especially in a performance. We often say that "it was a bad *Ma* or good *ma*," but it's really prompt thing. It's like a living-being. It's

not a dead space, it's a flexible movement. You can see it in time and space. In Japan, there are famous examples such as Japanese pond or stone garden. There is nothing like that. I think my work is also influenced by that. It's like simplicity. Even if there is only one sound and there is nothing, I want to explore the potential in just one sound. I think it's related to *ma*.

Matsuda What do you think is the difference in *ma* from other forms of silence such as *seijaku*, *chinmoku* or *muon*?

Komura I think *ma* is a divider of things such as sound or image. It's like something that has a beginning and an end. On the contrary, it's perishable. I can only taste the end at that time. It's like *wabi-sabi*, I feel impermanence compared to others. But I think it's similar to *mu-on*. I think *ma* and *mu-on* share similarity in neutrality. There are many other emotions, but *ma* is very neutral. I don't have any emotions, and I can apply *ma* in many situations.

Matsuda So you don't have any emotional feelings in *Ma*.

Komura But there is also a nostalgic feeling. *Seijaku* and *chinmoku* represent certain situations. But *ma* is a temporary feeling.

Matsuda Can think of various emotions in *ma*. For example, *ma* is nervous. or *ma* in nothingness. Or intentional *ma*. Comparing different types of *ma*.

Komura Mmm... let me see... *ma* can be nervous. For example, *ma* is nervous when performing or listening to music. But *ma* is very diverse. There are long *ma* and short *ma*. There are some seconds where *ma* is good or bad. I don't know. I think *ma* is a little nervous. But I think *ma* as neutral in general.

Matsuda Have you ever intentionally used *ma* in your works?

Komura Ah, but the onomatopoeia scene from the recent work, for the first time, I didn't use Fermata for the rest. Explaining the *ma*, or filling it in with words, is something I've never done before. At that time, I did it with the idea of closing performer's eyes, but in the sense that I was able to experiment with the idea that it wasn't just a silence for the player, I wonder if it's connected to that. Also, in my work for a string orchestra, for the players, I wrote "deep breath, exhale, and inhale." "Exhale as if you're blowing a candle." "Inhale as if you're smelling a flower." The breathing cycle happens several times, but each time the image is different. For example, inhale as if you were smelling a flower. What else did I use... "Inhale as if you were inhaling the salty air of the sea breeze ocean." It's the same gesture but a different context. As a listener, it's just a little bit of silence. It's the sound of a person breathing. It's the sound of a person breathing, but it's also related to specific breathing. I wanted to specify what kind of image. I wonder if it's

related to *Ma*. I wanted to make a difference in the quality of the silence. It's not just a dead space. It's like something's going on in the player's imagination.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL RUNNING

December 19th, 2025

1:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

Mr. Michael Running is a former monk who studied at a Buddhist temple in Taiwan and is currently a therapist in the United States. Professor Schick's wife, Brenda Schick, introduced him to me for an interview to broaden the perspectives on silence beyond musical contexts. As a Buddhist monk, he experienced emotional and environmental silence in the temples, and he has explored the impact of silence in therapy sessions.

Running I am a psychotherapist. And I've been doing this for about five and a half years. So it's a relatively new career for me. I'm 50 years old. So I'm smack in the middle of my lifespan. Probably a little bit over the middle now. Yeah. And in my therapy practice, I see individuals, couples, and I also run a weekly men's group. And in all of those relationships, silence is an essential part of the therapy, which I can get into in a little bit. My backgrounds, other career I've had is in nonprofit work, which is how I met Brenda many years ago, 25 years ago or so, in conservation, habitat conservation. And yeah, I ran an organization as the director. And then I worked for another organization as a communications manager for a number of years. And then in between those two roles, I was in a Buddhist couple of different Buddhist monasteries for all told about nine years. And that included two and a half years in Taiwan studying Chinese. And so I also, if you know the kanji of those seven different terms in Japanese, yeah, they're probably the same Chinese terms I'm familiar with, at least some of them are. So yeah, yeah. Yeah. And so obviously, silence came up a lot in the monastic practice as well. But before I go into a little bit more, I wanted to back up and ask you a question, because I've been thinking about this quite a bit since you reached out, which, what do you mean by silence?

Matsuda Silence? I think it can be very multi-meaning. It can be physical absence of sound. That is also one of the definitions of the silence to me, but also the feeling, psychological involvement in a quiet situation. So for example, when you are speechless, under the circumstances that makes you silent, for example, political oppression or restrictions, that is also counted as a silence, although it's very loud silence to me.

Running Yeah, that's a good point. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Matsuda So it's both physical absence of the sound wave, also feeling how you are feeling in the moment and the quietness is also part of the silence to me.

Running Yeah. Yeah, I like the play on that word silence, to be silenced or silence in the sense of I am at a loss for speech sometimes. I don't know what to say. I'm experiencing something that is beyond the limits of my language to explain. Yeah. Yeah, cool.

Matsuda You mentioned you actually use silence as part of the practice. Is that for both as a monastery, as a monk and also counselor?

Running Yes. Yeah. For both of those roles, those vocations, those positions I've had. Yes. And in the monastery, silence was only required in the absence of speech, particularly. It was only required a few times in the year in the monastery I lived at the most, which is in California. And that was when the monks were in deep retreat and we were requested to really refrain from talking with one another. And it was a good practice. Of course, it allowed us to go deeper inside and know ourselves even more, but also became aware of what we use speech for quite often. Perhaps it's to we might feel uncomfortable in the silence. And so we break the silence, break the silence through speaking with others. Or we might have a question that we feel insistent on getting the answers right away. And so that speech can be pressured or satisfy a very self-centered need of I have a question. So that sort of silence allowed us to reflect on the use of speech, our reliance on speech, but also what is beyond the speech, i.e. that interior. I mean, there's only been a few times in my life where I've actually encountered inner silence.

Most of my inner life is pretty noisy with thoughts and feelings and memories and future wishes. I mean, the mind is always secreting thoughts, right? It's always it is it's rare that the mind itself is silent, I have found. But you also get an awareness of yeah, we often indulge the mind's thinking and make get more noisy than it needs to be. And again, thinking about since your emails, the use of silence in the monastery and as a monk. I did have an experience a couple times twice going on retreats solo retreat where I was just by myself for I think both times was about two weeks. And that was a very interesting experience both times because it didn't have anyone to speak to. And so I was with myself, my experiences in a more intimate way. And if my memory is fairly accurate, this is some time ago now, probably 15 years ago. I really enjoyed that. It was nice not to have to speak with others and to let the mind settle into the being comfortable with the absence of spoken word, the absence of communication, and instead be more receptive to sound naturally. And the sounds of birds or the sound of the wind in the trees, the sound of cooking my food, the sound of the bell, that kind of thing. Not easy, though, I will say some people like to speak to themselves when they're on their own just to fill the silence. There's another phrase, just to fill the silence, because silence can feel anxious. It can bring up feelings of fear or isolation for some people, I think, which might lead, I could go right into the use of silence in therapy if you wanted, or if you wanted to talk a bit more about. Okay. So I've been trained in a particular approach to being a therapist that makes use of silence in a therapeutic way, meaning I need to tolerate when there is nothing being said, or need to even encourage an experience that goes beyond language, where someone is at a loss for speech, and instead they go inside and notice what's happening.

And this happens with certain individuals, it could be really beneficial to actually let the silence linger, maybe we've come to a completion of some thought or some story, and the silence is essential to give space to what wants to arise next, for the next thought, the next impulse, the next desire, the next memory, the next awareness, that silence is essential to let that next arise on its own. And sometimes it can be really helpful to just

name what arose next. For example, if someone is uncomfortable with silence and they make a joke out of it, or try to be humorous, I can just say something, like just name, like, yeah, you go to humor when nothing's being said, you know, and then I can inquire, what was the feeling right before you decided to make a humorous statement? And it's tricky, I usually don't do it that way, because it can feel a little judgmental towards the person, that that's not the intent at all, it's more just being aware, and helping them become more aware of what's happening inside of them, right? And so silence is, with individuals can be really essential in the therapeutic relationship to allow what wants to arise next to just happen, but it requires me to actually tolerate the silence. And that can be challenging. Because often, I had a client yesterday, where we had a long period of silence, where we also maintained eye contact the whole time. And it's quite intimate when that happens. And I had to refrain from looking away, or refrain from bringing up a question or something, because I really wanted to let the silence and the connection in the silence linger, the contact, because it felt important for the client. And it felt important for me too.

In the men's group that I run, the therapy group, there's seven men, and then myself, there's eight of us, silence can be really interesting in that space. And I'm more likely to speak about the silence or to name the role of silence than I am with individuals, individuals that can feel like I said, a bit judgmental, like they're doing something wrong, or whatnot. But in the therapy group, it's much more of an observation of, it could be a question of what's happening inside of you that is not being spoken about, right? Or what keeps the group from talking about what's happening, and being more comfortable with silence. Or it could just be an observational statement, like there is silence, and let the group go from there. They may agree, yes, or silence, or they may say, I don't want silence, I want something else, or so silence, again, is a tool of awareness in therapy. I think that's the heart of it for me, silence can be, and I think really is a tool for awareness, increased awareness.

Matsuda That's very interesting. Also, that's why I keep thinking about silences, like, because to me, the silence change the spectrum, or like the strength, like some people don't feel silence in the same situation, like even if you're in the same environment, hearing the same thing.

Running Yep, absolutely. It's very subjective, isn't it? Silence can be very, you're, I mean, back to how you defined it, it's not only the absence of sound, but it's the subjective feeling that we have in that absence of sound. Do we enjoy it? Do we relax in it? Do we relish in it? Or do we get nervous in it? Do we get scared? Do we, whatever, you know, do we get confused by it? Do we even notice it? Because we're so much up in our heads, right? Who knows? So yeah, each person has a different relationship with it.

Matsuda And then I have a question going back to the first example, when you say that speech and silence, or spoken word and silence, from your perspective, are they contradicting from one another? Like, for example, when there's this speech, there's no silence. What is the distinction, if there is any?

- Running It's a great question. That's a great, and that's where we get into the realm of paradox. Because in one sense, silence doesn't exist. Yes, it does not exist. And there are times when there is the absence of spoken word, absence of sound. I mean, I'm thinking about John Cage's three minutes and 33 seconds. Is there something what I forget what it's a minute and three, three, four minutes. Okay. It's the absence of music. But there's, I mean, the whole thing is to evoke the sounds of people's response to silence, right? The shifting in the seats, the coughing, the questioning, the rumbling. Yeah. Right. So yeah, it's an interesting question. I don't know if it's a, if they're contradictory, if we if we are able to rest in a world of paradox, right?
- Matsuda So when you speak, like there's a speech, or a spoken language, you no longer feel the existence of silence, but can silence exist?
- Running It can absolutely. Yeah, I had many that's a, I appreciate the question, because it brings me back to many times in the monastery where I was listening to my teacher speak, and feeling vast, beautiful amounts of space and silence. The words were clean. They were clear, they're sharp, in the sense of nothing else was added, and I could feel the silence and the words at the same time.
- Matsuda Yeah, yeah, that's, that's a beautiful experience. So like, when you say it, like, when you're hearing someone speaking to you, especially your teachers speaking to you, it's not just sound, it's kind of transcendent, transcendent to you, and then gives you a little bit of the silence, which is not the lacking of the sound, but the emotional silence that deepens.
- Running Yes, yep, yep. And there's also a type of meditation, I was even just trying to practice it for a second or two while you're speaking, where you can cultivate your mind to just hear the wave, the sound waves of the speech without interpreting the words. And so, you don't, you hear them as sound waves rather than actual meaning, and it's very interesting when you do that, what happens in your experience. So, and I think that's also a form of silence. Yeah, does that make sense a little bit?
- Matsuda I'm trying, I was trying to imagine the situation I had in the past, and I think that you have the similar experience in the past, but for example, going in a foreign country where you cannot understand what's going on, you still hear the sound.
- Running Right, right, but you don't interpret them, you don't know the meaning. Yes, that's a good example. Yeah, yes, I did have that experience for a long time in Taiwan, until I was able to finally understand Chinese more.
- Matsuda Yeah, I'd like to hear a little bit more about the experience in a foreign country, if you don't mind. Yeah. Do you feel any different value or perspectives in silence in a different location, so a different culture, like what you experience in Oregon, where you are right now, compared to that, to for example, Taiwan, do you feel any difference, or it's kind of similar?
- Running It's a great question, and yes, I haven't really thought about it, but as you asked the question, yes, there's quite a bit of a different relationship to silence, or maybe another

way to put it, relationship to a unconscious need to fill silence, or not. In Oregon, and you may experience this with a lot of Americans, generally speaking, Americans don't like silence, and they will fill it in some way or other. In Taiwan, you know, one of the ironic things I remember thinking about learning Chinese, the first things you learn is how to say hello, you know, ni hao, and goodbye, you know, zai jian, and Taiwanese very rarely say those things. They very rarely say hello, so you can come into a room, and that room might still remain silent. Your presence will be acknowledged, but in a silent way, or if they speak to you, it is out of this concern that what they ask, their form of hello is, ni qie bao la ma, meaning, have you eaten? Are you full? They don't say hello, or how are you, or what have you been doing? They literally go, are you satisfied? Like, are you full? If they do that at all, and you know, I was in a very unique position in Taiwan, because I was out in robes, and I was a foreigner, and so many people would either speak to me out of curiosity, or not speak to me out of confusion, right? But I think, yeah, there's a general cultural difference in the acceptance of silence, or again, the other way to put that is the non-insistence of filling the silence, right? Whereas I think in Oregon, there seems to be some compulsion to speak to what is known, like literally get, like, oh, hello, you are here, good to see you, how have you been? Like, instead of just acknowledge what is known in other ways without words, or silent acknowledgement.

Matsuda Yeah, because that's kind of connected to what you just said, that when you hear the silence, there's some kind of expectations, or some kind of background, you're kind of, not totally, your brain is working, what's going on with the silence? That doesn't quite happen in that situation. People are not expecting you to speak so genuinely.

Running Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I think there is this beautiful invitation that silence can give us of letting down the expectations, setting them down so that we can be surprised, or be, so something novel, something new can arise. That's hard to do. It's hard to do. I can compose a piece where that is embedded in it, it is more accessible to create silence, and that emerges into something new. But in human to human interaction, that's spontaneous, it requires us to tolerate not knowing, which is hard. There's a Chinese, old Chinese Zen koan, that the conclusion of it is, not knowing is most intimate. And that word intimate in Chinese, and the Kanji is the same for, it's in Chin-chieh, which means it's like the intimacy in family members, deeply, deeply knowing. So not knowing is most intimate. But for a lot of Westerners, you know, intimacy is scary. And silence can be deeply intimate, very, very intimate.

Matsuda Yeah, because that's a part of the composition method, what John Cage used is nothingness, like highlighting nothingness. Are you supposed to expect something? Yes, that question.

Running So it's a very provocative question.

Matsuda Yeah, yeah. Yeah, totally. And then I'd like to ask a couple questions about some word, because you said that you can understand some Kanji. I'm going to just copy and paste and then you can react to them if you don't mind. [Type "Chinmoku"] I know, like some words we share, some words doesn't, so I can explain one by one.

Running I'm going to look them up too, I've got in my Chinese dictionary.

Running Yeah. Yeah, see, this one doesn't show up in Chinese, at least it's not a word, the first one, the, any particular silence that evokes a feeling of depression, anxiety, or speechlessness. Wow. But the characters, yeah, the first one is to sink, to go down, to keep down, heavy. And then that second, yeah, of course, is, yeah, "moore". Yeah. Yeah, also "moore", yeah, that character shows up a lot in Chinese Buddhism, that second character. Yeah.

Matsuda Yeah, like Moku, so Japanese pronunciation is Chin Moku. Characters. And yeah, as you mentioned, Chin is sinking, to sink. Moku is basically speechless. It's just not quiet, but also quiet in a deepness. That's the word. And then when I see this word that invokes some feeling, for example, I'm from Nagasaki, and I quite often visit the ground zero of atomic bomb, as like there's a memorial hall, memorial place, and there's a tower that's like a middle of the atomic bomb was dropped, and then just a single tower. And then now it's a super congested area. So there's a lot of noise going on coming from the highway or like in the city. But when I stand in front of the tower, I still feel some deep silence in my heart. So it doesn't really reflect the environment sound, but the feeling I have in here. So I'd like to ask you if you have any experience or something like invokes that some kind of depression, anxiety or speechlessness because of some kind of background.

Running Yeah. Wow, what a great example. Yeah, I mean, I can feel the heaviness, the weight of that speechlessness, and it's a sacredness, right? There's a sacred quality to that silence as well. It doesn't show up in the definition so much, but in your example, it sure does. Well, actually, here's an example that's fairly recent in my life, because I was there's one that comes to mind. I was on a. Have you ever been to Utah yet? Have you visited Utah?

Matsuda Not quite. I went to Grand Canyon.

Running OK, so this example is similar to Grand Canyon. My wife and I went to Utah a year ago and spent some time in Canyonlands National Park, which is really similar to Grand Canyon, just smaller. And I remember being in that landscape and feeling the vast silence and also like really being comfortable with not saying anything, not needing to say anything, not wanting to say anything because it was so vast and sacred. It didn't feel that heaviness though that you're speaking about in this character. It didn't have the heaviness. It was more the expanse of awe, just there's nothing to say. I just want to receive what this is like. Just take it in, receive it rather than name it or describe it or like words are just stupid at that point. Yeah.

But another example is more along these lines. So my mother in the middle of October passed away. She died. She was 79, a fairly old 79. She had a lot of health problems. And we were with her when she passed away. And yeah, brings up emotion, just naming it. And there was the sense of profound, deep, very sad silence right after she took her last breath. We were anticipating another breath, but it was clear that like, have you ever been with someone that has died? There's a rhythm to their breathing. They get slower and slower. And the exhalations, the gap between the inhalation and exhalation gets longer and longer until another inhalation or another exhalation doesn't come. And

so there's, I mean, it's a really interesting use of silence because you're listening. Is another breath going to come, right? Is she going to breathe in or exhale out? And at one point we were listening and nothing came. And so then the awareness of, okay, the death has happened or death is happening. And it was a much more of a in the moment, profound sense of heavy. I'd say sad, not depressed, but a heavy silence of, we just let it lingered. We just, we didn't say a word. There's four of us, my, me, my wife, my brother and his wife. And we just, until we looked at each other knowingly, like she's gone. And then we had tears and cried and hugged and, but there's those few moments of waiting, like being in silence, but then having the sound of breath, waiting for the next breath doesn't come. And then the heavy silence of death, of dying, of loss of moving on.

Matsuda Thank you for sharing.

Running Yeah. Thanks for, I hadn't put that connected silence to that moment, but it's a silence, which is all around us. Yeah.

Matsuda Well, it's a deeply, deeply influential experience.

Running Yes. It's significant. Yeah.

Matsuda You know, it's not the lack of something. It's just full of awareness.

Running It's full of awareness and full of mystery to the mystery. I mean, the word that evoked, that represents for me, that experience I had there was astounding. It was astounding. Yeah. And beyond, beyond words.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ESPIRITU

August 27th, 2025

2:00 PM

University of California San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall

Mr. David Espiritu is a former manager at Conrad Prebys Music Center at the University of California San Diego. While he was working as a manager, he became deaf and has since partially recovered his hearing with the help of hearing aids. In the interview, he shared his experience with this overwhelming difficulty, as well as how he deals with persistent silence in his daily life.

Matsuda Because you have so many experiences at the different locations as a performer and as a producer, I'm sure, like, you have experienced, like, different acoustics. For example, here, it's so different from the Experiment Theater and Mandeville. I want to hear about how you perceive the sound happening in the concert hall. Like, how you perceive, not only sound, but also silence, which is the main topic in this interview. But like, I'd like to hear how you see those silent, different kind of, like, aspect of silence in the music performance side, as a both musician and producer.

Espiritu Yeah. Specifically to the concert hall, which we're in, it is not quiet. It is an extremely vibrant room. You can hear everything and anything. You can hear breathing. You can hear, like, paper moving of clothes. It's everything you hear in here, everyone's going to hear. But the cool part about the concert hall, it sounds different wherever you are. And one example is when they do, like, binaural beating, like a clarinet plays a note, and then they play to electronic, which is like a note right next to it. And you can hear the frequencies kind of going in and out. If you walk in the room, every single step, it sounds a little different because wavelengths change wherever you are, which is very, very cool. Now, silence, and I've had people try to be quiet. It's very hard. It's very hard. I mean, just moving on the stage, you're going to make some noise. Rustling paper, that's the one thing I do remember the most. And it was Nasim, where they wanted to create, like, some noise. And they were very worried it wasn't going to be loud enough. And I'm like, no, that's going to be plenty loud. You don't need a microphone on that. It's going to be perfect. When it comes to silence in the concert hall, it's hard. One, you can't control what your audience does. Someone's going to cough. Someone's going to do some noise. It's going to happen. So when it comes to that, it's uncontrollable. And that's what you just have to deal with. Yes, you can probably get some moments of silence. But even in this room, if you listen very carefully, you can probably hear the lights above us. And they have little fans. They need these fans to work. So is there true silence? If I turn them off, yeah. If we do a blackout, probably. We can get pretty quiet. But there's also an air conditioning unit in here. And it's very big with very slow air. So it's not supposed to be loud, but I'm sure someone can hear it. Someone with very good hearing. When it comes from a, I'm running the show, silence to me can be very uncomfortable because you don't know what's going on. I think most people understand that silence is not something that we listen to every day. At least in a general sense, like you go outside, you're going to

hear birds, planes, traffic. There's always, we're always surrounded by noise. And I think when silence happens, when I'm backstage running the show, it's like, what's going on? If something happens, something wrong. But for the most part, if we communicate with the musicians or whatever, you will know that, oh, I want it to be completely quiet for 20 seconds. I'm like, okay, cool. Now, sometimes we don't know. Sometimes we don't have the opportunity to learn this music, you know, within one rehearsal. Sometimes that's all we have. So it's like, oh, okay, what's going on? And we have to be quiet. Backstage, you can hear what happens backstage. Someone really loud playing trumpet in the actual backstage area, you will hear and hear. But it is really hard to hear it. Silence when it comes to music, I think it can also be uncomfortable because, you know, our audience comes to listen. Most of the time, they might not know what they're going to listen to. Especially with like world premieres or we like just having our collaboration concert. These are pieces that no one's ever heard, including the musicians, until like a week before. So it's always going to be a surprise to them. But I think one, Alec Karis says it the best. It's like, it's about the space between the notes when it becomes something about silence. Like you played a note and now there's nothing. Or maybe there is something that your brain is thinking about. Like the note had created something in you, but there's no noise. And then there's another noise. So yeah, I think from just running shows, it can be very, I don't want to say chaotic, but it's like, we're just kind of like be quiet and hope things are going the way. Because, you know, you come to hear the pieces. But what if the piece is silent? Are you hearing what the composer wants you to hear? Are you hearing exactly what it's supposed to be? Or did someone mess up? We don't know. But that's also the beauty of live performance. It's whatever happens. Like you can't, I don't think anyone has the perfect performance ever. You can get close, but the good side about that is it's a once in a lifetime. Like you come, no, it's never going to be played that way ever. That one time. Even like bands that do this over and over again, they're never going to be exact. So that's always, I think, when it comes to playing and in silence too, you just don't know. And it's just up to you to perceive that silence or that performance.

Matsuda Yeah. I'm glad you mentioned like this room is very loud, actually. Like even if there's no sound, because even now, like, as you mentioned, I hear a lot of noise coming from every direction. Almost like, I feel like noisy in a way. Like it's kind of disturbing. Have you ever had any experience with like getting so much noise coming from like all directions, for example, like coming from speakers or like those like uncontrollable noise, listening to those and it kind of stress you out sometimes or just you can kind of ignore it now?

Espiritu For sure. I ignore it. It's not like stressing at all. Even like when I started because my job isn't like, yeah, I have to mix. Yes. But mixing is very different when it comes to live performance in this kind of way, because people, dynamic range is super important. So you don't want to be like compressing anything. You don't want to make everything sound the same. You want stuff to be very quiet. You want stuff to be very loud. So that in a sense, I will like listen to that. But if there's a lot going on and that's what the composer wants, then they're happy with it. Then I just, OK, cool. I'm done. It's like it's not like I'm it's nothing to worry about. But tech goes wrong all the time. And some of these lights will go into a crazy loud fan noise. And that's because it just get overused.

They go overheated. And that's just like the computer. Like you open your MacBook and you run some really big program. The fan's going to turn on. It's the same with these lights. If you use them at 100 percent for a long time, they're going to turn on. That to me is chaotic. And I don't like that because now I have to fix it because we don't want unwanted noise inside here. We want it to be close to silent as possible, close to the room acoustics as possible, which brings up just someone putting their laptop there like an old laptop. The fan will go off and it'll sound like it's raining in the concert like and we've had complaints. And it's like there's nothing we can do about that person's computer. Yeah, because, you know, I can supply a computer, but it might not be, you know, the software they need. But yeah, loud noises don't really bother me. I mean, I understand it from like being protective of your hearing. So like I understand that. But that even when I started, it was just like things are going to be loud sometimes. That's just how it is.

Matsuda So it just changes like the perspectives once you are in this room and then accept it.

Espiritu Yeah, it's going to be loud. There's and then the good thing is you can move. I remember someone sitting right there and then it was the percussion festival we had. Someone was feedbacking on the bass drum with a microphone and speaker and it was crazy loud. And that person moved. That's all you have to do. I mean, that is an extreme though. Like feedbacking itself as an instrument is I think a very extreme thing to do. It's very cool because you're creating this instrument of peak, like you're taught in school, feedback is bad. This person is like, no, it's good. It's my own instrument. But that's the only extreme when it comes to like something really loud. And from a safety perspective, we should always be kind of like taking care of our hearing and not being, you know, at a really loud concert for too long.

Matsuda Yeah, that is true. Like you, we mentioned like the background noise can be sometimes foreground. The foreground sound can be background sometimes, right? Like those noise can be background once you accept that. Do you see like going out from the concert setting now, like for example, going to the outside, like ocean or river, do you see any kind of like perspectives? You feel silent, although you are actually listening to sound, which totally become background. Like do you have any specific place or favorite place you go sometime and then you feel silent emotionally?

Espiritu No, but with not being able to hear without my processors, that can be wherever I want because I can just take them off and I can hear almost close to nothing. But like a lot of musicians and performers, I think we all have a little bit of tinnitus, like we all have a little bit of that ringing. I still have that, but only when I take them off. So because it's in your head, it's in your head, not really. It's not really a physical thing. It's your, you know, your neurons telling, oh, there's this ringing that you're going to hear forever. So I don't think I can truly get silence. I can get very close. I can, you know, I'm like most people, I can turn off my hearing, which I think in a perspective way, I can get quieter. I can get closer to that silence. But with them on, I can, like you're saying, tune things out very well because I just don't need to listen to it. It's almost like an option. I don't have to, but I hear it. I just, it doesn't really, it's not like it's too much or not enough. But I guess every

morning I start out deaf I don't really put them on right away. So I have about, you know, two hours of getting, you know, doing my morning routine, yoga, doing some workout, eating, showering. I do that completely deaf. So I don't hear anything. In the shower, I hear a little bit in this ear, but for the most part, I don't like to hear anything. I have a very loud fan. I don't hear it. I have the TV on, but I don't hear it. So I guess that would be the silence emotionally, because it's, which is, I guess, kind of nice because you're starting your day off, you know, you're kind of slowly going into it. And I just start, I'm woken up and I don't have to hear right away. It's not my favorite thing because it can be a little dangerous. If something's happening, I can't hear. But I think it's a, I like starting the day like that. And then, you know, after a shower, I put them on and I'm like, okay, now I'm, I've done my morning. I can just start the day now with more sensory.

Matsuda May I ask you more about how you're experiencing the hearing issue, like how you started and stuff?

Espiritu It just went away. It just.

Matsuda When, when did it happen?

Espiritu No, it's been a year with a year and a half of the left. So that means two years with the right in July, maybe three years. November 20, must've been 2022. Was the first one. January 2023 was the second one. I think that's right.

Matsuda So it's been three, almost three years.

Espiritu Next three years in November. Yeah. Yeah. Three years of losing it. And then, but with the physical implant, it's not been that long.

Matsuda So can I ask what, if you remember, was the reaction to...

Espiritu I thought it was like a, like a, like a ear infection. Because it wasn't all the way off. It was like, just very hard to hear. And I thought it was an ear infection, just like clogged up or something. And then I went to the doctor and it wasn't. And then this one went like four months later. February.

Matsuda So like now it's like, at that point, like you notice you're losing the hearing ability.

Espiritu Well, at that point in February, I didn't like the plan was to get this implanted. And then I didn't even get to see the audiologist until I lost both. So the, the big like, "Oh shit" was when I looked it up. Cause it was like the doctor told me you're, you're going to need them. We're going to do one first and then we'll do the second one later. Cause they need to make sure your body's not going to reject it. And I looked it up online and I was like, Oh shit, I'm going to have this big thing on my head. And it's going in my, like, that's when I was like, Oh, this is, you know, my life's going to change. But I did accept it. It's never going to come back and it's gone. That's just how it is. You know, they tried everything they could to get it back. I trust that completely. Hearing loss is crazy because it's just something we can, it's natural. You are naturally going to lose your hearing

musicians, people who are in loud noise even quicker if you don't take care of it. But there's no, not yet, at least no way of getting it back maybe in the next 30, 40 years. But like, it's not, it's not like some, like I'm going to get it back. So I accepted it very quickly. And once you accept it, then it's very easy because you know, this is it. Some people have a very hard time accepting that because it's like, I'm disabled or I'm never going to hear the same. Yes. You're never going to hear the same. But in 15 years, you would have never not heard the same too. It's, I think that's what people need to understand. Your hearing's not perfect. Also your hearing is personal. Even before I lost it, our hearing's very different from one another. You hear things very differently. I hear things very differently. Right. And we can't even share that though. That's the crazy part when it comes to hearing. It's like, you can tell me what it sounds like, but I'll never know what it sounds like to you. Including silence because not all of us are lucky enough to be able to be in silence because of tinnitus or something or, you know, whatever it is. Maybe it's like they, it's too uncomfortable because I know some people cannot handle, you know, they, they need something constant.

Matsuda Yeah. Like, so like the main research topic I'm doing is like the seven terms in Japanese describing different kind of the silence. For example, *Ma* is like a brief pause between the sound and music or wording, speaking. And there's a term called the "Mu-on." "Mu" is nothing, and "On" is sound. So like, it's basically philosophical concept of no sound, which is, as you mentioned, impossible. But getting like that kind of hearing issue, to me, is kind of close to, I can imagine the world of muon, the nothingness of the sound, though you're still hearing the nervous system sound. Like when you get that situation, do you see the sound and silence different way before and after, if you remember.

Espiritu Like just silence in general or in music?

Matsuda Yeah. Like being in a quiet place compared to you have to be in a quiet place.

Espiritu Oh, okay. So choosing. Yes. When it comes to like choosing because people, I mean, the biggest one is for me is meditating. Like that's like you need silence. Right. One to begin with. But to me, meditating seems so difficult because you really have to just everything's done. I don't know. I don't know how you just turn off. But in silence too, nothing's on your mind. You can't think of anything. But choosing that, obviously someone's doing that, hopefully for our benefit in themselves or not. But it depends on this person, whatever the person is. I don't do that. Like I don't, you know, I guess I choose to be silence in the mornings. I can choose to be silent whenever. Like if someone's talking, I don't want to listen to them. I can just take them off. Being forced to be in silence, I think that's where it goes back to the uncomfortableness, because I think people are not totally okay with that. I think more audience members that come here are more prepared for it because they don't, you know, sometimes they don't know what to expect, but they understand like this is part of it. This is the experience. But yeah, when it comes to, that's a very good way, when you're talking about philosophy, it's like choosing or being forced, because like just in a prison system, people are forced to be in solitude. And there's no noise but you. You're forced to do that. Forced to listen to silence in a concert, it seems

kind of funny to me, but that you're, it's not like you're forcing them, but you're like giving them this experience of silence, but they don't know what that's going to be like or what they're thinking, as opposed to choosing. But some people do choose, because sometimes we'll play pieces that are very long, with very little music and lots of silence, and you just, you know. I think Steve and Sasha did one last year where it was like six hours, five hours. Yeah, and they were, someone fell asleep. It's just because they're like, they knew they were coming in, and that's what it's about. And they were okay with that, like come in, do whatever you need to do, just be, you know, respectful sometimes. But yeah, someone just fell asleep on the ground. They chose that, and then that's what happened to their silence. They fell asleep. I think sometimes we like, oh, I mean generally like, silence is quiet. Silence is nothing. Do you want silence when you go to sleep? Probably. I think loud noises would keep someone up, but not everyone is, I guess, initiated into silence, where it's like, silence is something. It's not nothing. Is it the absence of sound, or is it the creation of no sound? Because no sound is something. That's something. Yeah, I mean, because like you said, there's sound everywhere. We just can't even hear some of the sounds. Like, who knows what our voices are actually doing on a full frequency response, like animals. They hear very different from us. They hear more than us. Is there actual silence for animals? I don't think so, if they can hear so much more. But yeah.

Matsuda Now that you have a device, does hearing experience change? Did hearing experience change since you start using it?

Espiritu Yeah, so the device itself is not perfect. It's far from perfect. That being said, the brain is extremely powerful. So the brain can do something that no other part of your body can do, and it can trick you into thinking you still have something you probably don't. Technically speaking, these only go up to 8,000 frequency. So human, 20 to 20,000 hertz. So I have just up to 8,000, which is just about the end of speaking. So that's kind of what they do. It's not about anything else. It's how to get people to hear speaking really well. Music is extremely complex. I mean, just look at a piano. One note, that's not one note. It's three, four, whatever notes. So music is complex. The technology is not there, but my brain is. So unlike most people who lose their hearing, I am a very small percentage of it being right away with no history of it. Because there's other people who are, it's genetic. They know it's coming. They've been losing it for years very quickly. So they're prepared for it. But those people sometimes have never heard anything without help. So like hearing aid, where it's just a microphone and then it gets, so they've been hearing that and hearing aids aren't natural sounding. It's a microphone and it's a very, very small speaker. But that's probably closer to what I hear than what you would hear. So music's never gonna sound the same. But my brain can fill in the emotion, the feeling. Because my hearing doesn't sound organic at all. It sounds mechanical. I can tell it's digital. It's not juicy. That's my biggest one. It doesn't have this like nice, like what people say vinyl and tape sound like. You can hear like the organic juiciness of it. I don't have that anymore. But my brain is like, can fill in the gaps. At some point, I will forget what my hearing is and my brain will be like, this is my hearing. This is how we remember. And that's the same with people losing their hearing. Someone who's 70 is gonna lose their hearing for

10 years. Now they're hearing 10 years later is completely different. Their brain doesn't know anything now. It doesn't know that point of hearing. It now knows.

Matsuda Because it's too gradual.

Espiritu Yeah, yeah. Because your brain just learns. It just, it's like it really is its own thing. Like yes, our brain is our brain, but you don't know what it's doing half the time because it's able to do these things without you having to think about it.

Matsuda Yeah. Yeah, like the last one question. But so you were the musician too. Like when you, did you compose the music too?

Espiritu I mean, yeah, but not like I would say like score composition. Sometimes like, yeah, I would do some stuff. I never was good at like writing it out. So I would just let the DAW write it out, whatever it's called.

Matsuda Like I heard like a lot of composers have, even like great composers have like some kind of difficulties with how to use the silence in the piece because writing the piece sounds like writing the note and then writing the sound. But the goal is not just like playing that music all the time. Otherwise there's no differentiation between the notes. Always there's need of the silence, presence of silence. But like when you were a musician, performing the musician, like have ever used the silence as a part of the music composition or?

Espiritu Yeah, I think silence is super cool. It doesn't always have to have this super deep emotional connection, I think, because I mean, even in some like heavy metal like music, there's a break. There's like this build up, stop, breakdown. Just that stop, that's silence. But we don't like the people there don't look at it as like silence. It's like a little moment of like, oh, here comes a really big breakdown. And that I did a lot because it's fun. It's exciting. People get like this big rise and then we take it away, but we give it back. So it's definitely like a relationship when you, especially performing it, because you're like, you're doing it on purpose to get a emotional reaction. But I don't think a lot of people think of it as like a silence. It's like a more of a moment, but it is silence. It's the absence of your music for that one quick second where everyone's like waiting for it. Cause they know it's coming. You get a big rise or even with like electronic dance music, like the drop, it's coming, you know, it's coming. Then it happens. And I think not, again, not a lot of people see that as a silence or nothing, or it just like, it's part of it. It's a break. It's to get you emotionally hyped. But yeah, I would do that a lot. Cause it's cool. I enjoy it a lot in certain genres of music, because like you said, composers have a hard time writing because they are writing, but they don't understand that. No, silence can also be part of it. Not every instrument has to play all the time or none of the time. But I think when it comes to horror music, silence is your friend, your best friend, because your absence is creating uncomfortableness that people do not like. And then you hit them with something loud and shrilly or something chaotic, it gets you another emotional response to it. Specifically horror music, because it's like, you have so many aspects, your music controls so much to how to make someone scared. Just with music, you can scare someone, which is, you know, everyone goes to concerts or movies to like, I'm here to

enjoy the movie, but the music is doing something that your brain's not thinking about. It's just doing.

Matsuda Because the silence is giving like attention.

Espiritu Yes, yes, yes.

Matsuda From the audience and the expectation to what's going to happen, or like, I wonder where to go. And then all of a sudden, the sound or the theme breaks that.

Espiritu Or vice versa, there's lots of music and then nothing. Just nothing. Because the moment is whatever is on screen or whatever you're trying to see.

INTERVIEW WITH JEREMY OLSON

August 26th, 2025

1:00 PM

University of California San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall

Mr. Jaremy Olson is an audio engineer and manager at the Experimental Theater at the University of California San Diego. He works in a venue surrounded by hundreds of microphones and speakers used to generate artificial sound effects and spatial control. Because each speaker naturally produces static noise even when it is not in use, he hears a consistent static noise while working at the venue. Some people prefer listening to such static noise when they want to focus or mask ambient noise; however, because of his work environment, Olson cannot stand listening to static noise. His insights help us understand that our perception of silence can vary depending on one's experiences and perspectives.

Olson So, you know, there I did, you know, it started out when I'm working with them, I was doing primarily running the national anthems and the stuff that was happening on the field. You know, so I'd be on the field with the microphone and having whoever's saying whatever they're saying or whatever, you know, awards were being given out or scholarships to people. You know, I was running those microphones and stuff. And then it got into the point where started managing speaker loads and calibrating all the speakers in the stadium. And then at that point, we figured out a way to make the, to control levels in all the different areas of the stadium, depending on crowd size, because a smaller crowd that's less enthusiastic, you want the volume to be lower so that, you know, people can have conversations. And vice versa, like when everybody's really excited and screaming, you need the music to be louder because they're screaming. You want them to hear that too, or the announcements. And I only quit because I wound up having two full-time jobs, you know. And then it got to the point where I was doing in-game sound as well. And running the mixing board for the stadium during games. And then I did for the both the Padres and San Diego State men's basketball. I did the fake crowd sound during COVID.

Matsuda Okay. Wow. It's interesting. Like a fake cloud sound is meant to be like, fill up the space, right? So.

Olson Well, it started out with one, first the spaces speaking of silence, it's when they're quiet, it's eerie being in a space that large without having, hearing people talking or anything. It's really quite challenging to be there for people.

Matsuda Do you think that's for the players or?

Olson It is for, it's for everybody. And then with the in-game stuff, you know, even though the dugouts are a fair ways away with no audio and no crowd, no regular, you know, ground noise kind of thing, they can hear what each other's saying. And then on top of that, we had all the national, you know, sports press that were coming to the games. And from where they were with no crowd noise and nothing playing, you can hear what's being said

in the dugouts as well. And they, Major League Baseball didn't want reporters writing about every single thing that was said in the dugout. You know what I mean?

Matsuda So it's kind of sound, it was kind of muting the conversation.

Olson Yeah. It It was, that was where it started. And then, there's a baseball game called MLB The Show that has reactionary crowd noises in it. All that was actually recorded here in San Diego at our stadium with real crowds. So then me and several other people took that and created a playback scheme to play those different reactions as needed and to be able to build the stadium sound like it would naturally in a baseball game. And then once that was done, San Diego State asked me to do it for the NCAA basketball stuff. So I did it for them too using a basketball game that was recorded from the previous season. And was able to take crowd sound out of that that didn't have announcers and didn't have stuff in it. Those, you know, those microphones were excluded in this particular video that I got.

Matsuda They think it was the same reason?

Olson Same reason, yeah. They wanted to keep, you know, well, I think that basketball had a choice. The NCAA gave all the teams a choice whether they wanted to or didn't want to. But they were, people were really happy with what most of the stadiums were doing for baseball. And so, you know, did the season and, but it's mostly so that, you know, to kill silence. You know, because again, the two benches could hear each other talking and, you know, all you're hearing is, you know, your opponent speaking and squeaking on the floors from the shoes and stuff. And it's just, it kind of weighs on you, you know, like it kind of, you know, screaming crowds and loud noises and stuff, you know, get people's adrenaline going. Where the silence just kind of, it's like this weighted blanket that just kept sitting on everybody. And it made players, you know, lethargic and not really enthusiastic about doing what they wanted to do, so.

Matsuda That's interesting, because like a music scene's like, now you're working here, so like you notice like a lot of concerts, like people expect to be quiet as much as they can. And then that is kind of like manner for the performers to focus on the things.

Olson Well, I think music's different than live events, you know, especially sports events. You know, the silence between notes actually speaks volumes to a piece's composition. You know what I mean? And I guess, you know, I didn't, the first time I was really aware of that was in a music class when I was like 18 or 17 or 18. And this really great classical guitar player was explaining to me how he, when he tries to write pieces, he tries to focus on silence first and where he's gonna draw that tension. Because when you're used to hearing melody and rhythm and then it's nothing, you know, your head kind of compensates for where the melody might be resolving to and whether people are aware or not, they're kind of counting the measure out and expecting some sort of resolution to it. And that, you know, having that explained to me is, you know, integral to building great compositions. Then once that happened, then I started hearing it in almost every genre of music, you know, not to the degree here.

Matsuda Yeah, definitely. But like the, after like kind of enlightenment of like existing the silence in the composition, like, do you see that as like person, like to have the control of like the sound and silence in the stadium and in like the theater? Like, do you see those like different tensions and different perspectives?

Olson Oh, sure, of course. I mean, just the way that the experimental theater operates with acoustic, you know, simulated reverb. Right. You know, having conversations in here and in there hearing the reverb, you know, as you walk in, you just assume that your brain just naturally says, okay, this is what this room sounds like. And then when you start changing it to larger and more dramatic reverbs, and then turn it off in the middle of a sentence and it sucks kind of the life out of everything, you know, it's actually really fun to do to large crowds. Because they gasp every time. And if it's like four or five people, you get an ooh or an ah, but when there's like 40 or 50 people in there that have never heard it before, and it's never been explained to them that it's even possible, it's really very dramatic to people. And so that part I've truly liked doing those little demonstrations and, you know.

Matsuda Yeah, I remember when I came to the here, came to here, like, I think doing a Jessica, like, you know, she was taking many people to the tour, and then she all of a sudden changed the setting. And it's just like, I felt like I was in a different room all of a sudden, because like the sound is like kind of controlling the space, like how I perceive, like how large this room could be. Like, for example, like here, like I hear a lot of like refraction from every direction. So, and then that is kind of like, even if I close my eyes, like I kind of imagine how big this space could be, but like changing that artificially, like all sudden, it's just like.

Olson It makes me personally, I feel smaller. I feel like I shrink as a, in the space almost.

Matsuda Definitely, yeah, that's a crazy system. Like, how many, do you know how many speakers are now?

Olson There's 24 microphones and 73 speakers. Wow, 70 speakers. Well, there's more microphones in there just for recording purposes, but to run the reverb system, there's like 24 microphones in a grid.

Matsuda And then it was, it happened when you were here or like, it was like the process?

Olson The installation of the system. So there's, we're on our second system. The first system was originally created in the late 90s by a company called LCS, and then Meyersound purchased them. And then when this building was built, that's the system that we got installed. And so when I started working here, there was already a system in place to do that. And then since that system, there's been two other versions of it, upgraded versions of the system. And then now we're, the one that we have now is would be the fourth kind of version in its life. And we put that in, we started the installation in 2021, and we finished with all the beta testing this time last year.

Matsuda Oh, okay. Were you the part of the project, like kind of like, you know, suggest things when like, you know, give some feedback to the company?

Olson Of course, almost daily.

Matsuda Oh, wow. Like what kind of improvement?

Olson Well, there was, there were a number of problems, like coding problems that came up initially with feedback and weird artifacts. There were a number of clocking issues, not necessarily on with their fault, but the way that our building works and how rooms were connected together and how one clock source was clocking, was should have clocked everything. And when it first came in, there were multiple clocks working against each other so that eventually it would start putting out, you know, little clicks and ticks out of all the speakers and weird artifacts and stuff, that all that stuff had to get sorted. And then user interface stuff, you know, like the, how the interfaces work on the iPads and where certain things are or should have been that weren't and how, you know, the workflow could be made easier. That was part of our agreement with them to get it installed, was that we would, you know, serve as the beta test facility outside of their headquarters. And in addition to that, Rand and Shahrokh would start teaching classes for people to start composing for systems like this, because it's hard to, you know, it's one thing to just install it, but it's so much more than just a reverb system, like a room correction thing that, you know, without having, you know, opportunity to be in spaces like that, you can't really expect people to write for places like that. And so those were the three kind of, you know, deals that we made with them to get their beta test hardware in the building and their tech support constantly. They've been really great. We can, when I first started working here, the company wouldn't help us at all. Like they were just like, we don't have any parts. We can have somebody try and talk you through your problems on the phone, but if it's a broken part, you're gonna have to find it on eBay, which we did a lot. Me and Jessica bought lots of parts from other systems that were being taken out of service. And then, but now that this is in and we've done these beta testing stuff with them, they answer every phone call, every email, and they're very receptive.

Matsuda Wow. Like you mentioned about some like static noise coming from the speakers, like that kind of.

Olson Sure, well, every speaker has ground noise. Like it's even happening in here as we speak. You can kind of hear that really low thing. For me in spaces like this, I do okay. Like if I'm having a conversation, it doesn't affect me. But if I'm just working by myself and I'm building a light show or cleaning the room or laying out cables, putting up microphones, that silence mixed with that low, constant noise over a period of hours kind of mentally takes its toll on me. And so I have to have music going on. I mean, it can be even commercials. I don't have to like the music. It could be a TV show that I'm not watching, but some sort of noise has to happen like that for me for a couple of reasons. One, it just makes me not pay attention to those sounds that if you're just walking through the room for 10 minutes, your ears wouldn't adjust to hearing them. And so you wouldn't know that they were there. But after being there for so long, it kind of, my head makes them louder

and louder and louder for some reason over the hours. Like it's like my senses are focusing in on it more. And so for that reason, I need background noise.

Otherwise I make mistakes. I start overthinking what I'm doing and I start making mistakes. And then I overthink the mistake where if there's this background noise on for me and it's not this weird silence, I just go through the motions and everything seems to be all right. I do the same thing in concerts too. When there's, when it's, you know, things are constantly happening and I'm anticipating what the next thing that I have to do is like for the next part of a song that I have to ride the spader on or if I have to change the reverb during a part of a song or move to the next light cue. If I'm waiting for two to five minutes, sometimes 15 minutes in the case at this school, I really overthink it and I start to make myself nervous. And so in that situation, like I keep candy with me. And so like eating a piece of candy will totally like take my mind off of that and just let me go through the motions. And yeah, it took me a long time to figure that out.

Matsuda So did it happen since you started working as the audio engineer person at the stadium or here?

Olson Actually, that stuff started before both of them. I worked for 18 years in recording studios in Los Angeles. It started there.

Matsuda It was like a completely quiet situation, right?

Olson And I'd be by myself, you know, I'd be by myself in this big, huge room for hours setting up stuff, you know, running cables, setting up microphones, taking it down, setting up large format consoles, recalling mixes. And, you know, sometimes that stuff takes many hours and I would, same thing, the silence would get to me and I would start overthinking what I was doing. And so even just having the TV on, even if it's in another room and just that kind of background noise, I don't even have to follow it. I do better. And I think that what really made me learn it was playing music like, you know, I play bass and this friend of mine that I've, this coworker in the studio that I was, we were both on staff at for many years. We wrote many albums together. And for me, writing was always cumbersome because there was always like silence and the instrument. And I felt like I was always fighting it. And same with practicing, like I would get tired of practicing after 20 or 30 minutes because my mind was only thinking about the practicing and the music where I come to find out that just sitting on my couch and watching reruns of sitcoms to practice, I could practice for many hours without thinking about it because I would start to, you know, I practice the things I wanted to practice, you know, whenever, however I wanted to. But in addition, I would start playing the intro and outro themes and the scoring to it. I'd like start playing that. And then when the commercials would come on, I'd play the jingle to the commercial and it just kept my hands moving for hours and hours without thinking about it. And so that kind of entertainment of myself led me to continue doing this in silent situations. It just, it felt just normal for me to have background noise on. Strangely, if I'm not doing these type of tasks, if there's no tasks to do, I don't mind silence at all. Like if I'm just sitting there and I don't have to accomplish anything, totally fine with it.

Matsuda Interesting. So you can just sit and experiment with theater without any music? Well, I can't actually.

Olson I can if I turn the system off. Because then, you know, there's really more of a true silence.

Matsuda Like without the static noise?

Olson Well, the static noise is always there, but it's not being re-amplified through the reverb system. And so that constant state of noise is elevated a little bit more when it's on. And so when it's off, I can stay and do it longer. But if I'm just sitting there, I'm fine. But, you know, and I can, you know, I'll probably just fall asleep, who knows.

Matsuda But the- What about when you want to relax? Like, for example, like some people prefer to listen to so-called white noise.

Olson Oh, I cannot do that.

Matsuda You can't?

Olson No. Yeah. Any sort of repetitive sound will eventually take its toll on me.
Like a ceiling fan at night, a water fountain, wind chimes, like some people do totally okay with it. But for me, like having it over and over and over again, it just, like the bathroom fan, like even just watching television and having the bathroom fan on for more than 10 minutes, like, okay, just for some reason in my head, it gets louder than whatever I was doing before. Even though it's really not louder, in reality, my head kind of amplifies it inside itself.

Matsuda Do you think it's the same thing for the nature's sound too? Like, for example, by the river, by the ocean, they always have some of the repetitive sound, don't you?

Olson No, see, that stuff seems to be okay with me. So like in the stadium, for example, you know, if the stadium isn't open, but like the team is practicing and other people are working and it's silent, like that, and there's no music playing, I do okay with that. It's when nothing is happening and I'm trying to focus. I don't lose focus, I over-focus, I hyper-focus on what I'm doing and I'll just overthink the smallest tasks and I work, so I wind up working slower or I second-guess myself. I start thinking, are there other ways to do it? Where most of this stuff, you know, this point is super repetitive for me in many ways, you know, just like playing can be. So, you know, once you learn a specific technique playing, you don't think about it, you forget about what the technique is and you just use it, you know? And so silence makes me question that a lot.

Matsuda Yeah, I get it. Yeah, it's a part of the reason or the main reason I'm doing this research. To me, like throughout this course, like throughout this research, I figured like, at least in Japanese terms, there are seven terms that describes different kind of silence. For example, like as you mentioned, like the sound makes you quiet is part of the silence too, like you are kind of muted or you're trying to mute some distractions that is actually

playing something, but it's actually being quiet. That's a term called *achimoku* or that kind of term described like being quiet due to the factor that makes you quiet. But instead, like when you feel like more tranquil or serenity with the quietness, like it has a different terms. Where was I gonna go? Yeah, so when you, now you've talked about your job, like how you perceive those noise and sound can play a role as silence part, but like in your personal life, if you don't mind sharing it, like do you have something like some kind of moment you felt like strong, silent moment you felt like personally, emotionally?

Olson Yeah, you know, silence, I mean, it happens quite frequently to tell you the truth. You know, if everything is all of a sudden calm, like in my house, if everything is super calm and super quiet, like all of a sudden I get a little paranoid, like something's wrong, like did my dog get out of the yard or, you know, is my kid doing something that they shouldn't be? And that happens in music as well with me. You know, like if I don't know a silent part is coming, which happens often, you know, here, if I don't know that it's coming, like sometimes it takes me back. Like, I'm like, oh, did the microphone just break? Like, did the system just turn off? Like, and then I'll hear something that kind of like snaps me out of it. And like, you know, but there's a little adrenaline rush with that stuff for those kinds of silences for me. Yeah, totally.
It's almost like a fear.

Matsuda Because like you have a responsibility and expectations. Exactly. If that doesn't happen, you get stressed and anxiety.

Olson Yeah, so like, you know, if I hear my dog's collar jingling, you know, I'm like, oh, it's just my dog doing what my dog, but if there's no silence, I mean, if it's total silence and I haven't, you know, then I'm like, where's my dog at? And then I start like kind of getting a little stressed out over the silence. But there's also something to be said for, you know, not hearing stuff too. Like you were mentioning with nature, like even though it's quiet, it's not truly silent. You know, so in that case, like I think I feel really at ease because there is something that my mind registers as being there, even if it's on, you know, such a low volume level that I don't really hear it. You know what I mean? But yeah, both of those things happen to me.

Matsuda Yeah, like the foreground sound becomes the background, the background sound becomes the foreground and then it changed the tension.

Olson Yeah, exactly.

Matsuda The awareness of the sound.

Olson Which I think is the way that I always felt that this one teacher explained it to me, was trying to, that's what I took away from it is that, is that it can be used to create serenity, but it can also be used to create, you know, real tension. And so I've really started to, you know, find comfort in those. But I do get a little nervous when something silent happens and I'm thinking like, I'm looking at, trying to look at meters to see if something's registering. I'm like, you know, and there's always this checklist of things.

I'm like, what's going wrong? And I run through them and then, you know, almost never did anything go wrong, but you know, I still can't stop myself from feeling that kind of nervousness.

Matsuda Silence is just not empty, but it's just like context and it gives you a bit of a different emotion.

Olson People that have come into the room, into the experimental theater, a lot of them have kind of compared it to the isobaric chambers. Is that what, did I say it right? What's the, I think I'm saying it wrong. The true silent rooms.

Matsuda And that could, and that could, and the anechoic chamber, I can't.

Olson Anechoic, right, I missed it, okay. And I, and have the people that have spent time and then have described it to me, it sounds terrifying to me. I don't want to hear my blood move. Like I don't want to hear my hair crashing into itself, which people tell me, that just sounds horrifying to me, but maybe I would be all right.

Matsuda Why you think that's horrifying to you?

Olson I think I would, the same reason, I would overthink it because there wouldn't, because I would be forced to hear it and I couldn't block it out. And those silent moments in everyday life, those, you know, things that, those droning things, like my brain starts to amplify them for me. And I don't know that I could ever unhear it.
You know what I mean? I think I would always feel, even if I couldn't perceptually hear it, I would perceive the memory, you know, I could, I could, it would just kind of, there'd be some muscle memory of hearing it there that.

Matsuda Like, so I think this is my last question, but because like you're under that situation, like you have to hear well, like you focus on the hearing and then react to it and to avoid any kind of things from your personal life. Like, do you have any favorite place or favorite like locations where you seek to go to get relaxed, which has some kind of quietness with a serenity and a tranquility?

Olson Oh, well, my garden for sure. Garden. Yeah, it's easy for me to water plants and take care of plants and, you know.

Matsuda Is it because you focus on something, like you don't really hear things?

Olson Well, first, it's not silent, even if there's nobody around, just because it's outside, you know, I can still hear bees and birds and, you know, dogs from other blocks barking or whatever, but it's something that I can do mindlessly, you know, like, I can water a garden, and I now don't have to pay attention to what I'm doing. It's kind of, it's kind of like the same effect of practicing watching sitcoms for me, like, I would watch the sitcoms, and I would be watching the TV and playing without thinking about it. It's kind of the same thing, like, I can feel like I'm doing something, but I don't have to really, you know, put a lot of energy and thought into it.

Matsuda So, in a context, like, when you put sound or, like, rock music in a experimental theater, like, you kind of mute yourself, like, you don't have to think about it too much. Is, in that context, do you see the situation garden is giving you some kind of silent moment?

Olson Oh, yeah, for sure, even though the water is going, like, you know, I don't have to, you know, there's no critical listening. I don't have to, you know, doing what I do, you know, hearing is pretty critical to it, and, you know, I want to be responsible with the way that I hear things, but it's also really nice to, you know, not have to, you know, focus on what you're hearing, which the gardening, you know, doing that kind of thing, or surfing, or, you know, something like this really kind of makes that really easy for me, you know, like, even though there's lots of noises when you're surfing, even if it's crowded, it's usually still fairly quiet, you know, and I don't, you know, I don't have to be, you know, my hearing isn't responsible for anything where, you know, my whole adult life, all of my work has been, you know, revolved around how well I hear things, or how well I do not hear things, and yeah, so, you know, I don't know, I keep trying to take care of my hearing, but I don't know that we all have that much choice in the matter sometimes, you know.

Matsuda Like, there's a term in Japanese called the Muon. Muon is like empty sound, which technically impossible, as you mentioned, like, always there's sound coming from, you know, brain system, nervous system, blood system, so there's always sound, but the concept is there's no sound. Like, if you imagine that kind of situation, like, where or what kind of situation could be, just imagination thing, but do you have any thought, like, no sound in this world?

Olson No, I don't know how to imagine that. I don't, I mean, I don't, my understanding is that it's not possible.

Matsuda Right, it's impossible.

Olson I mean, especially thinking about on, like, a molecular level, even atoms have to be making noise, you know, if they're moving, they're making noise. I mean, it doesn't seem, I mean, I don't even know that a rock, you know, a rock is moving, sitting on the ground isn't not making noise. I mean, it, I might not be able to hear it, but it most certainly is probably making some noise, you know, so it actually is a terrifying thought to me, because to me, that would mean that there's nothing left.

I mean, I don't, and I don't, I don't know if that's an enjoyable way to think about life. I can block stuff out where I don't hear stuff sometimes. Like, sometimes if I'm reading something that I'm really interested in, you know, people can be talking directly at me, like, this close, and I don't hear them.

Not because I'm not hearing them, but because my brain has, you know, turned all that stuff off. Right. So, I mean, I like regular silence, I guess.