

John Cage: Forever and Sunsmell (1942)

Cage wrote *Forever and Sunsmell* for dancer Jean Erdman. The work is for singer and two percussionists. The singer is instructed to sing in a non-operatic manner, particularly to avoid using vibrato, but otherwise to have a "forced intense quality." The percussionists play two Chinese tom-toms and one large suspended Chinese cymbal with the two players often each playing on a different portion of it.

There are five sections to this song despite its brevity, each calling for different registers or combinations of sounds and a different basis for pitch organization of the singing part. The pitches of the song are relative; that is, since the accompaniment has no definite pitch, the singer is free to raise or lower the whole voice part to a range that feels comfortable.

The text is from e.e. cummings' 1940 published collection called *50 Poems*, using the poem designated as 26. Cage did not use the whole poem, nor did he use the lines he chose in the same order as the original. In addition to the poem, there are two wordless sections—a vocalise and an interlude of humming.

The opening and closing sections are soft and high, for voice unaccompanied, using only three notes. The other three sections are a high loud section that is almost entirely on just one pitch and accompanied by both percussionists, an a cappella section including humming, and an almost ritualistic section accompanied by the tom-toms.