

Transcript of Julius Eastman's interpretation of John Cage's *Song Books* (1970)

transcription by Adam Overton, in collaboration with G Douglas Barrett

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If you witnessed this concert and have other details to add, please contact a@plus1plus1plus.org.

A recording of this performance lives in the Music Library at SUNY Buffalo (Concert 2, JB 5):

<http://library.buffalo.edu.gate.lib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/music/spcoll/june.html>

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John Cage's Song Books (1970)

*performed June 4, 1975, by the SEM Ensemble: Petr Kotik, flute, director; Julius Eastman, voice; Judith Martin, synthesizer; Jan Williams, percussion
in Baird Recital Hall, Buffalo University
in the presence of John Cage*

Duration of entire performance: 1:03:04

Duration of Eastman's contribution: 13:30

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Some Notes on the Staging of this Performance

This transcript is based on an audio recording of Julius Eastman's performance, plus a few eyewitness accounts—remembered some 37 years after the fact—and is therefore incomplete in terms of what actually transpired onstage. What follows are some aspects of the staging of the performance, and its aftermath.

According to Ron Kuivila:

Eastman stood to the left, a woman in middle, and a man to the right.

Eastman may have worn some variant of a suit; the man may have been wearing street clothes; the woman may have been wearing a long dress.

At some point, Eastman induced the woman to undress from the waist up.

At some point, Eastman induced the man to undress completely, and caressed him in various locations.

According to Petr Kotik, Eastman apparently brought out **two chairs** for the performers.¹

According to the audio recording, Eastman's voice was amplified, most likely from a contact mic on his throat. This is suggested in the instructions for *Song Books*, which defines the "electronics" class of *Song Books* pieces as indicating:

“wireless throat microphones [that] permit the amplification and transformation of vocal sounds. Contact microphones amplify non-vocal sounds, e.g. activities on a table of a typewriter, etc.”

According to Arnold Dreyblatt,² after the concert ended, John Cage immediately stood up from where he had been seated and made a brief remark, which could be heard by those sitting around him, expressing his displeasure. He then rushed to the stage to confront Petr Kotik, the director of the S.E.M. Ensemble.

As Kotik remembers it,³ Cage had advanced upon the stage by the time the applause had ended, and they had the following exchange (additions in brackets and emphases are from Kotik):

Cage [to Kotik]: What was this about?

Kotik: I had no idea about Julius' performance, we have no rehearsals [according to Cage's instructions].

Cage: But YOU are THE DIRECTOR [meaning, no matter, you as the director are responsible].

key

[unintelligible]

[not totally sure]

[LAUGHTER] – indicates audience laughter

...

[26:10]

My name is Professor Padu [LAUGHTER]

And I'm here to show you a new system of love.

There have been many systems of love in the West which have been sort of degenerate, should we say ... The first system being the main system, the *In-And-Out System*, which I have now revised... to the

¹ During Cage's lecture the next day (around 40:12)—where he spoke at length about Eastman's performance—we learn about 2 chairs onstage:

Cage: One thing you should make sure is that soloists don't engage assistants.

Kotik: Now I did not know that there is any assistants until Julius came onstage.

Cage: No, I know that you did not know.

Kotik: I presumed that he needed two chairs to play a game. To play chess.

² Arnold Dreyblatt, interviewed by the author, October 2–12, 2012, via Skype and email.

³ Email correspondence/interview between G Douglas Barrett and Petr Kotik, October 5–8, 2012.

Sideway-and-Sensitive System. These are my two specimens – Mr. Charles and Miss Suzyanna. I might add that these are some of the best specimens in the world, I had to go to Haiti to get Miss Suzyanna. She was a special— comes from a special tribe which is found only in the Great Woods of Haiti.

Mr. Charles... I might congratulate you in the audience who are from Buffalo, because Mr. Charles I found in Buffalo, a very rare and wonderful specimen.

Now I would really like to congratulate you here, Buffalo. Now on with my lecture.

Here we have two of the greatest specimens here, first, and uh, first I would like to show you the eyes, the eyes of our specimens. You see they are quite oval, more oval than the ones of the male, you see, supposedly the male has more slanted eyes than the female because they're, sometimes they're more [aggressiveness?], as has been told to me by my teacher. [LAUGHTER]

Now the first thing that one does when one makes love with the eyes is to drink in the lover. Could we please demonstrate? Sideways please?

When drinking in the lover, one always starts from the feet and rises. There. Those who were at my lecture previously know that the importance of the *foot fet-ish*. [LAUGHTER] We therefore start— We start with the feet, drinking in the feet, and rise to the eyes. Could you please show that to us, please? Ready, and 1 ... 2 ... 3 and drink up... One more time ... starting from the feet, and 1 ... 2 ... 3 [LAUGHTER] ... Isn't that marvelous?

Now, the next thing I would like to show you is the function of the neck. The neck is connected with the eyes. The neck should always be elongated, the shoulders should be down, and it works in conjunction with the eyes. As our specimens will show you, the neck slowly turns, and again we drink into the feet, and rise... Can we have that please? Drinking into the feet ... elongating the neck ... and rising. Again. And 1 ... 2 ... 3, and drink ... isn't that marvelous? [LAUGHTER]

Next of course is to try the lips. The lips have a special function. As of course there have been some French degenerates who have introduced French kissing, but of course in my school, which is a very old and Indian school, we do not use the tongue. The lips are pushed outward, and without, I might add, a very, again, uh, degenerate function of Americans, that is smacking the lips, is not allowed. We just put the lips onto the other, and quick, draw away. Can we have that please? Closer please. Yes. Now, we start as always [...?...] near the feet. And down 1 ... 2 ... now push up the lips ... and ... yes ... marvelous, marvelous.

You'll notice that I've picked, um, two specimens of different races. I always of course like to show the best of both worlds. [LAUGHTER] That's very nice. Now, let me see.

Next we will show the hands, the stroking position. [32:24]

[30+ second silence from Eastman – other S.E.M. performers can be heard performing their respective solos]

[33:02]

Here you have a special body. [LAUGHTER]

With the hands, and with the arm, one embraces the lover, not with a funny kind of arm, but with the arm of tension. As we know ... in chess one always like a position with tension. Could we have [...?...] this,

slowly? And now pull ... 1, and release, 2, and again, and 1, and release, 2... Isn't that marvelous? Yes.

Next I would like to show you the hands, [...?...], the hands, stroke, and ... the fingers. You see, one never uses the palm, but I [wobble?] the tops of the fingers, hands to the [...?...]-line, we stroke, gently. Stroke, gently. ... [34:20]

[10 secs then HUGE LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE]

[34:35]

Right.

[34:45]

Now...

The same thing is true with the breast. We stroke, stroke, stroke. Now, as I will continue, we have, again, the feet, we always start with the feet. [35:11]

[35:37]

Feet, always start from the tip of the toes, and draws upward, like this, and downward and upward and downward... Could we try that on our slightly shy female? And upward and downward and upward and—.
[LAUGHTER]

One of course realizes that there is great power always in the feet. Again, let me show you my special leg method. [36:32]

[Eastman: 1 minute silence – other S.E.M. performers continue their solos]

[37:31]

As I said before, this is a special specimen from Buffalo, New York.

Now, as I said before, one takes the leg and slowly encompasses the body. But let us begin from the beginning. Let us first drink in with the eyes. Let us come closer and embrace with the arm. Let us squeeze, and let us poke the lips, and pucker. There you have it.

Now, for my final surprise, and the basis of my whole system – that is, the rejection of the *In-And-Out System*. As you see all of these are quite sensitive – the stroking ... the hugging ... the poking of the lips ... and the [quiet?] movement of the leg. [LAUGHTER] For those who have ballet training, good for you.
[LAUGHTER AND CLAPPING]

Alright now, for my final and beautiful system, we go *Sideways*, not *In-And-Out*. Could I see that please? *Sideways*? And side, 2 and 3 and 4 and ... Side, 2, 3 and 4. This is the basis of my method. I am hoping, of course, that most of you will go home and experiment, yes, because I know that you will like it as much as I have. For those of you who would like to have a private lesson, you write Box 202, La Jolla, California, care of Dr. Paga. Thank you so much for listening to this marvelous lecture. [40:30]

[CLAPS]

Goodbye.

[40:40]