

Introduction to Seventy Years of *Four Minutes, Thirty-three Seconds*

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ON 29 AUGUST 1952 THE PIANIST DAVID TUDOR SAT AT A PIANO ON THE STAGE OF Maverick Concert Hall, Hurley, New York, to perform a piece composed by John Cage that had been four years in the making. As Kyle Gann describes it,

Tudor sat down at the piano on the small raised wooden stage, closed the keyboard lid over the keys, and looked at a stopwatch. Twice in the next four minutes he raised the lid up and lowered it again, careful to make no audible sound, although at the same time he was turning pages of the music, which were devoid of notes. After four minutes and thirty-three seconds had passed, Tudor rose to receive applause—and thus was premiered one of the most controversial, inspiring, surprising, infamous, perplexing and influential musical works since Igor Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*. (Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, 2-3).

On the seventieth anniversary of the first performance of Cage's *4'33"*, this issue of *Australian Humanities Review* features a collection of essays by authors from a range of humanities disciplines who have been willing to adventurously think about, theorise or creatively experiment with the legacy of Cage's work, which, whether praised, censured or misunderstood, has had an undeniable influence on

the music and performance that came after it. In the time since its first performance, the aesthetic, cultural and conceptual reach of Cage's *4'33"* has been immense. Cage's experimental oeuvre (music, writings, teaching) is internationally significant, having been exported from America to the world, including Australia. The special section includes short essays by Shayne Bowden, Rachel Campbell and James Hazel Maher, Kim Cunio, Dieter Daniels, Richard Elliott, Daniel Fishkin, Mack Hagood, Peter Jaeger, Douglas Kahn, Caleb Kelly, Sally Macarthur, Julian Murphet, David Toop, Shelley Trower and Stephen Whittington.