

Silence is only as silent as its scale lets it sound. The one preceding the first note of an opera is only silent in that it is followed by lively arpeggios or majestic outbursts. But the more silent it gets and the longer silence lasts, the louder the smallest clicks and scratches become. Lasting silence reveals plenty of minor details, such as the life you discover through the microscopic lens -- and so much more. Some sound artists have decided to give it the leading role, only to show what silence itself has to tell/tells us.

When speaking of music and silence, John Cage's name is most likely to pop up. The American composer's most famous work, *4'33"*, is a blank partition – nothing is supposed to be played. By representing *4'33"*, the surrounding sounds become the composition itself, showing the listener there is no such thing as absolute silence.

Other works, further investigating the nature of silence, were directly inspired by Cage's endeavour. Thirty years after *4:33*, Spanish artist José Iges released *Dylan in Between*, a track that brings together the pauses featured in Bob Dylan's songs. The initial title - *Dylan on the Beach* - revealed a mockery of the French word *plage*, which, according to the artist, stood for the silence between two tracks on a vinyl.

All together, the empty seconds separating tracks are full of clicks and pops that music lovers from the vinyl era believe to deliver "mysterious messages." But digital silence is "for us and now" ; as Iges stresses, the illusory belief that we hear absolutely nothing. "Silence is, maybe, death."

While Cage and his heirs attempted to find answers to the conceptual question of the nature of silence, some others had already gone beyond this question. Onkyo means noise or echo in Japanese, and the Tokyo-based group of artists named after it characterizes itself by playing improvised "quiet noise."

The performances of onkyokei musician Sachiko M spark sometimes extreme reactions from audiences, left perplexed by what they consider to be an absence of music – only a few beeps tearing deep silence. In this light, the very silence Sachiko M gave as answer to our questions was/is eloquent enough.

The emblematic instrument of the onkyokei movement is a mere technique first used by Toshimaru Nakamura. The Japanese experimenter and his peers brought silence to the forefront by playing with the so-called No input mixing board, a mixing console whose input is connected to the output, thus creating a closed circuit: in other words, making music out of nothing but electronic interferences that the artists bend and twist.

The digital absence of signal that is said to be silence is indeed deceptive, as José Iges explained/explains. Even the stars of the quietest summer night are roaring and howling to us: Hungarian composer Jen_ Keuler collaborated with an astrophysicist, Zoltán Kolláth, to compose "Stellar Music No 1" using acoustic waves produced by faraway stars, transmitted through light patterns and translated back into sound.

Sound does not exist only within our ear -- as the stars reveal, it is an ensemble of waves surrounding us and everything. The sense of hearing in some animals, for example, is much sharper than the human one, as it amplifies the lowest sounds up to unbearable tumult and sometimes catches sound frequencies our human ear cannot. These waves can break through glass and(, paradoxically/ironically, ?) suppress the enemy in complete silence: What our ear cannot hear, our

body feels. French-Polish composer Kasper Toeplitz explored these unknown realms through a collaboration with Zbigniew Karkowski entitled *Le Dépeupleur*.

”Our bone structure picks up where our ears cannot keep up. So why should we neglect a significant part of the range at our disposal?” Whatever the way, sound waves affect the listener, Toeplitz explains, both emotionally and physically. "We're not distancing too much from the very definition of music, are we?" Delusory silence is not a void, quite the contrary. "[Inaudible frequencies are] not about emptiness, nor are they about silence – it is full, too. Perhaps a full whose fullness is hard to perceive (likewise to dark matter?) but full nonetheless.”

While some artists have proven - either through demonstration or experience - that silence is a relative notion, overcoming Cage's definitive statement is a necessity for artists like Francisco Lopez, *who considers silence to be a colour among others on the sound palette*. The Spanish experimental artist uses complete silence as part of his compositions, which he considers to be absolute concrete music, *and occasionally blindfolds the attendees to let them fully appreciate his performances*.

”“Silence”, in both a performance or a release, i.e., within a “musical” context, is a relative concept, not a physical, absolute one. That is why – as opposed to Cage's dictum – there is indeed “silence” in music while there’s no such things in the physical world we experience – as there’s no such things as a geometric circle in reality.”

The relative nature of silence does not mean that silence does not exist; there is silence in music just as there is white and black in painting – *never absolute at the risk of smothering other nuances, and never as striking and impressive as when they're not perfect*.