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To Helen Wolff

[1954]

12 E. 17 St., New York City

Dear Helen:

(I typewrite because the pen is so bad.)

The piece is not actually silent (there will never be silence until death comes which never comes); it is full of sound, but sounds which I did not think of beforehand, which I hear for the first time the same time others hear. What we hear is determined by our own emptiness, our own receptivity; we receive to the extent we are empty to do so. If one is full or in the course of its performance becomes full of an idea, for example, that this piece is a trick for shock and bewilderment then it is just that. However, nothing is single or uni-dimensional. This is an action among the ten thousand: it moves in all directions and will be received in unpredictable ways. These will vary from shock and bewilderment to quietness of mind and enlightenment.

If one imagines that I have intended any one of these responses he will have to imagine that I have intended all of them. Something like faith must take over in order that we live affirmatively in the totality we do live in.

With or without my intention, my art is cheapened and made expensive. That is not my concern. A demyself takes place in composing and in the event of the movement of this composition in the world death to it as mine must take place. Otherwise I shall be in "fear and trembling" in a perilous situation of my own imagination.

You know my constant interest in 'oriental thought' and you may think this has been mixed with a musical action which you cannot accept. As I see it useful art has been illustrative or didactic. But what is that art which is not didactic, nor symbolic, but to be experienced? Clearly, life itself of which we have only to become aware.

I am therefore not concerned with art as separate from such awareness (nor is it)

Another friend of mine was disturbed about 4'33" and said with some hesitation and incapable of hearing the sounds of everyday life which he informed him why, if in private he could hear, he was disturbed to foresee it had to have a point."

However, I do not wish to win an argument, nor will I. I have written and got Exhaustion (47). 4'33" is also a matter of composition.

I send this not to defend myself but out of love (through my relation to Christian) from which

It is for that reason being aware of your own experience in store for them. You have

P. S. Incidentally, it was my 'ability.' But that was a long time ago. It was perhaps my choice to perform, composition, concert

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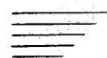
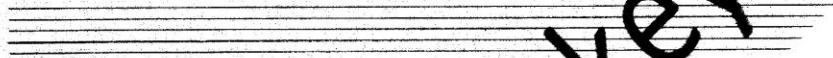
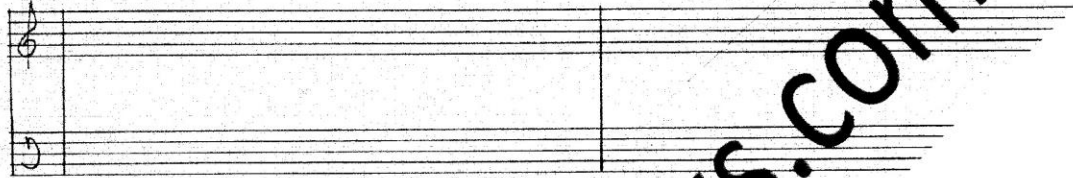
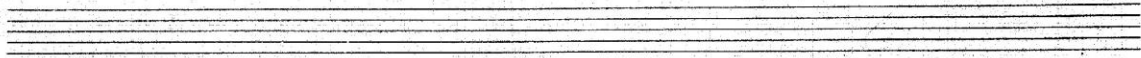
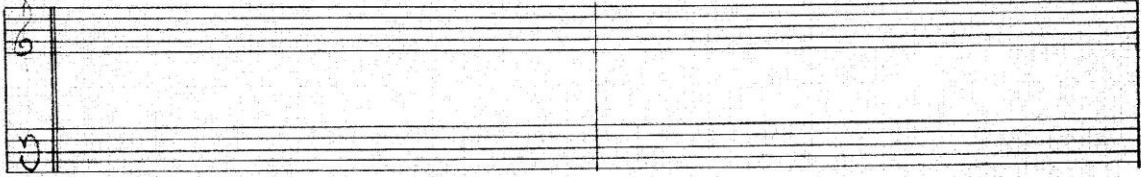
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