

# John Cage Quotes

*Music, Art, Sound, Needs, Thinking, Writing, People, Ideas, Happens, Mind,  
Trying, Order, School, Silence, Mistake, Mean, Feelings, Listening, Two, Wall*

I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones.

~John Cage

There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.

~John Cage

Everything you do is music, and everywhere is the best seat.

~John Cage

The act of listening is in fact an act of composing.

~John Cage

The world is no longer a romantic place; some of its people still are however, and therein lies the promise. Don't let the world win.

~John Cage

It is not irritating to be where one is. It is only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else.

~John Cage

If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, then eight. Then sixteen. Then thirty-two. Eventually one discovers that it is not boring at all.

~John Cage

I have nothing to say, and I am saying it.

~John Cage

Good music can act as a guide to good living.

~John Cage

Look at everything. Don't close your eyes to the world around you. Look and become curious and interested in what there is to see.

~John Cage

My favorite piece [piece of music] is the one we hear all the time if we are quiet.

~John Cage

The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.

~John Cage

We need not destroy the past. It is gone.

~John Cage

Value judgments are destructive to our proper business, which is curiosity and awareness.

~John Cage

There is poetry as soon as we realize that we possess nothing.

~John Cage

Get yourself out of whatever cage you find yourself in.

~John Cage

If you develop an ear for sounds that are musical it is like developing an ego. You begin to refuse sounds that are not musical and that way cut yourself off from a good deal of experience.

~John Cage

Whether I make them or not, there are always sounds to be heard and all of them are excellent.

~John Cage

People who aren't artists often feel that artists are inspired. But if you work at your art you don't have time to be inspired.

~John Cage

A meal without mushrooms is like a day without rain.

~John Cage

The first question I ask myself when something doesn't seem to be beautiful is why do I think it's not beautiful. And very shortly you discover that there is no reason.

~John Cage

As far as consistency of thought goes, I prefer inconsistency.

~John Cage

Everyday is a beautiful day, Everything is pleasing

~John Cage

The world is teeming; anything can happen.

~John Cage

Be happy whenever you can manage it. Enjoy yourself. It's lighter than you think.

~John Cage

Ideas are one thing and what happens is another.

~John Cage

The function of Art is to imitate Nature in her manner of operation. Our understanding of her manner of operation&Rdquo; changes according to advances in the sciences.

~John Cage

We carry our homes within us which enables us to fly.

~John Cage

Where does beauty begin? Where does it end? Where it ends is where the artist begins.

~John Cage

My favorite music is the music I haven't yet heard

~John Cage

Art's purpose is to sober and quiet the mind so that it is in accord with what happens.

~John Cage

We're breaking all of the rules, even our own rules, and how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for X quantities.

~John Cage

Theatre takes place all the time - wherever one is - and art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.

~John Cage

I am trying to check my habits of seeing, to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing.

~John Cage

Art is whatever you can get away with.

~John Cage

Music is a means of rapid transportation.

~John Cage

All great art is a form of complaint

~John Cage

The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature, in her manner of operation.

~John Cage

Our poetry now is the realization that we possess nothing. Anything therefore is a delight (since we do not possess it) and thus need not fear its loss.

~John Cage

Try as we may to make a silence, we cannot.

~John Cage

It is not futile to do what we do. We wake up with energy and we do something. And we make, of course, failures and we make mistakes, but we sometimes get glimpses of what we might do next.

~John Cage

When we separate music from life we get art.

~John Cage

Our business in living is to become fluent with the life we are living, and art can help this.

~John Cage

If this word "music" is sacred and reserved for eighteenth and nineteenth century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound.

~John Cage

A 'mistake' is beside the point, for once anything happens it authentically is.

~John Cage

I like being moved. I don't like being pushed.

~John Cage

My favourite music is the music I haven't yet heard. I don't hear the music I write: I write in order to hear the music I haven't yet heard.

~John Cage

Every something is an echo of nothing

~John Cage

The Indians long ago knew that music was going on permanently and that hearing it was like looking out a window at a landscape which didn't stop when one turned away.

~John Cage

Food, one assumes, provides nourishment; but Americans eat it fully aware that small amounts of poison have been added to improve its appearance and delay its putrefaction.

~John Cage

The grand thing about the human mind is that it can turn its own tables and see meaninglessness as ultimate meaning.

~John Cage

The emotions - love, mirth, the heroic, wonder, tranquility, fear, anger, sorrow, disgust - are in the audience.

~John Cage

Out of the work comes the work.

~John Cage

An error is simply a failure to adjust immediately from a preconception to an actuality.

~John Cage

A mind that is interested in changing...is interested precisely in the things that are at extremes. I'm certainly like that. Unless we go to extremes, we won't get anywhere.

~John Cage

Now that we have everything we need, we discover that there is almost nothing that we have that we want

~John Cage

The purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.

~John Cage

No one can have an idea once he starts really listening.

~John Cage

For myself and my own experience now, I don't really need any music. I have enough to listen to with just the sounds of the environment. I listen to the sounds of 6th avenue.

~John Cage

Music is edifying, for from time to time it sets the soul in operation.

~John Cage

Which is more musical: a truck passing by a factory or a truck passing by a music school?

~John Cage

Each something is a celebration of the nothing that supports it.

~John Cage

I want to change my way of seeing, NOT my way of feeling. I was perfectly happy about my feelings.

~John Cage



The responsibility of the artist consists in perfecting his work so that it may become attractively disinteresting.

~John Cage

It's useless to play lullabies for those who cannot sleep.

~John Cage

In the dark, all cats are black.

~John Cage

Not one sound fears the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound.

~John Cage

All I know about method is that when I am not working I sometimes think I know something, but when I am working, it is quite clear I know nothing.

~John Cage

We are not committed to this or that. We are committed to the nothing in-between, whether we know it or not.

~John Cage

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.

~John Cage

With just one musician, you can really do an unlimited number of things on the inside of the piano, if you have at your disposal an exploded keyboard.

~John Cage

In the nature of the use of chance operations is the belief that all answers answer all questions.

~John Cage

To see, one must go beyond the imagination and for that one must stand absolutely still as though at the center of a leap.

~John Cage

Don't try to create and analyze at the same time. They're different processes.

~John Cage

What right do I have to be in the woods, if the woods are not in me.

~John Cage

If my work is accepted, I must move on to the point where it is not.

~John Cage

There's no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.

~John Cage

There will always be critics eager to fashion opinions for the lazy and incapable.

~John Cage

All God's religions ... have not been able to put mankind back together again.

~John Cage

When you make music you are acting as a philosopher. You can either do that consciously or you can do it unconsciously, but you're doing it.

~John Cage

There are some good people in it, but the orchestra as a whole is equivalent to a gang bent on destruction.

~John Cage

In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall.

~John Cage

My work became an exploration of non-intention.

~John Cage

An artist conscientiously moves in a direction which for some good reason he takes, putting one work in front of the other with the hope he'll arrive before death overtakes him.

~John Cage

In an utter emptiness anything can take place.

~John Cage

We are involved in a life that passes understanding and our highest business is our daily life.

~John Cage

I remember loving sound before I ever took a music lesson. And so we make our lives by what we love.

~John Cage

...we make our lives by what we love.

~John Cage

Beware of losing what isn't in your head.

~John Cage

Let no one imagine that in owning a recording he has the music. The very practice of music is a celebration that we own nothing.

~John Cage

To accept whatever comes, regardless of the consequences, is to be unafraid.

~John Cage

One shouldn't go to the woods looking for something, but rather to see what is there.

~John Cage

Art is sort of an experimental station in which one tries out living.

~John Cage

I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing.

~John Cage

Why do you not do as I do? Letting go of your thoughts as though they were the cold ashes of a long dead fire?

~John Cage

College: two hundred people reading the same book. An obvious mistake. Two hundred people can read two hundred books.

~John Cage

A finished work is exactly that, requires resurrection.

~John Cage

Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.

~John Cage

Now that things are so simple, there's so much to do.

~John Cage

I don't need sound to talk to me.

~John Cage

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