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Audio: M.C. Richards recorded during a poetry reading at Indre Studios, Philadelphia, May 5, 1997. Collection of Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center. Gift of Mary Shepard Phillips. © Estate of Mary Caroline Richards. Video produced by BMCM+AC. [\[View at article URL.\]](#)

Introduction

I live in an agricultural community. Where you sometimes have to wait for the cows to go by before you can drive down to the house.

You need to know about that because this poem that I'm about to read, which was written for John Cage, the composer, for his 75th birthday, has cows in it.

And the other thing, for those of you who don't know or have, perhaps, some immediate feeling about John, is to realize that one of his contributions was to find that the whole universe of sound is music. He didn't make a distinction between noise and music. It made him controversial. But.

This was a poem written on request for his 75th birthday celebration. And we were on stage together in Los Angeles, and I got to read it to him.

Dear John Cage
It is already dusk
and the cows are not yet in —
already dawn, are not yet out. Listen.
It sounds ever thus, the breathing.
40 years ago
you touched down at our landing,
young planets.
inwardly orbiting. tirra lira loo
Our first words were a courtship!
tirra lira day in and day out
Shall I tell you the secret of our mystery?
You are a preacher and I am a missionary.
We make love for justice
and delight: kindness, laughter, and rage.
Macrobiotic eros, you nourish the ends of the earth
in ever new beginnings.
The cows, John, the cows are banging their udders
like soft cymbals, and the milkers
are playing the teats like bell ropes
tugging and letting go.
The music, my God, the music!