

Composer Portraits

John Cage

Jessica Aszodi, *mezzo-soprano*

International Contemporary Ensemble

Steven Schick, *conductor*

Thursday, September 20, 8:00 p.m.



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Avant “l’Artisanat furieux”
from *Le Marteau sans maître* (1954)

Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)

Jessica Aszodi, *voice*; Maiya Papach, *viola*; Eric Lamb, *flute*;
Dan Lippel, *guitar*; Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *percussion*

“Music for Three”
from *Music for _____* (1984-1987)

John Cage (1912-1992)

Maiya Papach, *viola*; Eric Lamb, *flute*; Ross Karre, *percussion*

Commentaire I de “Bourreaux de solitude”
from *Le Marteau sans maître*

Boulez

Maiya Papach, *viola*; Eric Lamb, *flute*;
Nathan Davis and Matthew Gold, *percussion*

Amores (1943), movement II

Cage

Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *tom-toms*

“L’Artisanat furieux”, from *Le Marteau sans maître*

Boulez

Jessica Aszodi, *voice*; Eric Lamb, *flute*

- Aria* (1958) Cage
Jessica Aszodi, *voice*
- Commentaire II de “Bourreaux de solitude”
from *Le Marteau sans maître* Boulez
Maiya Papach, *viola*; Dan Lippel, *guitar*;
Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *percussion*
- 1’5^{1/2}” for a String Player (1953) Cage
Maiya Papach, *viola*
- “Bel Édifice et les pressentiments”, version première
from *Le Marteau sans maître* Boulez
Jessica Aszodi, *voice*; Maiya Papach, *viola*; Eric Lamb, *flute*; Dan Lippel, *guitar*
- 4’33” (1960) Cage
- “Bourreaux de solitude”, from *Le Marteau sans maître* Boulez
Jessica Aszodi, *voice*; Maiya Papach, *viola*;
Eric Lamb, *flute*; Dan Lippel, *guitar*;
Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *percussion*
- Radio Music* (1956) Cage
Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, Ross Karre,
Eric Lamb, Dan Lippel, Maiya Papach, *radio*
- Après “l’Artisanat furieux”, from *Le Marteau sans maître* Boulez
Eric Lamb, *flute*; Dan Lippel, *guitar*; Ross Karre, *percussion*

Solo for Flute Cage
from Concert for Piano and Orchestra (1958)

Eric Lamb, *flute*

Commentaire III de “Bourreaux de solitude” Boulez
from *Le Marteau sans maître*

Eric Lamb, *flute*;
Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *percussion*

Atlas Eclipticalis (1961-62) Cage

International Contemporary Ensemble with special guests

“Bel Édifice et les pressentiments”, version double Boulez
from *Le Marteau sans maître*

Jessica Aszodi, *voice*; Maiya Papach, *viola*; Eric Lamb, *flute*; Dan Lippel, *guitar*;
Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *percussion*

Amores (1943), movement III Cage

Nathan Davis, Matthew Gold, and Ross Karre, *woodblock*



This program is performed without intermission and runs approximately 80 minutes.

Major support for Composer Portraits is provided by
the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight's performance begins.

Miller Theatre is wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.

About the Program

The Boulez-Cage Correspondence

The Boulez-Cage Correspondence is the title of a book, of the letters Pierre Boulez and John Cage wrote to each other, but we are dealing here also with a correspondence of interests. The two composers met when Cage made his second visit to Paris, arriving in the spring of 1949. He was thirty-six, and the composer of a substantial output, especially of music for percussion ensemble (*First Construction*, 1939) and prepared piano (Sonatas and Interludes, 1946-8). Boulez, though only twenty-four at the time, already had a reputation as a composer (Second Piano Sonata, 1947-8) and polemicist. Someone—it may have been Virgil Thomson—suggested to Cage that he pay a call on his junior colleague, and they evidently hit it off right away, musically and personally. Boulez was impressed by how the prepared piano made possible a controlled expansion of sonic resources to embrace complex sounds, noises, and microtonal tunings; he also latched onto Cage's use of charts of sound categories: pitches, durations, dynamic levels. As for Cage, he found in Boulez a young man of huge energy and conviction, who shared his wish to remake music. After a few months, he returned to New York, and the relationship continued by mail. Both of them revered Webern. Both of them wanted to monitor subjectivity in composition. Both of them expected much from electronic means. As Boulez was to write in an essay of 1951-2: "The direction pursued by John Cage's research is too close to our own for us to fail to mention it."

Of course, it did not remain so. Cage was already using chance operations, to Boulez's consternation, and soon he would make the breakthrough into silence, with *4'33"*. The exchange of letters continued a while, but at a lower level of engagement on both sides, before petering out after they had met again, in New York late in 1952, and ceasing altogether after the summer of 1954—just when Boulez was at work on *Le Marteau sans maître*. The correspondence in the other sense, however, the closeness of aims and ideas, remains vitally present in the music of the two composers: a correspondence that, of course, also shows up their differences.

I think constantly of my friends in Paris, of you and your music...

[Cage to Boulez, December 1949]

Pierre Boulez: Avant “L’Artisanat furieux”

John Cage: Music for Three

René Char (1907-88), a fiercely independent writer who had come through the surrealist movement, was the young Boulez’s poet of choice. A hectic erotic cantata, *Le Visage nuptial* (1946), was followed by music for a radio play, *Le Soleil des eaux* (1948), and it was to Char that Boulez turned again—now to dense, compact, cryptic poems—for the work he began in 1953, *Le Marteau sans maître*. Cage’s charts had opened the way to “total serialism,” whereby every note was thoroughly determined by a pre-arranged system. *Le Marteau* was to be an escape, but an escape made by one who had learned from working under extreme constraint. Rules remain, but they are almost limitless in what they legitimate, and the result is often—as in this first movement, for alto flute, viola, and vibraphone—music of darting brilliance.

Cage’s *Music for _____* (1984-7), from more than three decades later, allows us to approximate the scoring of the Boulez movement, since it provides seventeen instrumental parts to be used in any combination. Each part includes elements that are scrupulously notated and others allowing some leeway, so that the music weaves between precision and freedom—though it may not always be clear to a listener which is which.

I have just embarked on the preparatory phase of my new work...

I plan to put into practice in it some ideas derived from your pieces...

[Boulez to Cage, January 1950]

Pierre Boulez: Commentaire I de “Bourreaux de solitude”

John Cage: Amores, movement II

Combining imaginative freedom with tight system, *Le Marteau sans maître* also brought together impulses from different musical traditions: European folk and chamber music, what Boulez had picked up from musicians in South America during his tours there as music director for Jean-Louis Barrault’s theater company, and what he had heard from records of African and Asian music. Hence the pulsing percussion joining the ensemble in this movement, and the resonant sounds of the xylorimba and plucked viola, together with the universal flute that seems at once above and enmeshed in the percussive activity.

A decade earlier, Cage astonishingly foresaw the sound, phrasing, and form of this Boulez movement. He wrote *Amores* in January-February 1943 as a four-movement piece, the first and last for prepared piano, the middle two for three percussionists, who in this second movement play tom toms and a pod rattle. Cage performed the sections for prepared piano at a concert in Paris in June 1949, but it is unlikely Boulez heard the percussion movements. Thinking along similar lines, and with a probably rudimentary experience of similar African sources, the two composers came to similar conclusions.

Your letter has just arrived here at home. I cannot tell you how overjoyed I was to get it.

Without news of you I am without news of music...

[Cage to Boulez, January 1950]

Pierre Boulez: “L’Artisanat furieux”

John Cage: *Aria*

The alto flute, which so far has come to seem the leader in *Le Marteau sans maître*, invites the voice, a low woman’s voice, to take part. Time slows, but not tension. For one thing, none of the most usual associations of the singing voice—with subjective expression, ritual participation, ecstatic pronouncement—quite fit. Also, the vocal melody is at once superbly sure and wonderfully strange—the duetting with the instrument likewise. The two move in a space beyond categories.

Cage’s *Aria* (November/December 1958) is not much nearer any song tradition we can name, though it certainly shares with many other arias aspects of bravura. Writing for a singer who commanded not only different languages but also different voices, Cathy Berberian, Cage included the lot, with typical openness. Words are set down (in Italian, French, Russian, English, and Armenian), together with brief or undulating lines to indicate how they should be sung, in terms of range and melodic contour. Many of these lines are then drawn over in color (an early use of marker pens), leaving the singer free to choose the vocal character for purple, scarlet, or whatever. And “non-musical” vocal sounds are also invited. The result is a do-it-yourself aria that can be taken in many directions: humorous, strange, savage, sophisticated.



*I have started...a collection of 14 or 21 polyphonies (maybe more),
I don't know yet, very long in duration. But one will be able to select what one likes...*
[Boulez to Cage, December 1950]

*From time to time ideas come for my next work which as I see it will be a large work
which will always be in progress and will never be finished;
at the same time any part of it will be able to be performed once I have begun...*
[Cage to Boulez, May 1953]

Pierre Boulez: Commentaire II de “Bourreaux de solitude”

John Cage: 1'5^{1/2}” for a String Player

Omitting the two performers of “L'Artisanat furieux,” Boulez leaves himself with a largely percussive ensemble—wholly percussive at first, with the viola playing pizzicato. Resonances are crucial, and the music jolts to a stop irregularly to let a moment in its inscrutable harmonic progress hang in the air. In the second part of the movement, the viola is played with the bow, leading a line, like Ariadne's thread, through the labyrinth.

With Cage, we come now to a composition exactly contemporary with *Le Marteau*, for it was in May-July 1953 that he wrote 1' 5^{1/2}” and four other short pieces for a string soloist, as parts of the immense project he mentions above. He sometimes called this project—which recalls Boulez's “Polyphonies” of two and a half years before—“The Ten Thousand Things,” referring to a term found in Taoist and Buddhist writings to indicate the diversity of the universe. In the case of these first string pieces, Cage used chance operations to determine where a string would be stopped (graphically notated), what the bowing pressure should be, where a noise should be added, and how fast and dense the music should be. Where Boulez's viola melody comes from the workings of an elaborate system, modified by the composer, Cage's comes from a randomness the composer chooses.

The only thing, forgive me, which I am not happy with, is the method of absolute chance...

[Boulez to Cage, on the Music of Changes, December 1951]

[Cage to Boulez, on 4'33", summer 1952]

**Pierre Boulez: “Bel Édifice et les pressentiments,” version première
John Cage: 4'33”**

The third poem is introduced immediately as a song, but instrumental commentary or preamble is contained within it, since Boulez divides the text into three couplets and has the instruments play alone before each of them. Turning away again from percussiveness, the movement puts forward alto flute, viola, and guitar, whose lively interplay is changed, each time the voice enters, into playing that is more accompanimental. Finally, it is as if the voice has silenced them.

And so to 4'33". We all know this piece, of course. Or do we? Each time, it is going to be different. Each time, its difference is going to be different. It is the most straightforward piece in the world, and the most unknowable. David Tudor presented the first performance in Woodstock, N. Y. on August 29, 1952. His program also included Boulez's First Sonata, which Cage mentioned to Boulez, while saying nothing about what the concert is now best remembered for.

Everything you tell me about music on magnetic tape I find extremely interesting...

[Boulez to Cage, October 1952]

The “Williams Mix” is on its way to you...

We performed it at the University of Illinois with 8 tape recorders and 8 loudspeakers...

[Cage to Boulez, May 1953]

**Pierre Boulez: “Bourreaux de solitude”
John Cage: *Radio Music***

For the first and only time in *Le Marteau sans maître*, a song is followed by another song, this one the work's big slow movement, with a sense of drag not only in the tempo but also in how the lines slowly swirl after each other, as if time had become as thick as treacle. For the first time, too, the whole ensemble is in play.



Radio was the internet of the 1950s. New music was disseminated far more abundantly by radio than by records; the first performance of *Le Marteau*, in Baden Baden on June 18, 1955, took place at the behest of the head of the local radio station, Heinrich Strobel. Cage's use of radio receivers as concert instruments, first in *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1952) and then in *Radio Music* (1956), came therefore in tribute to an ally. He wrote *Radio Music* for a concert in New York on May 30, 1956, providing parts for up to eight radios. Each part is a string of numbers, representing frequencies to be tuned into, with some silences but nothing fixed with regard to durations and volume levels. Chosen by chance, the frequencies do not, of course, necessarily coincide with those of broadcasting stations, and, equally obviously, Cage could not have foreseen what would be picked up. Indeed, that was part of the point, that the outcome should be indeterminate, except in its overall length of six minutes.

*I am deeply ashamed of never having written since leaving New York
[a year and a half ago]...*

[Boulez to Cage, June 1954]

Pierre Boulez: Après “L’Artisanat furieux”

John Cage: Solo for Flute, from Concert for Piano and Orchestra

Short, a shard, the epilogue of the “L’Artisanat furieux” cycle, like the prologue (whose viola has been lost), skids in phrases of unpredictable length, going at double the speed of the vocal setting. For twenty years, until Lev Koblyakov published the first thorough analysis, nobody had any idea how this music was composed. It just was. In many senses, it still just is. Though Koblyakov and several later interpreters have revealed much of the compositional technique, and shown how that technique is responsible for the work’s quivering harmonic consistency and its febrile rhythms, few listeners are going to be pondering serial derivations when faced with music so electric. The music has, as Boulez wished, exploded beyond its mechanism.

So it is with Cage. For a concert celebrating his twenty-five years as a composer, in New York on May 15, 1958, Cage produced his Concert for Piano and Orchestra, comprising uncoordinated solos for piano and other instruments. Chance operations were used for all, to make decisions about sounds of the widest possible range. With a musician before us, though, tracing a line through these sounds, random events start to fall into patterns, to matter.

With Boulez, we see the tip of the iceberg. With Cage, we see the tip, even though there is no iceberg.

My poor John, I haven't had time to write to you much this year...

[Boulez to Cage, July 1954]

Pierre Boulez: Commentaire III de “Bourreaux de solitude”

John Cage: *Atlas Eclipticalis*

As first completed, in 1954, *Le Marteau sans maître* comprised six movements, three on the poem “L’Artisanat furieux” followed by three on “Bourreaux de solitude,” each triptych including a song along with two instrumental spin-offs. When Boulez revised the score in 1955, he not only added a third poem, in two settings, but also interleaved the groups and composed a third commentary on “Bourreaux de solitude,” to complete a set of movements that could come regularly in even-numbered positions. This third commentary seems to reflect on, and even come near quoting from, all three of its companions.

Can music composed by chance operations include self-quotations? Perhaps. Like the “Ten Thousand Things” of 1953-6 and the Concert of 1957-8 (or, from the future, *Music for _____* of 1984-7) *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961-2) provides a number of solos to be put together in any combination. Now, though, there are eighty-six of them, allowing the potential of performance by symphony orchestra—a potential realized, disastrously, when the Philharmonic scheduled the work in 1964. Cage’s source of randomness in this case was a book of star charts, from which he traced points and lines onto musical staves; hence the title. Unlike the “Ten Thousand Things” and the Concert, however, *Atlas Eclipticalis* also has a part for conductor, as timekeeper.

Cage dedicated each part to a different colleague or friend, Boulez not included.



I am keeping as much of my time as possible for writing “Le Marteau sans maître.”..

I am trying to rid myself of my thumbprints and taboos;

I am trying to have an ever more complex vision...

[Boulez to Cage, July 1954]

Pierre Boulez: “Bel Édifice et les pressentiments,” version double
John Cage: *Amores*, movement III

The last, longest, and most fully scored movement of *Le Marteau sans maître* begins as a more dramatic and mercurial setting of the poem already heard in the middle movement. But this is all over in around a minute and a half, after which the singer continues as another instrumental voice, humming, as she did between phrases of the poem. In alternation with her, the alto flute re-enters, with gong and tam tams. Memories from earlier movements resurface, until the flute conveys the work to silence.

From Cage comes the tiny postscript: a dance of woodblock figures repeated and transformed, re-used in *Amores* from a percussion trio of 1936.

Program notes by Paul Griffiths

Texts and Translations

Le Marteau sans maître

Pierre Boulez

“L’Artisanat furieux”

L’artisanat furieux
La roulotte rouge au bord du clou
Et cadavre dans le panier
Et chevaux de labours dans le fer à cheval
Je rêve la tête sur la pointe de mon cou-
teau le Pérou.

The furious craftsmanship
The red caravan on the edge of the nail
And corpse in the basket
And plowhorses in the horseshoe
I dream the head on the point of my knife
Peru.

“Bourreaux de solitude”

Bourreaux de solitude
Le pas s’est éloigné le marcheur s’est tu
Sur le cadran de l’Imitation
Le Balancier lance sa charge de granit
réflexe.

Hangmen of solitude
The step has gone away, the walker has
fallen silent
On the dial of Imitation
The Pendulum throws its instinctive load
of granite.

“Bel Édifice et les pressentiments”

Bel édifice et les pressentiments
J’écoute marcher dans mes jambes
La mer morte vagues par dessus tête
Enfant la jetée promenade sauvage
Homme l’illusion imitée
Des yeux purs dans les bois
Cherchent en pleurant la tête habitable.

Stately building and presentiments
I hear marching in my legs
The dead sea waves overhead
Child the wild seaside pier
Man the imitated illusion
Pure eyes in the woods
Are searching in tears for a habitable
head.

About the Artists

Steven Schick was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. For the past thirty years he has championed contemporary percussion music as a performer and teacher, by commissioning and premiering more than one hundred new works for percussion. Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego and a Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. He was the percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars of New York City from 1992-2002, and from 2000 to 2004 served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland. Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group red fish blue fish, and in 2007 he assumed the post of Music Director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus. Steven Schick recently released three important publications. His book on solo percussion music, *The Percussionist's Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams*, was published by the University of Rochester Press; his recording of *The Mathematics of Resonant Bodies* by John Luther Adams was released by Cantaloupe Music; and, a three-CD set of the complete percussion music of Iannis Xenakis, made in collaboration with red fish blue fish, was issued by Mode Records.

Jessica Aszodi is a soprano from Melbourne, Australia with a wide variety of artistic influences. Her performance practice encompasses opera, chamber music, experimental, conventional, and contemporary-classical music. In addition to her performing activities, she works as a producer, collaborator, and art-maker. She is an alumna of the Victorian Opera Company's Artist Development Program, where she studied opera performance in 2008-09. She later gained a Master's in Contemporary Music Performance from the University of California, San Diego. Jessica has sung many roles for Victorian Opera including Mozart's Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), R. Strauss' Echo (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Walton's Popova (*The Bear*) Elliot Carter's Rose (*What Next?*) Handel's Atalanta (*Serse*), and Sesto in *Guilio Cesare* (for which she was nominated for a Greenroom Award). Her roles for other companies include Stockhausen's Eve (*Dienstag aus Licht*), Menotti's Monica (*The Medium*), Mozart's Aminta (*Il re pastore*), and the title role in Satie's *Socrates*. Jessica has performed with ensembles as diverse as the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, the Center for Contemporary Opera New York, Speak Percussion, the La Jolla Symphony, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, Astra Chamber Music Society,



Bang on a Can, and eighth blackbird. Festivals at which she has sung include Aldeburgh Festival (UK), the Macau International Music Festival (China), Music X (Switzerland), Melbourne International Biennale of Exploratory Music, Melbourne International Arts Festival, and the Vivid Sydney Festival (Australia). Jessica is passionate about creative and innovative performance. She is co-director of the vocal ensemble Aria Co., most of whose projects involve new, unusual, or rarely performed works, performed in semi-staged settings. In addition to her work as a performer, she is an active commissioner, producer, and creator of new work and has received grants from the Australia Council for the Arts, the City of Melbourne, and Arts Victoria to support those endeavors.

The International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), described by the *New York Times* as “one of the most accomplished and adventurous groups in new music,” is dedicated to reshaping the way music is created and experienced. With a modular makeup of 33 leading instrumentalists performing in forces ranging from solos to large ensembles, ICE functions as performer, presenter, and educator, advancing the music of our time by developing innovative new works and new strategies for audience engagement. ICE redefines concert music as it brings together new work and new listeners in the 21st century. Since its founding in

2001, ICE has premiered over 500 compositions, the majority of these new works by emerging composers, in venues ranging from alternate spaces to concert halls around the world. The ensemble received the American Music Center’s Trailblazer Award in 2010 for its contributions to the field, and received the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming in 2005 and 2010. ICE is Ensemble-in-Residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago through 2013. The ICE musicians also serve as Artists-in-Residence at the Mostly Mozart Festival of Lincoln Center through 2013, curating and performing chamber music programs that juxtapose new and old music. ICE has released acclaimed albums on the Nonesuch, Kairos, Bridge, Naxos, Tzadik, New Focus, and New Amsterdam labels, with several forthcoming releases on Mode Records. Recent and upcoming highlights include headline performances at the Lincoln Center Festival (New York), Musica Nova Helsinki (Finland), Wien Modern (Austria), Acht Brücken Music for Cologne (Germany), La Cité de la Musique (Paris), and tours of Japan, Brazil, and France. ICE has worked closely with conductors Ludovic Morlot, Matthias Pintscher, John Adams, and Susanna Mälkki. With leading support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ICE launched ICElab in early 2011. This new program places teams of ICE musicians in close collaboration with six emerging composers each year to develop works



that push the boundaries of musical exploration. ICElab projects will be featured in more than one hundred performances from 2011-2014 and documented online through DigitICE, a new online venue, and ICE's blog. ICE's commitment to build a diverse, engaged audience for the music of our time has inspired The Listening Room, a new educational initiative for public schools without in-house arts curricula. Using team-based composition and graphic notation, ICE musicians lead students in the creation of new musical works, nurturing collaborative creative skills and building an appreciation for musical experimentation. Read more at www.iceorg.org.

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About Miller Theatre

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Gerard Lynch and Karen Marisak

Marc Maltz

Michael Minard

Jack Murchie

Maury Newburger

Susan Newman

Mary Pinkowitz

Miriam Pollett

Trevor Rainford

Carol Robbins

Eliisa Salmi-Saslaw

James Schamus

Carol O. Selle

Anita Shapolsky

Fran Snyder and David Voremberg

Gilbert Spitzer and Janet Glaser Spitzer

Gayatri Spivak

Peter Strauss

Jim Strawhorn

Richard Tucker

C. Dennis and Ila Weiss

Robert Zipf

Anonymous



Upcoming Events

Saturday, September 22–Saturday, September 29

OPEN WORKSHOPS AND PROCESSION

Morningside Lights: The Imagined City

Curated by Processional Arts Workshop

Original, participatory score by Nathan Davis

www.morningside-lights.com

Saturday, October 6, 8:00 p.m.

JAZZ

Christian McBride and Inside Straight

Thursday, October 11, 8:00 p.m.

COMPOSER PORTRAITS

Jonathan Harvey

Ensemble Signal

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

Saturday, December 1, 8:00 p.m.

EARLY MUSIC

Church of St. Mary the Virgin (145 W. 46th Street, between 6th and 7th Aves.)

Masterpieces for Double Choir

The Tallis Scholars

Peter Phillips, *director*

Thursday, December 6, 8:00 p.m.

COMPOSER PORTRAITS

Olga Neuwirth

International Contemporary Ensemble

Jayce Ogren, *conductor*

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