Kierkegaard tells the story about a man who notices a large printed sign in a storefront window. On the sign is written, "We press clothes". So he goes back to his room, gathers up some suits and brings them to the store. "You've made a mistake," they said, "We don't press clothes here. We just print the sign in the window". Most likely, Kierkegaard was attacking Hegel for just giving us the sign and not the real thing. Now, the real thing in today's music, especially in today's music, is up for grabs. But I do know that our notions about what it could be or should be is probably just the sign in someone else's window.

When I first met John Cage in 1950, not long after, Christian Wolff appeared on the scene. He was sixteen years old and one of the compositions we're gonna hear this evening, the Duet for two violins, was written at that time. Christian Wolff was studying with Grete Sultan. She was a friend of John Cage and being that Christian was composing, she probably thought that it would be a good idea for them both to meet each other. John Cage and myself were living in the same building at that time and so I got to hear the news as soon as it happened. In fact, I had lunch with Cage the very afternoon that Christian Wolff was expected. Later on in the afternoon, John came downstairs and tumbled into my apartment, shaking with excitement. He just couldn't get over the music that was brought to him, especially from someone so young.

We must be reminded that, in early 1950, in New York City, there was very little, practically no experimental music being done. Boulez was on his way, but his music wasn't known here at all until about a year later. Stockhausen was in Paris studying with Messiaen. There was really no avant-garde community in either America or Europe of an experimental nature. Some years after this meeting with Cage and Christian, Cage went on to say that he felt that Christian Wolff's importance at this time is equal to Webern's at his time. I agree with that assessment.

Now, the music that we're all going to hear is gonna sound vaguely familiar and the reason it will sound vaguely familiar is that, though Christian Wolff is still an extremely young man, he has been a tremendous influence on two generations of composers. One of the most notable of these composers he has influenced is John Cage. I am sure that if John Cage didn't have Christian's music with him all these years as his North Star, his trip would have been quite different. I too am profoundly indebted to Christian Wolff. I think of him as my artistic conscience. I'm a composer who desperately needs an artistic conscience. For as long as I remember, I've dangled between the real thing and the sign in the window. Or, more precisely, that mammoth sign in that mammoth window with the legend written, 'The big time!' In a sense, Christian Wolff has ruined my life, but he has saved my art!