as slow as possible

synopsis

(350 words)

In 1985, John Cage wrote a composition called, As Slow As Possible. He intended it be performed, as slowly as possible. Originally written for piano, Cage later rewrote the piece for organ, so that notes could be sustained even longer.

After his death in 1992, a group of people in Halberstadt, a small town in the former East Germany, asked the question - "*What would be as slow as possible?*" They determined it would be to use the entire life of the instrument to play the song. They built a pipe organ in an old monastery, and stretched this four page composition over the life span of the organ – some 639 years.

The organ plays continuously. Note are sustained for months or years, and on occasion, according to the score, and at the hands of humans, the notes are changed.

Fifteen years ago, on his 18th birthday, Ryan Knighton was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, and told he would slowly go blind. After 15 years Ryan has less than 1% of his vision left, and in only one eye. He waits for the day when this last sliver of sight will go, and he will be left completely blind.

As Ryan adjusts to what he calls 'the new social order' of his body, he proposes to venture beyond the familiar streets of his own neighbourhood on a journey to Germany, to find the John Cage organ. The organ's signal has found a listener in Knighton - who in turn has found a personal metaphor in the promise of a note change. One thing gives away to another, the past, present and future all at play in the ritual.

While caning his way into the uncertainty-riddled experience of a road trip, Knighton contemplates his own change – the challenge of letting go of his old identity, while waiting for the new one to emerge. The experience unfolds like a Cage piece itself – a series of chance encounters in the form of airports, train stations, the unfamiliar hubbub of foreign cities, and people - some of whom don't believe he's blind at all, and one who offers him something profound.