

AS IN THE OLD ROUÉ'S QUIP THAT "A DRINK BEFORE AND A CIGARETTE AFTER ARE THE THREE BEST THINGS IN LIFE," SOMETIMES THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES LIE IN AN UNSPOKEN ELLIPSE. THE SAME IS TRUE OF SOME OF OUR MOST BEAUTIFUL SOUNDS. ON THIS CD 34 ARTISTS PROVIDE PERSONAL VIEWS INTO THAT SONIC ELLIPSE, SUGGESTIONS FOR LISTENING TO THAT WHICH MIGHT OTHERWISE PASS YOU BY: COUNT-OFFS, GROOVE GRIT, TAPE HISS, BREATHS, RESTS, CD GLITCH, GUITAR HUM, AUDIENCE ANTICIPATION, REVERB TAILS, ROOM TONES, MINUTES OF SILENCE, THE CALM BEFORE A STORM.



- 00 0'00" JOHN BOWERS "SILENCE SILENCED"
- 01 2'41" DANIEL LEVITIN "ANTICIPATION"
- 02 2'16" RORY SHACKLES "BETWEEN RAGIN, AND HELL"
- 03 0'29" GYÖRGY KURTÁG "NÉMAJÁTÉK – VESZEKEDÉS 2 (DUMB-SHOW – QUARRELLING 2)"
- 04 1'39" MICHAEL J. SCHUMACHER "THE OTHER BOULEZ"
- 05 4'33" PEOPLE LIKE US (VICKI BENNETT) "CAGE SILENCED"
- 06 2'08" PAUL DAVIS "S.B.D."
- 07 2'21" JOHN LEVACK DREVER "PASTORAL PAUSE"
- 08 2'00" KAPITAL BAND 1 "HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THIS ROOM?"
- 09 4'32" RICHARD BEARD "I AM NOT SITTING IN A ROOM"
- 10 1'44" DAVID HOYLAND "A MINUTES SILENCE FOR THE QUEEN MUM, 2002"
- 11 0'12" VALERIAN MALY "APPLE (WINDFALL/ FALLOBST)"
- 12 2'27" PETER CUSACK "THE QUIET ROOM"
- 13 3'50" ADRIAN NEWTON "BIRD HIDE"
- 14 1'39" JENS BRAND "SILENCE/SILENT LANDSCAPE"
- 15 2'11" ALVIN LUCIER "QUIET COFFEE"
- 16 1'29" LORI TALLEY "BIRD SONG"
- 17 4'06" DALE LLOYD "LOBBY AND LEBEG" *
- 18 1'29" ERIC LEONARDSON "ERSTER BERLINER"
- 19 4'37" AARON SIEGEL "THE SOUND WAS ..."
- 20 0'16" NO NOISE REDUCTION "0'0,060" FOR A ROCK AND ROLL BAND"
- 21 1'55" JUSTIN WIGGIN "EEG RECORDING OF NO SOUNDS IN THE SURROUNDING AREA"*
- 22 1'33" ANNE WELMER "KRIKLE"
- 23 3'11" ANDY KEEP "MY LAPTOP COLONY – COLONY IN MY LAPTOP" *
- 24 1'04" DAVID FIRST "TELL TALE 2.1"
- 25 4'34" DAN EVANS FARKAS "HUMBUCKET"
- 26 2'05" YASUNAO TONE "IMPERFECTION THEOREM OF SILENCE"
- 27 2'03" STEPHEN VITIELLO "WORLD TRADE CENTER RECORDINGS"
- 28 2'50" MATT ROGALSKY & GEORGE BUSH "TWO MINUTES FIFTY SECONDS SILENCE FOR THE USA"
- 29 1'57" DAVID WATSON "VENTILATOR"
- 30 3'37" THOMAS JOYCE "UNSPOKEN CONVERSATIONS"
- 31 2'36" FRANCISCO LÓPEZ "UNTITLED #102" *
- 32 1'05" TED COLLINS "LULLABY"
- 33 1'23" CHRISTIAN MARCLAY "UNUSED SPACE"

* PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE TRACKS HAVE BEEN EDITED FOR THIS COMPILATION.

A CALL FOR SILENCE



sonic arts network

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WWW.SONICARTSNETWORK.ORG



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FEB 2004 CURATED BY NICOLAS COLLINS

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THIS IS THE FIRST EDITION IN A SERIES OF PUBLICATIONS ISSUED BY SONIC ARTS NETWORK IN THE UK.
IT IS FREE TO MEMBERS. INFORMATION ON MEMBERSHIP CAN BE FOUND AT www.sonicartsnetwork.org

SONIC ARTS NETWORK IS GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE THAT SUBMITTED WORK FOR,
AND CONTRIBUTED TO THIS EDITION. WE HOPE YOU ENJOY LISTENING.

DESIGN BY [WHITE-CARD] | www.white-card.co.uk

New York born and raised, **NICOLAS COLLINS** studied composition with Alvin Lucier at Wesleyan University, worked for many years with David Tudor, and has collaborated with numerous soloist and ensembles around the world. He lived most of the 1990s in Europe, where he was Visiting Artistic Director of Stichting STEIM (Amsterdam), and a DAAD composer-in-residence in Berlin. Since 1997 he has been editor-in-chief of the Leonardo Music Journal. He is currently Chair of the Department of Sound at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Recent recordings are available on PlateLaunch and Periplum.

INTRODUCTION

A CALL FOR SILENCE

It's getting harder and harder to find quiet. It's not just that the world is louder now than it was when Lucy first stepped out onto the veldt, but that we have become increasingly suspicious of a priori distinctions between 'worthy' and 'unworthy' events; between foreground and background; between privileged 'sound' and disenfranchised 'noise.' If we no longer trust the divisions our culture has handed us, we have no choice but to listen to everything. The hi-fi-guy's obsession with the 'signal to noise to ratio' is becoming figuratively, and mathematically, irrational: what to do as the numerator approaches infinity while the denominator slips away toward zero? One man's noise is, we discover, another man's signal. The ticks and skips of vinyl are no longer distractions, speed bumps on the road to musical enjoyment; they are the music itself, the material of a new CD. And the glitch of one errant CD begets the next CD.

To be sure, while noise has tiptoed across the border into signal, there has been the occasional reverse migration: my corner bar in Amsterdam, close by the Concertgebouw, was much loved by musicians because it was the only pub in town that played no music – occasionally some of signal's most skilled craftsmen spurn their own product as noise. Whether John Cage's 4'33" was the catalyst or merely the first (in)audible public symptom, since that 1953 performance in Woodstock, non-intentional sound has been getting louder. There seems to be a growing love for the ephemeral, the ancillary, the residual, the inadvertent.

This could be the end game of Postmodernism's elevation of ornamentation (noise) over structure (signal). Or a pragmatic reaction to the glut of CDs and the near perfection of recording technology: the only thing left to record is the un-recordable. But as a diasporated New Yorker, prone to fits of post-9/11 sentimentality, I like to think of it as the latest manifestation of the old roué's quip that "a drink before and a cigarette after are the three best things in life."

The most important moments of our lives often lie in an unspoken ellipse. The emotions called up by the hole in the skyline at the tip of Manhattan are vastly more profound than any provoked by what used to fill it – or by whatever will replace it. Cage's 4'33" and Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning Drawing* were exercises not in nihilism, but in sensitivity to traces of things past or passing.

This CD began with an invitation by Phil Hallett to curate the first volume in a new series planned by Sonic Arts UK. After some weeks of fruitless puzzling over possible rubrics, I asked my wife, in a tone of mild desperation, what I should do; she responded sensibly, "what would you like to listen to?" "Nothing!" came my testy reply. An arched wifely eyebrow argued (silently) that there was something to be said for following my instincts. That night I dreamt of absences of sound, of not-quite silences, of homages to the unnoticed: groove grit, tape hiss, CD glitch, the snap crackle-pop of optical film soundtracks, the static between radio stations, cell phone break-up, guitar hum, audience anticipation, reverberation tails, room tones, the calm before a storm, residual files from de-noising software, PA systems just below feedback, coughs recovered from the editing room floor.

Our *Call For Silence* brought forth a deluge of over a hundred extraordinarily imaginative submissions. What you have on this CD are 34 visions of silence, ranging from almost inaudible to all-too-audible (from 0000000000000000 to 1111111111111111); suggestions for listening to that which might otherwise pass you by; reminders that those fleeting seconds between tracks are also moments to be lived, even loved.

NICOLAS COLLINS



IMAGE: ROSE MARY WOODS, NIXON ARCHIVE, WASHINGTON DC

THE ROSE MARY WOODS/NIXON TAPES

PERHAPS THE SECOND MOST FAMOUS SILENCE in all of spoken word recordings is the 18 1/2 minute gap on a piece of 1/4", .5 mm magnetic tape recorded in the Nixon White House. The *most* famous silence is probably Jack Benny's, during a skit in which a mugger demands "your money or your life." The notoriously stingy Benny is silent for tens of seconds, and as the audience realizes his dilemma, the laughter grows to fill the silence, until Benny replies, "I'm thinking - I'm *thinking!*" In live performance it was very funny. But when Benny moved the gag to radio, it became not just funny but audacious to use precious broadcast time for silence. Just as audacious is the silence on Woods/Nixon tape, for we anticipate that it holds the key to 'just what the president knew and when he knew it.'

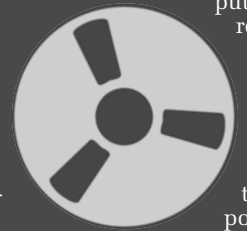
Like his predecessor Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon recorded his telephone conversations and White House meetings, presumably to keep a record of his presidency, but also to keep track of promises made by and to political allies and opponents. White House Tape #342 was recorded on a voice-activated Sony 800B recorder at 15/16 IPS and during the Watergate scandal, the tape, among others, was subpoenaed by special investigators. Nixon's personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, admitted erasing part of this tape 'accidentally', on her Uher 5000, on June 20, 1972. Investigators concluded that it could not have been accidental, and that, due to the way the Uher's functions are arranged, accidental erasure would have 'required the skills of a contortionist.' The 18 1/2 missing minutes, or 86.7 feet of tape, is perhaps the most contemplated, intriguing, and beguiling silence in contemporary American politics. It has been widely believed to contain incriminating information about Nixon's involvement in criminal activities while President.

Tom Stockham, one of the early inventors of digital recording, was a member of a congressional panel charged with trying to restore the contents of the tape. The panel concluded at the time (1974) that it was impossible. Stockham told me in 1990, "We did a very thorough job trying to recover it.

Unfortunately, it was erased by a stenographer's recorder which has a double erase head, and absolutely no human voice sounds were there except in a couple of places where the instrument used was stopped and then started again. But it was obvious, in the final analysis, that the gaps were created by the pushing of a manual button on the recorder. Also obvious was the way in which it was done; without a doubt, it had to have been done by a finger pushing this manual button."

More recently, the National Archives Technical Evaluation Panel was convened in 2001 to revisit the case of the 18 1/2 minute gap. The panel concluded, however, that even current technology was inadequate to restore the missing information, based on tests they made using the original two tape recorders in question and newly recorded material.

That the experts have been unable to restore the missing Nixon speech must cause a great deal of technical frustration. When Rose Mary Woods put the tape in her Uher and pressed record, she wasn't actually erasing the magnetic particles that contained the information, she was merely redistributing them in a random fashion so that their information could not be easily revealed. This is tantamount to taking a Shakespeare sonnet and running it through a paper shredder. All the components of the original message are there on the 1/4" tape, but now hopelessly disordered as a random arrangement of electrons. And the evidence is that the tape was erased seven to nine times, decreasing the likelihood that it will ever be restored to intelligibility. The silence continues to capture our imagination not of course because of what is there, but because of what is not. Picasso said that the most important part of his paintings was space - the space between objects. Miles Davis concurred that during his solos, he was 'playing space' and that the silence between his notes was what contained the real message. As we wonder what evils might have been revealed in those 18 1/2 minutes, we can suppose that were Nixon alive, he would almost certainly respond today with a most meaningful and artful silence.



DANIEL LEVITIN

Thomas G. Stockham Jr. passed away during the production of this project. We would like to dedicate this CD to the memory of his contributions to the field of silence.
<http://ego.psych.mcgill.ca/levitin.html/pubspages/stockham.html>

SONIC ARTS NETWORK FEB 2003
A CALL FOR SILENCE

DO IT YOURSELF SILENCE

TRADITIONAL METHOD

As soundscape theorists following R. Murray Schafer have long emphasised, it is not easy to acquire good quality silence these days. The following is a simple recipe for making your own silence inexpensively using standard home studio equipment. The Bowers family and friends have enjoyed many hours of silence in our monthly soirées fabricated using this method.

INGREDIENTS *you will need:*

- a pair of movable, free standing loudspeakers
- stereophonic amplification (allowable substitute: four egg whites)
- a mixer
- a recorded or synthesised sound source
- large quantities of critical theory (optional)

PREPARATION Before your guests arrive, reverse the polarity of just one of the loudspeakers. Lower channel and output levels at mixer and amplifier. Let stand.

METHOD For monophonic sources: plug the sound source into a channel at the mixer. Using a pan pot, mix the signal left until hard. Adjust equalisation and raise gain, fader and overall amplification levels to taste. Return the pan to the centre. For multi-channel sources: repeat the above until each source channel is panned to the centre at the mixer. Turn loudspeakers to face each other and bring together until silence appears. Serve immediately, adding more source if required.

If complete silence is not heard, try the following substitutions:

- physically identical point mass loudspeakers for conventional ones
- an absolutely isotropic sound carrying medium for earthly air
- a room with no reflecting surfaces for your four walled studio or parlour
- a disembodied ear with zero extension placed exactly on the plane orthogonal to the axis between the loudspeakers for your twitching flesh and blood ones
- four egg whites for the amplifier (whisk the eggs for silence meringues)
- accept that as situated embodied creatures we inhabit a world of noises and that there is no practice-neutral notion of silence that is meaningful to us (some listeners prefer to add critical theory at this stage for a fuller flavour)

ALTERNATIVE METHOD FOR COMPUTER USERS

My great grandfather bequeathed this Max/MSP patch to me many years ago. It has been used since time immemorial through many generations in my family to silence sound and music of all sorts.

I have successfully silenced nu-metal (though I had trouble with the first 13 tracks of Korn's *Follow The Leader*). My father before me eliminated the rowdy bits in Morton Feldman. Grandfather hushed both Crosby and Sinatra.

It is said that great grandfather managed to flatline most of English traditional folk music before Percy Grainger could transcribe it. For this, of course, we should all be eternally grateful. I commend this patch to you. It works especially well as a source for *Do It Yourself Silence (Traditional Method)* described earlier.

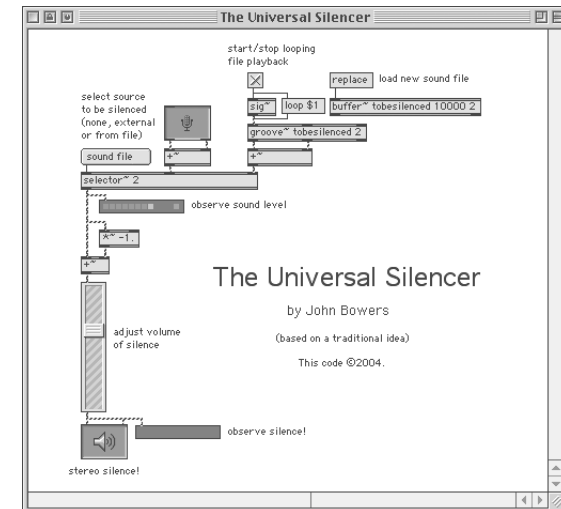


IMAGE: JOHN BOWERS

00 0'00" SILENCE SILENCED

To demonstrate the elegant simplicity of these methods for *Do It Yourself Silence*, I have silenced the rest of the current CD (I felt it was too loud anyway). This overture/meta-compilation is presented as track zero. Attempts to further silence the whole CD with the silent overture already in place were abandoned after consultations with mathematicians, religious leaders and the Sonic Arts Network's Health and Safety Officer.

JOHN BOWERS was a handsome and highly regarded silent movie actor whose career failed with the talkies. The tragic end of his life (probable suicide by walking into the sea at Malibu) is adapted in the film *A Star is Born*. The John Bowers who contributes to this CD, also handsome, also prefers silence.

ANTICIPATION A SOUND COLLAGE BY DANIEL LEVITIN

In my own experience as a performer and as a record producer, the most anxiety-filled moments in any musical performance are those few seconds before any notes are played. Someone—the conductor, the producer, the drummer—is counting off the tempo, and the musicians have only a few brief seconds to be brilliant, artistic, and in touch with their inner muse. Everyone's head is racing with thoughts: Will this be any good? Will so-and-so mess up their part again? Anticipation is a collection of these moments: count-offs in recording studios and live performance, vocalists taking a breath before a take starts, producers and engineers announcing that the tape is rolling. The piece ends with a famous bandleader exhorting an engineer let's go! and with this, the listener is left with that sense of expectation for the beginning of a piece.

DANIEL LEVITIN (b.1957, San Francisco, California) received his first tape recorder, a 3M open reel machine, when he was 4 years old. He soon began clandestine recordings of conversations between his parents. It was only through the loving intervention of his grandfather that the machine wasn't confiscated, and as a condition of keeping it, the young Levitin switched from spoken word recordings to music recording. His recording career came to an abrupt halt when, while experimenting with different sized capstan wheels at the age of 5 (effected by piling up multiple layers of electrical tape on the rubber bushing), the faithful workhorse 3M broke. Following an incident in which his stereo system caught fire in a dorm room while listening to Abbey Road at 110dB, Levitin transferred from M.I.T. to Stanford University, where he studied Music and Psychology. Just before his senior year, the music department informed him that it was impossible to major in saxophone. Not to be denied his musical destiny he left school to become a record producer.

For ten years, Levitin worked as a session musician, commercial recording engineer, live sound engineer, record producer and consultant for countless rock groups (including work with Santana, Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder), and also served as Director of A&R for 415/Columbia Records. A long time pursuer of guitar tone, Levitin's custom modified guitar amplifiers have been used by Blue Oyster Cult, Joe Satriani, and Chris Isaak. Levitin has a number of awards and gold and platinum records to his credit. In 1990, he returned to college at Stanford, earning his B.A. in Cognitive Psychology and Cognitive Science, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Oregon, researching Absolute Pitch in expert and non-expert populations. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of Psychology and Associate in the Faculty of Music at McGill University.

BETWEEN RAGIN, AND HELL

The piece is constructed using the space between the songs of two full-length records. The title of the two records used are partially referenced in the title. The point at which one chooses to proclaim silence is relative to the level of sonic activity that preceded it. This implies that any state of silence must be ushered in by sound and ebb back into it. Given this, I chose to allow a bit of the beginnings and the fade of the ends of each song to be audible.

RORY SHACKLES is an audio/visual artist based in Chicago. He obtained a BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is currently working on a MFA. His past work has primarily been in improvisational electronic performance. His work will be available online in 2004.

NÉMAJÁTÉK – VESZEKEDÉS 2 (DUMB-SHOW – QUARRELING 2)

FROM JÁTEKÓK (GAMES AND PLAYS); DEBORA PETRINA, PIANO

My pedagogic collaborator asked me for a piece about parallel clusters. [I composed a second version] of Veszekedés (Quarreling).

The second one has the same concept and mood of the first one, but in the form of a dumb-show: The gesture is very important, just beyond the sound (a gesture for the crescendo, another one for the accelerando...) because it favours a physical feeling.

G. KURTÁG

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04 1'39" MICHAEL J. SCHUMACHER
THE OTHER BOULEZ

The Other Boulez captures the in-between sounds of a selection of Pierre Boulez's piano music.

MICHAEL J. SCHUMACHER is a composer of electronic sound installations using 2–16 speaker, computer-controlled random structures, of acoustic music realizing advanced formal schemes, of taped and live music (also improvised) for prepared electric guitar, synthesizer, etc. He has composed works for piano solo, chamber ensemble, voice, and orchestra. He studied music at Indiana University and the Juillard School of Music. Born in Washington, D. C., he has lived in New York since 1983.

05 4'33" PEOPLE LIKE US (VICKI BENNETT)
CAGE SILENCED

www.peoplelikeus.org/biog.htm

06 2'08" PAUL DAVIS
S.B.D.

I've always loved to listen to the acapella cuts on 12" singles and check for sounds that you can't pick up in the full mix ... so I thought for the project to make a scratch collage from these sorts of quiet noises –sniffles or throat clears, bleed from the singer's headphones of the instrumental, click tracks, reverb from the vocals that you normally don't hear etc. I used some little bits from acapella singles by Michael Jackson, Bobby Brown, Ginuwine and Lil Kim. Because of the low level of the audio, you can also hear other sorts of ephemeral DJ noises like my hands hitting the records.

In retrospect I probably should have made it a bit more ridiculous and done a DJ routine with two records of just silence so all you'd hear was vinyl hiss and the 'thump thump thump' of my hands, but I didn't think of it till too late. Hope you like it.

PAUL DAVIS founded Beige Records with Joseph Beuckman in 1997 and The 8-Bit Construction Set and BEIGE Programming Ensemble with Cory Arcangel, Joseph Beuckman, and Joseph Bonn in 1999. Graduated from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in 2000, graduate study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Created & curated The BEIGE World Cassette Jockey Championships. Co-founded Chicago performance venue Camp Gay. Performing as 'DJ Spin-Laden', is the only DJ to ever get booed off stage at the Technics/DMC World DJ Championships. Releases on Beige, Soundlike, and Wobblyhead labels. Currently preparing for the 2004 Whitney Biennial. www.post-data.org/~paul

07 2'21" JOHN LEVACK DREVER
PASTORAL PAUSE

This location recording was made on Dartmoor, Devon, South West of England in the late summer of 2003. It documents a time gap in between vehicles crossing a cattle grid. The edit is taken from the first car, which has just crossed the grid, and the 2nd car, just before it reaches the grid. A CD of Dartmoor cattle grids and the moments in between will be released later this year on the SoundMarked label.

JOHN LEVACK DREVER is a lecturer in composition at Goldsmiths College, University of London and ACE/AHRB Arts and Science Research Fellow with Centre for Computational Creativity, Department of Computing City University. He is a director of the UK and Ireland Soundscape Community, a regional branch of the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology.

08 2'00" KAPITAL BAND 1 (NICHOLAS BUSSMAN AND MARTIN BRANDLMAYR)
HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THIS ROOM?
PROJECT: KAPITAL BAND 1, ORIGINAL CD TITLE: 2 CD

The piece is part of a suite composed by Kapital Band 1. Kapital Band 1 is a cooperation of Martin Brandlmayr and Nicholas Bussmann. *2 CD* is Debut Album by Kapital Band 1 released beginning 2004 at Mosz Records/Vienna. The pieces on the album have one thing in common: they play around with what something you don't hear. Naturally we can't tell you how many people performed *How many people are in this room?* Likewise, in our other pieces the music tries to hint rather than tell IT. The CD comes in a double CD Case with a second CD that looks identical. It is a blank CDR. You can put music onto it or use it as a shaving mirror.

www.kapitalband1.com www.mosz.at



09 4'32" RICHARD BEARD

I AM NOT SITTING IN A ROOM

This was conceived as a referential piece. It starts when I leave the room and ends when I re-enter. In the meantime I carried out the relevant Monday evening chores.

RICHARD BEARD studied Film and Sound in a fine art context at Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry, and then later specialised in electroacoustic composition at the City University, London. In between he was involved with improvisation, where he was an active member of the London Musicians' Collective in the early 1980s. Since then he has collaborated with numerous musicians and has realised recorded parts for pieces by Stockhausen (*Aus den Sieben Tagen*), Cage (*Ryoanji*) and Morricone (*Cadenza*).



IMAGE: RICHARD BEARDS' ARMCHAIR

10 1'44" DAVID HOYLAND

A MINUTES SILENCE FOR THE QUEEN MUM, 2002

AUDIO RECORDING: WEST HAM UNITED VERSUS CHARLTON ATHLETIC, UPTON PARK, 3PM SATURDAY 6TH APRIL 2002

"Ladies and Gentlemen, if I could ask you now to switch off your mobile phones, as we are going to have the minutes silence for the Queen Mum. If you haven't reached your seat, if you're stood in the concourse, perhaps you could just stand quietly.

During the war the Queen Mum stayed in London instead of being evacuated to safety. During that time she won the hearts of EastEnders by touring parts of East London that had been heavily bombed. She was very much our Queen. The minutes silence will begin on the referees whistle..."

DAVID HOYLAND is an artist/curator/game-show host. Recent live works have included *Sculpture Wars* (art Review, Dec/Jan 2002) and *Last Nights Television*.

11 0'12" VALERIAN MALY

APPLE (WINDFALL / FALLOBST)

THE POWER OF GRAVITY: RECORDINGS FROM SIR ISAAC NEWTON'S APPLE TREE WOOLSTHORPE MANOR, LINCOLNSHIRE, ENGLAND, OCTOBER 18, 2003.
SOUND DESIGN: OLIVER FRIEDLI

If one opens a German-English dictionary to the term 'Fallobst', one finds a word that encompasses everything contained in this recording: 'windfall'. This word, in English, is not only used to denote ripe fruit that has fallen to the ground, it also describes 'an unexpected stroke of luck'.

It must be several years ago now that my wife and I found ourselves wandering through a pear orchard in the village of Kehrsiten on the Vierwaldstätter Lake near Lucerne, Switzerland. Enveloped by the darkness of night and undisturbed by surrounding noises, we listened to the sound of ripe pears as they fell to the ground – a sequence of events of surprisingly remarkable sounds and structures. It was also an 'unexpected stroke of luck', because in these abrupt and unpredictable events of concentrated density, I could recognize everything that engages me as a sound artist and composer: creating an energy of attentiveness that is indeterminate and unpredictable in the Cagean sense, yet which retains a narrative, metaphorical overtone. It would be exaggerated to identify a matrix of my sound art in the pear orchard and its aural outcome, but in any event, it is an 'unexpected stroke of luck' to listen to the noise of the falling fruit and to find pleasure in it: the sudden rustling of the branches as the fruit falls through them, followed by the sound of its impact, a dull thud in the damp grass of the night. Here, the static (the motionless tree) meets the dynamic (the falling fruit). The process of ripening of the fruit also fascinates me: this 'little bit too much', the extra few cells which have been enriched with water, making the fruit too heavy to be held by the branch, the maturation, reached at some point in time, which lets the pear or apple fall.

In 1998, I read what for me appeared to be a sensational news item: the apple tree under which, according to legend, Sir Isaac Newton made his observation of the famous falling apple, has been scientifically demonstrated to still exist.

In Contemporary Physics, R.G. Keesing published the article *The History of Newton's Apple Tree* (An investigation of the story of Newton and the apple, the history of Newton's apple tree and its propagation from the time of Newton to the present days). Ever since reading this article, I planned a sound installation using recordings of apples falling from Sir Isaac Newton's famous apple tree.

It was 'an unexpected stroke of luck' that Nicolas Collins sent me the *Call for Silence*, and so, from October 17 to 19, 2003, I traveled with my colleague and former student Oliver Friedli to the Woolsthorpe Manor in Lincolnshire, Newton's place of birth, to record apples falling from the original tree in surround-sound procedure. >>

A CALL FOR SILENCE

The birth house lies nestled in an almost forgotten, picturesque landscape, with its fruit orchard, free-range chickens (all descended from Newton's time) and bleating sheep of a rare species. The atmospheric impression is however dreadfully clouded by an incessant, ubiquitous noise: if only Highway A1 were not in the vicinity! Hardly more imaginable is what William Stukley noted in his diary on the occasion of a visit to Newton in 1725/6:

"... After dinner, the weather being warm we went into the garden and drank tea, under the shade of some apple trees, only he and myself. Amidst other discourses, he told me that he was just in the same situation, as when formally the notion of gravity came into his mind. It was occasioned by the fall of an apple, as he sat in a contemplative mood".

Despite the omnipresent noise, I decided to use only original recordings from these environs for this production. Noise is a daily reality and if one listens into its internal structures, one might also discover some fascinating sound processes.

I am especially grateful to Susan Haimes, Property Manager of Woolsthorpe Manor, and her colleagues who made the recordings at this historic monument possible in an unconventional and uncomplicated way. Also unforgettable is the English tea that was served to us beneath Newton's apple tree.

With support from the Hochschule der Künste Bern,
Department of Music and Media Arts.
English translation: Laurie Schwartz

VALERIAN MALY 1959, lives in Cologne/ Germany and Berne/ Switzerland works in the fields of inter-media, performance, installations, runs a gallery of time-based art in Cologne and is curator of festivals and exhibitions, teaches at Hochschule der Künste Berne, department of music & media arts.



12 2'27" **PETER CUSACK**
THE QUIET ROOM

Recorded at Jaguars—the car manufacturers—in Liverpool, October 2003. The quiet room is where all the little sounds like doors, boots and bonnets closing and wing mirror motors are checked before the car leaves the production line. The sounds are diagnostic of any faults.

PETER CUSACK plays guitar and the Turkish saz and is a recordist with a long interest in the sound of our environment. CDs include *Your Favourite London Sounds* and *The Cow was Dead, the Horse was Alive* a sonic drift through the Lea Valley area in East London. He also teaches on the Sound Arts & Design course at the London College of Communication.

13 3'50" **ADRIAN NEWTON**
BIRD HIDE

The piece entitled *Bird Hide* is based on recordings made 11th April 2003 from within a bird hide in Wicken Fen nature reserve, Cambridgeshire. (Binaural recording, 3 min. 50s in duration).

I made this recording while searching for rural tranquillity—something increasingly difficult to find in our predominantly urban society. Wicken Fen is one of our oldest nature reserves, and is something of a wild oasis among the agricultural landscapes of East Anglia.

Which sounds feature in the soundscape I recorded? The sound of the wind in the reeds, distant shots, bird calls, the creaking of wooden hide, and the sounds made by the birdwatchers themselves: breathing and speaking in hushed tones. This is the sound of people listening and watching intently, trying to sit as silently as possible. Some conservationists have suggested that nature reserves are sacred places, to which those that value wildlife make a pilgrimage. Given this, the silence of the birdwatchers could almost be considered an act of reverence. But of course, the silence is not total.

The scratching sound heard at the end of the recording was made by a wasp eating the wood of the hide.

ADRIAN NEWTON'S interest in soundscape composition focuses on exploring the relationship between people and their environments, and particularly their relationship with nature. Recent pieces include *Village soundings*, a series of four 30-minute radio programmes based on the soundscapes of rural villages in East Anglia, broadcast on Resonance FM in 2002. The soundscapes of his original home, rural Cheshire, featured in *Shick Shack*, a piece also broadcast on Resonance FM as part of the *Houynhym Tales* series compiled by the Sonic Arts Network. He has performed regularly over the past few years in the Cambridge area as a member of the LEAPS experimental performance group.



IMAGES: "TEA CUPS", EYSLE

14 1'39" **JENS BRAND**
SILENCE/SILENT LANDSCAPE

The recording was made in January 2002 in the Magadigadi Pans in Botswana, Africa. One of the few places in the world with nothing to hear, as there is no life and most of the time no wind. Far away there was a thunderstorm on that day, what is, as I believe the more audible aspect of the track. The recording is part of a videosculpture entitled *Stille Landschaft*. A video is projected into a sound-proof semi anechoic chamber, to be watched by one person at a time.

JENS BRAND, born in 1968 in Dortmund, studied visual arts in Munster, Germany and lives and works as a composer, musician, visual & audiovisual artist and organizer in Cologne. He has presented, performed and exhibited all over Europe, Cuba, Botswana, Japan and the USA.

Although educated in visual arts he soon started to confuse and cross the borders between being a composer and a visual artist. Most of his installations contain sound and most of his sound-works and compositions consider the image to be as important as the audio-information. A lot of the works are developed for the location in which they are presented. A tendency in his work is for any given piece to be either very simple and meaningless or else a very complicated mess that involves everything and everyone. His pieces can appear as concerts, performances or installations. Recent works have ended up being mixtures of these genres, developed as logical and absurd games between the audience and the artist. His experiments with everything that can be considered to be art are not supposed to establish a belief or truth, but try to offer a fruitful soil for research, communication and progressive failure.



15 2'11" **ALVIN LUCIER**
QUIET COFFEE

Recently my spouse returned from a two-week yoga trip to Turkey. She brought me a small gift of an old metal Turkish coffee pot. For this project I simply inserted a pencil microphone into the pot and recorded a brief segment of the ambient sounds of my house as heard from deep inside the pot.

ALVIN LUCIER is currently completing a Meet-the-Composer commission for the Sospeso Ensemble and Engine 27, New York. During the Summer, 2004, he will install a new work, *Two Glasses of Water*, in a cargo container belonging to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zug, Switzerland.

16 1'29" **LORI TALLEY**
BIRD SONG

Bird Song is a recording of a caged mechanical bird that's lost its tweet. All that remains is the sound of the wind-up mechanism continuing to move the bird back and forth on its perch in time to the song it used to sing.

LORI TALLEY is a sound artist living and teaching in Chicago. She is also extensively involved in experiments in language and emerging forms of literary art practices.

17 4'06" **DALE LLOYD**
LOBBY AND LEBEG

This was recorded on the fourth level of the north lobby of the Washington State Trade And Convention Center after open hours. Nearby a hanging sculpture by Ann Gardner entitled Lebeg, which nearly spans the entire four levels of the lobby, can be heard as its mechanisms slowly move. Aside from traffic sounds coming from outside of the building, all of the sudden sounds occurring in the nearby vicinity were coming from the building itself (such as the natural shifting of the architecture or the thermostat control of the space).

DALE LLOYD is a sound artist and producer who also curates a recording label called and/OAR which is devoted to field recording and various kinds of sound work utilizing field recordings in some way. Dale also produces compilations for phonography.org, a website and discussion forum devoted to the art of field recording. www.and-oar.org/dailelloyd.html www.and-oar.org

18 1'29" **ERIC LEONARDSON**
ERSTER BERLINER

This recording documents an audience gathering and waiting for me to perform in a large industrial garage at Dock 11 in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin. If memory serves me well, it occurred in 1997 on the evening of the summer solstice. The occasion was also my first live performance in Europe, participating in the *Erster Berliner 72 Stunden Congress für Performance und Visual Kunst*.

ERIC LEONARDSON is a composer, sound designer, and an active member of Chicago's experimental improvised music community. He performs often on a self-built electroacoustic instrument made of coil springs and other inexpensive, everyday objects. In the mid-80s he co-founded the Experimental Sound Studio, and since 1995, Leonardson has been the sonic force behind the Chicago-based performance group, Plasticene. He also teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Columbia College. www.subliminal.org/eleon

19 4'37" **AARON SIEGEL**
THE SOUND WAS ...

the sound was... is part tape music and part sociological study of how people use language to respond to sound. Asked to react to a short, recorded abstract sound, passers-by spoke into a DAT machine. Their responses include what the sound reminds them of, how it relates to pre-established musical terminology, and the images the sound evokes.

I have edited together individual responses to form a sort of 'reverberation' of the sound. The original sound is not heard during the course of the piece. During interspersed silences the listeners can imagine for themselves what the sound was.

AARON SIEGEL performs as a percussionist and composes music in Brooklyn, New York. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in composition at Wesleyan University where he is studying with Ron Kuivila, Alvin Lucier and Anthony Braxton. As an improviser, Siegel plays regularly with Memorize the Sky (Matt Bauder and Zach Wallace), Chorus of Seeds (Stephen Rush, Tim Flood, Jacob Garchik), as a member of Scott Rosenberg's ensemble and as a solo performer on both computer and percussion.

20 0'16" **NO NOISE REDUCTION BY RAFAEL TORAL & PAULO FELICIANO**
0'0,060" FOR A ROCK AND ROLL BAND

0'0,060" for a Rock'n'roll Band is partly a little tribute to John Cage, after his series of pieces with similar titles. While consisting of rock band Tina and the Top Ten blasting at full volume for six hundredths of a second, the absence of the time needed for its perception as such not only makes it impossible to experience the music, it also makes it impossible to identify the sound source at all, transforming it into an abstract burst of noise.

Paulo Feliciano (guitar), Falcon D (drums), Captain MD (bass), Johnny "boy" Santini (guitar), Mimi (vocals, *silent*), Rafael Toral (precision edit); Recorded at Musicorde, Lisboa, May 1994. Produced and mixed by Rafael Toral. Previously released in: The complete no noise reduction, Moneyland records (Portugal), MR\$ 0495 (CD, 1995)

NO NOISE REDUCTION. Since 1990, João Paulo Feliciano and Rafael Toral have worked together on a duo project—No Noise Reduction, working in a variety of areas from sound art to music activities of a conceptual or experimental nature. The project investigates randomness and the resolution of uncontrollable events in real time, involving the artists in spontaneous activity often aiming to get rid of noise by using it, through cutting-edge experimentation and technology abuse.

21 1'55" **JUSTIN WIGGIN**
EEG RECORDING OF NO SOUNDS IN THE SURROUNDING AREA

I am a sound artist.
I work with dreamsoftallbuildings and as geography of nowhere.
I am researching the notion of using alpha brain wave activity as a means
of building a foundation of new communication.

A new language.
This piece is called "eeg recording of the realisation of no sounds in the surrounding area".
The sound of a brain recognising silence.
The endless void in the brain is spitting out pulses and sounds every second.
We need to harness this "music" that is hiding in a theoretical prison
and share our very own phono graphical beings.

22 1'33" ANNE WELMER
KRIKLE

Krikle is a granular synthesis fire which is burning two single pulses from an ultrasound sensor.

ANNE WELLMER was born in Gütersloh (d 1966). She studied sonology (electronic music, sound design) at the royal conservatory of the Hague (nl), and composition with Alvin Lucier at Wesleyan University (ct, usa). She creates music theater, sound installations, music for dance and video and improvised music with digital and analog electronics. Wellmer is a member of the live electronics trio boddendijk/wellmer/van der heide and of the electronica improvisation trio grand mal. Anne Wellmer lives and works in the Hague in the Netherlands.

23 3'11" ANDY KEEP
MY LAPTOP COLONY - COLONY IN MY LAPTOP

my laptop colony - colony in my laptop is the normally hidden internal activity inside my laptop computer, booting up and preparing itself for a collaborative live performance with myself. The sounds heard have been captured by a pickup coil that is able to detect a hive of electrical and electromagnetic activity inside the deceptively calm looking designer exterior. Audible evidence that perhaps all objects experience the need to push a little adrenalin around the system before public appearances.

ANDY KEEP is a performer/composer, currently engaged in a PhD, exploring some behavioural models and timbral languages of audio feedback set-ups through responsive strategies in improvisation and composition.



24 1'04" DAVID FIRST
TELL TALE 2.1

Tell tale 2.1 is a live performance for two heterodyned transistor radio carcasses in close proximity. Audio frequencies are produced by tuning both radios to the extreme left of the AM dial – lower than any commercial station's broadcasting signal – and using body capacitance to influence the exposed tuner located in the modulating radio. The carrier radio, in turn, outputs the resulting difference tones that fall into the audio range – a technique similar to playing a Theremin. It is a fairly volatile system – the apparent frenetic movements of the sound are actually the result of trying to keep my hovering hand, for the most part, as absolutely still as possible.

DAVID FIRST has long been interested in the secret worlds of minimal gestures, hyper-sensual tuning relationships and ritual phenomena. His most recent project, *Operation: Kracpot*, involves real-time audification of the Schumann Resonances, binaural beating brainwave entrainment theories and something he calls the Spherical Overtone Series in an attempt to reconcile the important findings of uptight scientists and the fascinating conjectures of wiggled out new-agers.

25 4'34" DAN EVANS FARKAS
HUMBUCKET
AKA "60 CYCLES OF JUBILATION"

Humbucket is a celebration of hum and distortion. The main source of hum in this piece is a result of my holding the tip of a guitar patch cord, modified so that the tip and ground are both 'hot'. The cord is plugged into several guitar FX boxes: first distortions, then flangers/choruses/phase shifters/octave dividers. Oscillators and guitars and a tape degausser (eraser) are also added.

This recording is from my third performance of *Humbucket* on August 17, 1991 at the original Knitting Factory in New York City. Ben Manley must have recorded it. This recording has been edited for time to fit on this CD.

I entered into this music scene as a sound engineer, setting up recording and PA equipment at two new music lofts in NYC (Roulette & Experimental Intermedia). There are two things a sound engineer tries to avoid/diminish/remove/alleviate: grounding hum (buzz) and distortion.

Hum most often come in two flavors: 60 Hz in America and 50 Hz in Europe, one or both of these two elsewhere. The Hz in the frequency of alternating current (A/C). Hum gets into the audio chain in any number of ways including ground loops, poorly shielded cables, proximity to amplifiers and A/C power lines and light dimmers. Distortion often arises from over-boosting a signal or boosting a very low signal and the noise that comes with it. The more stages between sound source and speaker or recording, the more chance for hum and distortion to make their way in and muck things up.

In 1987 I saw the band Raging Slab. They were the first of three warm up acts; they didn't care. At one point, the guitarist tripped over his cord, unplugging it. Instead of plugging it back into his guitar, he touched the tip to his forehead. This resulted in a loud 60 Hz buzz. This was the first inspiration for this piece.

I recently contacted Alvin Lucier who told me the following: "In 1980 I was recording sferics, electromagnetic disturbances in the ionosphere, with a pair of home-made antennas. I had to find a place where there were no power lines whose 60 cycle hum would interfere with the recording. After some searching I found a place on a mountaintop in Colorado. Bob Ashley once made sound for a film by George Manupelli simply by holding one end of a bare wire routed into an input on an amplifier. Not exactly 60 cycle hum, but..." It is hard to get away from 60 Hz hum in America, and in cities and suburbs it's impossible. Proximity to electric power lines is all that's needed. These 'power-frequency fields' have even been implicated in causing cancer. It's everywhere. It's invisible. It's necessary for our modern way of living. You cannot generally hear it. If you do hear it, it's considered a mistake. Turn your stereo on and have nothing playing; turn the volume all the way up; it's there; it's always there.

IMPERFECTION THEOREM OF SILENCE

I like to make a definition of silence for this piece first. My definition is: Material sound I used for this piece has very short silent moments. They appear between sound waves on the sonogram of the recorded sound as a horizontal straight line, or gap between sound waves. There are many such parts on the sonogram, so I choose the straight lines or the gaps between sound waves more than 10 milliseconds. I erase every sound wave on the sonogram of my material source. Then, the rest must be silence. The material source is made from 45 minutes of recorded performance of my new piece, *Wounded Soutai Man'yo BOOK III*, which is a sequel to the track 3 of my album on Asphodel label (Asp 2011).

ON IMPERFECTION OF SILENCE Rauschenberg's well-known *Erased De Kooning* are actually drawings by erasers, which were merely an episode comparing the two key events in the history of Arts, his white paintings and his famous remark, "white canvass is not empty". He confessed later to an interviewer if the drawing was his, he should have erased the entire drawing. Coincidentally, John Cage's text on Rauschenberg has an epigraph, "To Whom It May Concern; The white paintings came first; my silent piece came later." Not only Cage considered white paintings and the Silent piece (4'33") as based on the same principle, also, he advised the students of indeterminate music at Darmstadt that "one could write music by observing the imperfections in the (white) paper upon which one was writing". Cage's experience in the anechoic chamber implicate there is no such thing as perfect silence, which coincides with Rauschenberg's "white canvass is not empty". So, if you think of silence as devoid of sound then you would be mistaken.

My intention is that collecting the micro silences (named after Curtis Roads' micro sound) from the piece I composed for this track and to find imperfection of a silence. I have to hastily add this, that I gave a huge increase of gain to emphasize imperfection of silence.

YASUNAO TONE, a co-founder of Group Ongaku and an original member of Fluxus, was born in Tokyo in 1935 and has resided in New York since 1972. He's had numerous concerts, group performances, group exhibitions and collaborations: including Kitchen, Experimental Intermedia, Roulette, Guggenheim Museum, Metronom (solo concerts), Fluxus Festivals, New Music America etc. His work is distinguished by onversion of text into music via images with analog (*Molecular Music*) and digital means (*Musica Iconologos*) and music generating text (*Lyrictron*), also with critique of medium in use (*Music for 2CD Players, Solo for Wounded CD*). His albums, *Musica Iconologos (Lovely)*, *Solo for Wounded CD (Tzadik)*, and *YASUNAO TONE (Asphodel)*, also, numerous compilations. He was a recipient of Golden Nica Prize from Ars Electronica in 2002.

WORLD TRADE CENTER RECORDINGS: PHOTOCCELL/TELESCOPE

TRACKING AUDIO SIGNALS; PRODUCED BY LIGHT, VIEWED FROM THE 91ST FLOOR.
(AUGUST 1999)

This recording was made one night during my 6-month residency in the World Trade Center's Tower One. I wanted to find a way to create a sound experience that mirrored the effect of the fading sunlight, the view of buildings being replaced by trails of light, windows from other buildings, billboards, boats along the Hudson River, etc. I was thinking more metaphorically, when Bob Bielecki, a friend and engineer wired up a small photocell to one of my audio cables adding a 9 volt battery for power and showed me how to use photocells to listen to light frequencies. Using a telescope, the photocell in this recording is amplifying the sound of a police car's flashing light across the river, on a far-off New Jersey street. Courtesy of the artist and The Project, New York and Los Angeles.

STEPHEN VITIELLO is an electronic musician and media artist based in New York. CD releases include *Scanner/Vitiello (Audiosphere/Sub Rosa)* with Scanner, *Bright and Dusty Things (New Albion)* and *Humming Bird Feeder ver. 02 (Lucky Kitchen)* with Tetsu Inoue. Recent exhibitions include the 2002 Whitney Biennial, Yanomami: Spirit of the Forest and Ce qui arrive, both at the Cartier Foundation, Paris. Vitiello's installation, *World Trade Center Recordings: Winds After Hurricane Floyd* has been presented in exhibitions and public radio internationally and is in the permanent collection of The Whitney Museum of American Art.
www.stephenvitiello.com

TWO MINUTES FIFTY SECONDS SILENCE FOR THE USA

A distillation of George W. Bush's address to the world on March 17 2003, in which he gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to get out of town. Using my own software (written in the SuperCollider programming language), I removed his voice from the 13+ minute speech, leaving only his 'silences'. The thumping sounds you hear, which a number of people have taken to be a reference to 'drums of war', are the reverberations of Bush's voice inside the White House.

This piece was first published for free distribution on the web in March 2003 at www.mrogalsky.net and then more widely distributed as part of Protest Records Vol. 2, at www.protest-records.com and was subsequently included in the May 2003 *illegal art* compilation at www.detritus.net

Maintain Radio Silence, an article by myself detailing explorations of 'silences' distilled in similar ways from radio broadcasts and improvising musicians, was published in the journal *Digital Creativity*, Vol. 14 No. 2 (2003).

MATT ROGALSKY is a media artist working in the area of live electronic performance and installation, often with a focus on exploration of abject, invisible/inaudible, or ignored streams of information. He performs and presents work regularly in Europe and North America.

He has recently been working in various ways with 'silences' collected from live radio broadcasts. This has taken several forms: an installation entitled *Ellipsis*, which has been shown at iapason Gallery (New York City, Sept–Oct 2001) and *Sleeper* (Edinburgh, Nov-Dec 2001); a concert piece which uses live input from two talk radio stations; and an artist's edition of 24 CDs which collected the 'silences' from a 24-hour period of BBC Radio 4.

29 1'57"

DAVID WATSON

VENTILATOR (SOLO HIGHLAND BAGPIPE)

Currently I employ between four and six mics on my Highland Bagpipe, and run each one through a mixer. In this recording we hear a lot from inside the bag, and blowstick, as well as fingers on the finger-holes. There are reeds in the bagpipe here, but I am below sufficient air pressure for any of them to kick in.

DAVID WATSON –originally from New Zealand– has worked in New York’s downtown scene for the past fifteen years. Projects include guitar playing, live electronics, playing bagpipies himself and writing new music for traditional pipe and drum bands.

30 3'37"

THOMAS JOYCE

UNSPOKEN CONVERSATIONS

This piece deals with the negative spaces in language. This recording is of three people speaking and I have edited out the words leaving linguistic fallout accidents, pauses, umms, errs, and dragging of words. The voices interact with one another, creating *Unspoken Conversations*. You can start to hear the changes in atmosphere and mood. Subtle changes in the silent timbres. Breathing and mouth movements between words become rhythmic. Loud accidents and dragging of words, bring surprises within the aforementioned subtleties. Although there is no narrative, you can get a sense of personality and character just from the sounds.

THOMAS JOYCE, sound artist/designer, mobile: 07748086977

31 2'36"

FRANCISCO LÓPEZ

UNTITLED #102

Created at mobile messor, summer 2000 (cassette tape hiss of 50th generation-copy with no sound input)

FRANCISCO LÓPEZ has developed a sonic universe, based on a profound listening of the world. He has realized concerts and sound installations all over Western and Eastern Europe, North, Central and South America, Japan and Australia, and his works have been released by more than one hundred record companies throughout the world.



IMAGE: "SECRET", 1998 METAL DISC AND PADLOCK DISC 7" DIAMETER
CHRISTIAN MARCLAY EDITION OF 5
COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK



32 1'10"

TED COLLINS

LULLABY

This is a recording of a Winnie the Pooh tape played so softly that it can only be heard when your ear is right next to the speaker. I play it this quietly so that the story won't distract me from falling asleep, but so that I can still hear the soothing mechanical whirring of the tape player.

TEDDY COLLINS is thirteen years old, has lived in three different countries, and listened to Winnie the Pooh in all of them.

33 0'00"

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY

UNUSED SPACE

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY is an artist and musician whose work explores the intersection between visual art and sound.

SONIC ARTS NETWORK FEB2003

'A CALL FOR SILENCE'

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

JOHN CAGE AND 4'33"

What follows is an excerpt from Larry Solomon's 1998 essay that examines the aesthetic, history and impact of Cage's 4'33". The original full length work can be found at <http://music.theory.home.att.net>

4'33", pronounced "four minutes, thirty-three seconds", (Cage himself referred to it as "four, thirty-three") is often mistakenly referred to as Cage's "silent piece". He made it clear that he believed there is no such thing as silence, defined as a total absence of sound. In 1951, he visited an anechoic chamber at Harvard University in order to hear silence. "I literally expected to hear nothing," he said. Instead, he heard two sounds, one high and one low. He was told that the first was his nervous system and the other his blood circulating. This was a major revelation that was to affect his compositional philosophy from that time on. It was from this experience that he decided that silence defined as a total absence of sound did not exist. "Try as we may to make a silence, we cannot," he wrote. "One need not fear for the future of music."

To Cage, silence had to be redefined if the concept was to remain viable. He recognized that there was no objective dichotomy between sound and silence, but only between the intent of hearing and that of diverting one's attention to sounds. "The essential meaning of silence is the giving up of intention," he said. This idea marks the most important turning point in his compositional philosophy. He redefined silence as simply the absence of intended sounds, or the turning off of our awareness. "Silence is not acoustic," he said, "It is a change of mind. A turning around." He was later to identify this with Eastern thought. "In India they say that music is continuous; it only stops when we turn away and stop paying attention."

In 1988, in a conversation with William Duckworth, Cage affirmed the connection of this idea with 4'33". "No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. I listen to it every day. ... I don't sit down to do it. I turn my attention toward it. I realize that it's going on continuously. More than anything, it is the source of my enjoyment of life. ... Music is continuous. It is only we who turn away." Cage often referred to it as his most important piece, and it was his favorite. "I always think of it before I write the next piece."

The origin of the concept of 4'33", i.e., a silent frame filled with non-intentional environmental sounds, is debatable. But when Cage was a Fellow at Wesleyan's Center of Advanced Studies (1960-61), he was asked to compile a list of books having the greatest influence on his thought. One of these was Luigi Russolo's, the Italian Futurist, *The Art of Noises* (1916). In this book there is a chapter that presages 4'33", i.e., "The Noises of Nature and Life". Russolo begins by poetically describing many of the sounds of nature. Then comes a remarkable statement:

"And here it can be demonstrated that the much poeticized

silences with which the country restores nerves shaken by city life are made up of an infinity of noises, and that these noises have their own timbres, their own rhythms, and a scale that is very delicately enharmonic in its pitches. It has been neither said nor proven that these noises are not a very important part (or in many cases the most important part) of the emotions that accompany the beauty of certain panoramas, the smile of certain countrysides!

But let us leave nature and the country (which would be a tomb without noises) and enter a noisy modern city. Here, with machines, life has created the most immense, the most varied sources of noise. But if the noises of the country are few, small, and pleasing, then those of the city ... Oh! To have to listen to noises from dawn to dusk, eternal noise!"

It is chilling to think of Cage reading this passage. He referred to it in his 1948 lecture at Vassar. It makes the conception seem less radical ... (At Vassar) He said that there ought to be a piece that had no sounds in it. Although the germ of an idea was there, it would be five years before he would actually write it. The next year Cage wrote that he wanted to "compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. It will be three or four and a half minutes in length – those being the standard lengths of 'canned music' – and its title will be *Silent Prayer*."

It wasn't until 1951 that Cage was inspired to proceed by seeing the white, empty paintings freshly done by his friend, Robert Rauschenberg. "I responded immediately," he said, "not as objects, but as ways of seeing. I've said before that they were airports for shadows and for dust, but you could also say that they were mirrors of the air." "When I saw those, I said, 'Oh yes, I must; otherwise I'm lagging, otherwise music is lagging.'" Cage felt that Rauschenberg's painting gave him "permission" to proceed with the composition of the "silent piece".

4'33" continues to baffle and confound people today. It has become an icon of the modern era, at once synonymous with Cage in the popular imagination, and Cage with it. This probably would have pleased him. It is music that is completely free of intentional sounds, and, in this sense, it is like a tabula rasa, a blank slate upon which the world of unintended sounds writes its music. But, it is a tabula rasa in which not everything is permitted. Intentional sounds and egocentric actions have no place here. 4'33" requires a serious, reverent, focused, and open mind that is willing to put aside preconceptions and embrace the universe of sound as music.

It is easy to fall victim to the error that anything goes in this piece. Cage was clear that this is not the case. He was quite critical of "bad performances" of his music, and 4'33" was no exception. Ego and guile have no place here. The performer is dispensable and so is the audience. Only a singular, devoted listener is needed.

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