

Project John Cage : music by John Cage & Earle Brown

**Premiere July 14 at 19:00 (BST)
then available until September 2022.**
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https://youtu.be/qgvm_HYFUFg

Layered and collaged performances of compositions by John Cage (1912-1992) and his New York colleague Earle Brown (1926-2002). Recorded in isolation, then mixed and combined by Cage's chance means (Variations III). After many webcasts of conventional concerts we thought of something pertinent to current media, rather than the transmission of a traditional event. This collaborative project was inspired by Cage's work for Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) made in the late 1960s at Robert Rauschenberg's invitation.
Devised by Richard Bernas and Norman Rosenthal.

John Cage Winter Music (1958)
Earle Brown 25 Pages for Piano (1953)
Ben Smith, piano

John Cage Song Books (1970)
Rosie Middleton, mezzo soprano
Linda Hirst, mezzo soprano & cook
Richard Bernas, water

Thoreau's Walden
excerpts read by Norman Rosenthal

I Ching (The Book of Changes)
hexagram texts read by Tom Phillips

Studio : Raqib Shaw
Studio camera : Jane Clegg
Studio sound : Misha Mullov-Abbado
Editor : Sam Belinfante
Director : Richard Bernas



I'd worked with Norman Rosenthal curating concerts for his Royal Academy exhibits. We had a shared interest; he knew John personally and I had worked with him for years, giving the UK premieres of many of his compositions between 1972 and 1990. He asked me to think of a concert for his YouTube site, Solti Studio Concerts, presented in collaboration with the family of the conductor.

It soon occurred to us that, in simply videoing and webcasting a static concert format, we would really underestimate the potential of Cage's imagination. As a life long collaborator with Merce Cunningham, he was deeply involved with dance. The confederacies of theatre were part of his performing life. His creative impulses and influences spilled into painting, writing, live electronics and mixed media.



Rather than transmit the recording of a concert performance I thought of a series of individual Cage events that each performer could record on their own cameraphones which we would later mix and sequence following the chance processes based on Cage's Variations III. That piece was part of his mixed media performances in the late 1960s which pioneered what we now classify as Performance Art. We were all in lockdown, so it was right to use those works of John's that would take advantage of performing in isolation, later mixing the results together to enable a texture that was quite contrapuntal and frequently complex, one that allowed for the pleasure of unexpected encounters.

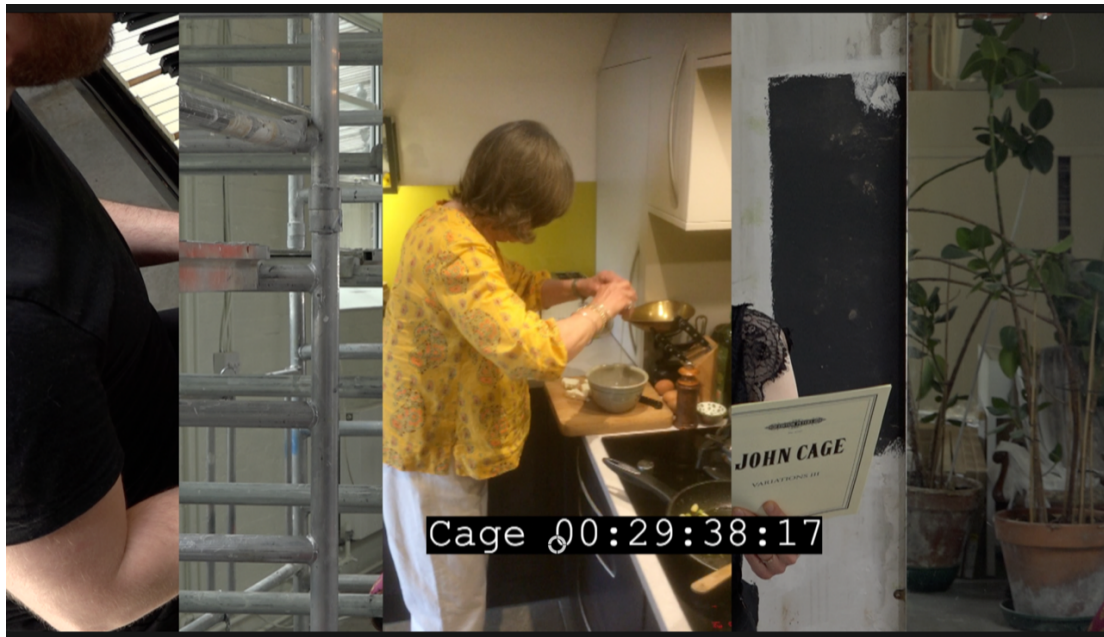


I thought of a longer musical work that would knit together the individual contributions, the piano piece Winter Music, played here by Ben Smith. With its isolated chords framed by silences both long and short, Winter Music became the canvas or the white page onto which the other activities would be located. Vocal and theatrical events from Cage's SongBooks (dedicated to Cathy Berberian and others) are performed by the mezzo sopranos Rosie Middleton and the great modern music advocate Linda Hirst. Passages from two books that deeply influenced Cage's artistic philosophy, the ancient Chinese I Ching and Thoreau's Walden, are read by Tom Philips and Norman Rosenthal. So, I hope you will find that there's more to John's work than the too-notorious Silent Piece. – **RB**

John Cage (1912 - 1992) was an American composer, music theorist, artist, and philosopher. A pioneer of indeterminacy in music, electroacoustic music, and non-standard use of musical instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. His many collaborators included the architects Erno Goldfinger and Buckminster Fuller, the painters Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and the choreographer Merce Cunningham.

Earle Brown (1926–2002) was an American experimental composer whose works in graphic notation and open form were seminal in the development of postwar music. He described his sound ideal as spontaneous, warm and responsive to the moment. Refusing to acknowledge the stylistic boundaries that dictated new music during his time, Brown embraced a wide range of influences including jazz improvisation, twelve-tone technique, the indeterminacy of his New York School colleagues (John Cage, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff), action painting, collage and the mobile sculptures of Alexander Calder.

Richard Bernas has conducted many UK orchestras, also appearing in Europe, Japan and the Americas. His involvement in John Cage's compositions included the UK premieres of *Sonatas and Interludes* and *HPSCHD* and the World Premiere of *Europas 3 & 4*. He's worked with a wide range of composers from John Adams and Elliott Carter to Karlheinz Stockhausen and Iannis Xenakis and curated many music events for UK museums, principally Tate Modern and The Royal Academy. In 1991 he received a Gramophone Award for Contemporary Music.



Linda Hirst's 50 year career so far began in the small choirs of the 70s, Monteverdi Choir, Schutz Choir of London, with John Eliot Gardiner, Roger Norrington and David Munrow. She was a Swingle Singer, then co-founder of Electric Phoenix. With both groups she travelled the world leading to an eclectic solo career. She has sung at Glyndebourne, ROH, the Proms, the major European Festivals, and with orchestras and ensembles worldwide, working directly with Henze, Berio, Ligeti, Weir, Holt, Osborne, Knussen and more. Recently Linda was part of Martin Creed's *Toast Exhibition* at Hauser and Wirth in London.

Rosie Middleton specialises in new music and collaborates with composers internationally. Highlights of 2020-21 include Laura Bowler *GOLD* (Riot Ensemble), being cast in Matt Rogers' *She Described it to Death* (ROH), a Somerset House residency with Catherine Kontz and winning the Michiko Hirayama scholarship for excellence in experimental vocal music. Her future engagements include Laura Bowler's *The Blue Woman* (ROH), *microstories* - a collaborative project with CHROMA ensemble and Jamie Hamilton's *Versionland* with Phaedra Ensemble.

Tom Phillips is an artist whose work is fuelled by several persistent preoccupations, expressed through an even larger number of formats. These include painting (both figurative and abstract), opera (composer, librettist, set designer), concrete poetry and ornamental forms of writing, sculpture and site-specific designs (mosaic, tapestry, wire frame objects). He has also taken on several para-artistic roles – critic, curator, committee chairman for the Royal Academy, translator – all of which he has folded back into his art.



Ben Smith is a London-based composer and performer. He is interested in - amongst other things - phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and encounters with silence and repetition. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and is currently a Junior Fellow at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he previously studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks.

Norman Rosenthal used to work at the Royal Academy of Arts, which he left in 2008. He still works a bit as a curator and writer on art and artists, but above most things he loves performances of what he knows is serious music of all kinds. This is from Palestrina and even before, (as far as it still possible to be performed with conviction), down that of the present day. He is of the strong opinion that after David Bowie is forgotten, John Cage and Pierre Boulez will forever be remembered.

