

James Weeks

Freehand Etude

in memoriam John Cage

for three performers

perusal score
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Three performers, drawing and vocalising

Set-up

Each performer is equipped with a copy of the attached, ruled sheet of A4 paper (the ruled page provided may be photocopied as required), landscape-oriented, and a pencil with an HB or softer lead.

Each performer sits at their own table (or they may sit at the same table). Unless the performance space is exceptionally quiet, amplification will be required for both voices and pencils.

Performance

Starting together but proceeding independently, each performer draws, with eyes shut, a freehand line across the paper from left to right, and then (with eyes open) vocalises the line drawn in a single, long breath. This process is repeated six times, making a total of seven lines. The piece finishes when all three performers have drawn seven lines on the paper and vocalised them.

The paper is divided into seven bands, and each line should begin within a different band. The band-widths represent a pitch width of a major third (four semitones); however, the bands are not related to each other in pitch (so the top band on the page does not represent a high register of the voice, etc.); rather, the performer can choose a new pitch range for each band, staying within the most comfortable parts of his/her voice. Tuning devices are therefore not required.

The performers begin by closing their eyes together and beginning to draw at roughly the same moment. Having drawn each line, each performer independently opens their eyes, takes a little time to take in the contour of the line drawn, and then vocalises it. Between the end of each vocalisation and the start of the next drawing, each performer should count 30 of their own heartbeats.

Drawing

Lines should be drawn with eyes shut; nevertheless, set out to draw straight (horizontal) lines. The pressure of pencil on paper should be quite light. From line to line, vary the speed of drawing. Draw each line in one movement.

Vocalising

Set out to represent the drawing faithfully. Sing to an 'o' vowel with the mouth only slightly open, as quietly as possible without the sound cutting out, as if to yourself. Once, sing on a 'v' sound with plenty of air (more like a voiced 'f'). Vocalise each line in a single breath.

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