

John Cage: *Solos for Voice 93-96* (premiere recordings) and *4 Solos for Voice*¹ Electric Phoenix

[1]	<i>Solo for Voice 93</i>	Judith Rees
[2]	<i>Solo for Voice 94</i>	Meriel Dickinson
[3]	<i>Solo for Voice 95</i>	Daryl Runswick
[4]	<i>Solo for Voice 96</i>	Terry Edwards
[5]	<i>4 Solos for Voice</i>	Electric Phoenix

Recorded at October Sound, London on 10th May 1999

Recording engineer and sound treatments John Whiting

Produced, assembled and mixed by Daryl Runswick at The DReam Room, London, 1999

Remixed and the solo versions extracted at The Sign, Wales, 10-12 August 2017

When Electric Phoenix recorded *4 Solos for Voice* we intended to issue it as a single group performance: we had no idea of issuing the individual Solos separately.

For the recording, made several years after the world premiere (and indeed after Cage's death) I as producer adopted several procedures which I hope he would have approved of.

1. Because Cage stipulated that in performance we should ignore one another completely I decided we would record the four solos separately, not as an ensemble. In actual performance it is virtually impossible to ignore one another – though we positioned ourselves apart on stage and out of each other's eye-line – but here we could be truly independent. I therefore summoned the singers to the studio alone and they recorded their music in the presence only of John Whiting and myself. Of course as producer and also singer I had the 'disadvantage' of hearing all the others. To avoid 'cross-contamination' I recorded my own performance first.

2. I recorded each vocal event separately and stopped the tape (it was still Digital Audio Tape in those days) between events. In this way we could re-record an event as many times as we wanted until we were pleased with it. Naturally it meant we ended up with a collection of single events with no start times.

3. I instructed each singer to nominate a start time for each event, within the parameters stipulated by Cage. We each picked our start times randomly, unaware of what times the others had picked. I then took the recorded events home to my studio and assembled them strictly in accordance with the chosen times. This process, I believe, provided a good approximation of Cage's 'chance operations', and the results, as he would have predicted, throw up some wonderfully serendipitous juxtapositions.

4. Cage prescribed several places in each Solo where the singer might choose to do a visual event. This would obviously not 'read' on an audio recording (we didn't use video). As producer I therefore chose to substitute a noise for each visual event, to be inserted as per instruction at one of Cage's prescribed times. The noises we chose were: Judith Rees, two wood

¹ This is not the premiere recording of the group piece: another group got in before us (though they made several mistakes in the realisation).

blocks played with a beater; Meriel Dickinson, a mechanical clown's laugh; myself, turning on a digital camera and taking a picture; Terry Edwards, crumpling a snack carton.

5. The recording process described here did throw up one problem: whenever the layout of the start timings produced a moment where there was an absence of any event (which was often) the resulting pause contained digital silence – absolute nothing, sounding false to the listener. I therefore recorded some 'atmosphere' – an empty room with nothing happening but discreet background noise – and laid it behind the entire performance.

6. In 2017, having listened to *4 Solos for Voice* for many years, I took cognizance of the fact that these are *four solos*. They are intended to be performed both separately and together. The method I had used of recording the voices meant that the extraction of solo versions was an easy matter: you just mute three of the voice tracks and do a mixdown of the resulting solo. Repeat for the remaining three voices.

7. For the listener's convenience I did not allow much silence at the start of the solo performances: Cage prescribes a random time between nought and forty-five seconds before the start of the first event in each *Solo*. I imposed shorter starting times. (Purists can 'insert' their own silences at the beginnings of the tracks as follows: Daryl, 37 seconds; Meriel, 25 seconds; Judy, 35 seconds; Terry, 34 seconds.) For the ensemble version however I allowed the singers' chosen starting times to stand: therefore the quartet recording has quite a long silence at its beginning.