

JOHN CAGE How to Get Started, 1989-

John Cage conceived How to Get Started almost as an afterthought -- a performance substituting for another that was previously planned in 1989 for delivery at "Sound Design: An Invitational Conference on the Uses of Sound for Radio Drama, Film, Video, Theater and Music" presented by Bay Area Radio Drama at Sprocket Systems, Skywalker Ranch, in Nicasio, California.

In his introduction, Cage talks about the difficulty of initiating the creative process, while exploring the usefulness of improvisation, a subject about which he had long been deeply ambivalent. He proposes a collaborative framework in which sound engineers capture and subsequently layer his extemporized monologue, which consisted of ten brief commentaries on topics then of interest. This amounted to an experiment having to do with thinking in public, before a live audience.

Twenty years after John Cage's first and only performance of How to Get Started in Nicasio, California, we are enabling the public to add yet another layer to the mix: your extemporizations on your ten topics of interest, in your voice. Drawing upon Cage's realization of How to Get Started as a script in effect, you are invited to participate in its further life. Your audio recording will be added to the official archive and will be made available online.

HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

1. Familiarize yourself with Cage's realization, and listen to selections at www.howtogetstarted.org/cage.php
2. Get out ten cards, number them, and write down ten topics of interest
3. Practice extemporizing on each topic, in random order
4. Notice that Cage never spoke for more than three minutes on a single topic
5. Visit Slought Foundation and schedule a session

GETTING STARTED

- Walk into the sound installation, and take a seat at the table. A chaperone will accompany you, to insure that you are comfortable and positioned well in relation to the microphone.
- We recommend that you distribute your numbered cards on the table, to make it easier to find them during the performance. The order of your ten thoughts will be randomly determined by our software. The screen will display numerical cues for you to follow.
- The collaborating engineer will be seated to your immediate right. Count 1 to 10 into the microphone, to calibrate your audio levels.
- Next, verbally agree upon a silent start/stop signaling system with the engineer, to use during the recording process. Examples of silent signals include raising your hand, or nodding your head. You will need to silently signal the engineer before you begin each thought, and after you complete each thought. If you signal that you are done with your thought before a previous layer has finished playing back, the engineer will signal to you to wait until it has finished.
- Note that during your second thought, and all subsequent thoughts, the engineer will layer your previous thoughts back into your headphones. The engineer may adjust the playback volume and pan your voice left and right during this time.
- When you are ready to get started, let the engineer know. Your first numerical cue will then be displayed, and after your silent signal the process will begin!

MORE

To learn more about [How to Get Started](#), upcoming performances, or to visit the permanent installation at Slought Foundation in Philadelphia: www.howtogetstarted.org

To schedule a recording session at Slought Foundation: info@sloughtfoundation.org