

John Cage's Silent, Avant-Garde Piece 4'33" Gets Covered by a Death Metal Band

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John Cage - 4' 33" Death Metal Cover by Dead Territory [ORIGINAL VID...



When we think of silence, we think of meditative stretches of calm: hikes through deserted forest paths, an early morning sunset before the world awakes, a staycation at home with a good book. But we know other silences: awkward silences, ominous silences, and—in the case of John Cage's infamous conceptual piece 4'33"—a mystifying silence that asks us to listen, not to nothing, but to *everything*. Instead of focusing our aural attention, Cage's formalized exercise in listening disperses it, to the nervous coughs and squeaking shoes of a restless audience, the ceaseless ebb and

flow of traffic and breathing, the ambient white noise of heating and AC...
and the suspended black noise of death metal....

We're used to seeing 4'33" "performed" as a classical exercise, with a dignified pianist seated at the bench, ostentatiously turning the pages of Cage's ["score."](#) But there's no reason at all the exercise—or hoax, some insist—can't work in any genre, including metal. [NPR's All Songs TV](#) brings us the video above, in which "64 years after its debut performance by pianist David Tudor," death metal band Dead Territory lines behind their instruments, tunes up, and takes on Cage: "There's a setup, earplugs go in, a brief guitar chug, a drum-stick count-off and... silence."

As in every performance of 4'33", we're drawn not only to what we hear, in this case the sounds in whatever room we watch the video, but also to what we see. And watching these five metalheads, who are so used to delivering a continuous assault, nod their heads solemnly in silence for over four minutes adds yet another interpretive layer to Cage's experiment, asking us to consider the performative avant-garde as a domain fit not only for rarified classical and art house audiences but for everyone and anyone.

Also, despite their seriousness, NPR reminds us that Dead Territory's take is "[another](#) in a [long line](#) of [4'33" performances](#) that understand Cage had a sense of humor while expanding our musical universe." Cage happily gave his experiments to the world to adapt and improvise as it sees fit, and—as we see in [his own performance of 4'33" in Harvard Square](#)—he was happy to make his own changes to silence as well.

Related Content:

[John Cage Performs His Avant-Garde Piano Piece 4'33" ... in 1'22" \(Harvard Square, 1973\)](#)

[See the Curious Score for John Cage's "Silent" Zen Composition 4'33"](#)

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