

= Speechless (Fred Frith album) =

Speechless is a 1981 solo album by English guitarist , composer and improviser Fred Frith of the group Henry Cow . It was Frith 's third solo album , and was originally released in the United States on LP record on The Residents ' Ralph record label . It was the second of three solo albums Frith made for the label .

Speechless was recorded in France , Switzerland and the United States , and featured Frith with French Rock in Opposition group Etron Fou Leloublan on the first side of the LP , and Frith 's New York City band Massacre on the second . It is mostly a studio album with extracts from a Massacre concert mixed into four of the tracks on side two of the LP .

Speechless has been described as a mixture of folk music , free improvisation , avant @-@ rock and noise . AllMusic said that it is often regarded as one of Frith 's best solo albums .

= = Background and recording = =

Speechless was the second of a series of three solo albums Frith made for The Residents 's record label Ralph Records , the first being Gravity (1980) , an avant @-@ garde " dance " record that drew on rhythm and dance from folk music across the world , and the third being Cheap at Half the Price (1983) . He had recorded with The Residents in the late 1970s and early 1980s , and appeared on several of their albums . Gravity was well received by music critics .

Just as he had worked with two backing bands on Gravity (Swedish Rock in Opposition group Samla Mammass Manna and United States progressive rock group The Muffins) , on Speechless Frith used French Rock in Opposition group Etron Fou Leloublan and his own New York City band Massacre . Side one of the LP record was recorded with Etron Fou Leloublan at Studio Freeson in Pujaut , France and at Sunrise Studios , Kirchberg , Switzerland in July and August 1980 . Side two of the LP consists of four tracks built around extracts from a Massacre concert at CBGB in New York City in April 1980 : " A Spit in the Ocean " , " Navajo " and " Saving Grace " were later altered and added to by Frith at Sunrise Studios in July and August 1980 , while " Conversations With White Arc " is an unaltered improvised piece . The remaining four tracks of side two were recorded by Frith at Sunrise during the same period .

On Speechless , Frith continued his exploration of world folk and dance music that he had begun on Gravity , but unlike Gravity , Speechless included extensive use of found sounds and field recordings . Frith said that many of the tapes were made while walking the streets of New York City , and include street fairs and demonstrations . Recordings were also made while visiting friends : the title song 's rhythm track is provided by a malfunctioning water pipe in Tim Hodgkinson 's kitchen .

At the time Frith had a passion for tape manipulation and " sound malfunctions " . In a 1982 interview with Down Beat magazine Frith said that so much more can be done with tape : " I 'm interested in using the studio for things that you couldn 't possibly do in a performance , to use the medium of tape in a way that is intrinsic to it . " He added that hardware malfunctions often result in more interesting sounds than was originally intended : " [A] lot of the sounds that I get in the studio have been specifically the result of overloading or causing to malfunction various pieces of technology , like harmonizers or digital delays . "

Frith described the theme of Speechless as revolving around " questions of power and language , of striving to find a voice but remaining always on the edge being understood . " This notion came to him when he once tried to listen to a recording of an interview he had done , and the cassette machine played back both sides of the tape at the same time , backwards , rendering the words unintelligible . Andrew Jones wrote in Plunderphonics , ' pataphysics & pop mechanics : an introduction to musique actuelle that Speechless is " ultimately about being unable to articulate the words that once flowed freely . "

= = Music = =

Speechless is an instrumental album that includes elements of folk music , free improvisation ,

avant @-@ rock and noise , plus field recordings and tape manipulation . Featured are also many " happy accidents " that resulted from " sound malfunctions " in the studio . The tracks on the album vary from folk and melodic pieces (including the waltz ballad " Domaine de Planousset ") , to noisy avant @-@ rock (" A Spit in the Ocean ") , to layered sound collages (" Speechless ") .

Glenn Astarita at Jazz Review said that the listener can expect " the unexpected , amid pounding backbeats , variable rhythmic flows , and multihued soundscapes . " Peter Marsh at BBC Music described the music as being an " unholy alliance " between Captain Beefheart 's Magic Band and King Crimson .

= = Reception and influence = =

Rock critic Peter Marsh , in a BBC Music review , described Speechless as " beautifully progressive musicmaking that doesn 't take itself too seriously . " Glenn Astarita at Jazz Review said the album was " highly recommended " , adding that " Frith ? s off @-@ kilter methodologies translate into a fun @-@ filled production , awash with a cartoon @-@ like rationale . " Tom Schulte at AllMusic wrote that Speechless is often regarded as one of Frith 's best solo albums , and that its " inspired manipulations hold up under repeated scrutiny . "

The waltz ballad " Domaine de Planousset " was performed live by Frith several times , including at the 4th Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville in Victoriaville in Quebec , Canada with René Lussier in October 1986 , and at the Bahnhof Langendreer in Bochum , Germany with Frith 's band , Keep the Dog in mid @-@ 1991 . The performance with Lussier was released as " Domaine Revisited " on Nous Autres in 1987 , and the performance with Keep the Dog was released as " Domaine de Langendreer " on That House We Lived In in 2003 . " Conversations With White Arc " was revisited on Massacre 's 1998 album , Funny Valentine as " Further Conversations With White Arc " .

= = Track listing = =

All tracks composed by Fred Frith except where noted .

= = = Original 1981 release = = =

= = = 1991 CD re @-@ issue bonus tracks = = =

= = Personnel = =

= = = Side One = = =

Fred Frith ? guitar , violin , mellotron , organ and bass guitar (track 1) , voice (track 3)

Etron Fou Leloublan :

Guigou Chenevier ? drums , tenor saxophone and voice (track 3)

Bernard Mathieu ? soprano and tenor saxophones , voice (track 3)

Ferdinand Richard ? bass , guimbarde , voice

Jo Thirion ? organ , harmonium

Guests

Tina Curran ? recorders , unusual edits

Roger Kent Parsons ? bagpipes (track 4)

Bob Ostertag ? field tape recordings

Production

Recorded at Studio Freeson , Pujaut , France and at Sunrise Studios , Kirchberg , Switzerland in

July and August 1980 .

Francois Riether ? engineer (France)

Etienne Conod ? engineer (Switzerland)

Robert Vogel ? engineer (Switzerland)

= = = Side Two = = =

Fred Frith ? guitar , violin , keyboards , bass guitar (tracks 3 @,@ 5 @,@ 8) , drums (tracks 2 @,@ 3) , voice

Massacre :

Bill Laswell ? bass guitar

Fred Maher ? drums

Guests

Steve Buchanan ? snake saxophone (track 2)

George Cartwright ? alto saxophone (tracks 1 @,@ 2 @,@ 4)

Mars Williams ? baritone saxophone (tracks 1 @,@ 2 @,@ 4)

Tina Curran ? recorders , bass guitar (tracks 2 @,@ 7)

Production

Recorded at Sunrise Studios , Kirchberg , Switzerland in July and August , 1980 . Tracks 1 , 4 and the end of track 2 were recorded live at a Massacre concert at CBGB in New York City , April 1980 , and were later altered and added to in Switzerland ; track 6 is an unaltered improvised piece from the same concert .

Charlie Martin ? engineer (USA)

Etienne Conod ? engineer (Switzerland)

Robert Vogel ? engineer (Switzerland)

= = = Bonus tracks on 1991 CD re @-@ issue = = =

Fred Frith ? guitar , bass guitar , keyboards , tapes (tracks 14 @,@ 17) , drums (track 16) , noise (track 16) , voice (track 17 @,@ 18) , homemades (track 18) , effects (track 19)

Bill Laswell ? bass guitar (track 15)

Fred Maher ? drums (track 15)

Tina Curran ? voice (track 16)

Steve Kretzmer ? drums (track 17)

Tetsuto Koyama ? bass guitar (track 19)

Miyamoto ? drums (track 19)

Masami Shinoda ? alto saxophone (track 19)

Chie Mukai ? kokyū (track 19)

Kenichi Takeda ? taisho koto (track 19)

Keiji Haino ? voice (track 19)

Tenko Ueno ? voice (track 19)

Recording

Track 14 is a tape collage of Henry Cow 's entire discography prepared by Frith for Morgan Fisher 's 1980 Miniatures compilation album ; it contains a portion of every track recorded by the band and was assembled by Frith in New York City and KUNM , Albuquerque , New Mexico in 1980 according to a strict mathematical system .

Track 15 was recorded with Massacre live at Rue Dunois , Paris in 1981 and at home in New York City .

Track 16 is from Elliott Sharp 's State of the Union compilation , recorded at home in New York City , 1982 .

Track 17 is from a record @-@ by @-@ mail project with Steve Gore for his LP Ridin ' on a Bummer , recorded at home , 1983 .

Track 18 is from the Japanese compilation Sound Cosmodel , recorded at home , 1982 .

Track 19 is from the Japanese compilation Welcome to Dreamland , collated from the other songs on that record at Studio Dig , Tokyo , February 1985 .

= = = Artwork = = =

Tina Curran (Frith 's wife at the time) ? album cover artwork on the original LP record

= = CD reissues = =

In 1991 East Side Digital and RecRec Music re @-@ issued Speechless on CD with six additional tracks . In 2003 Fred Records issued a remastered version of the original Speechless LP on CD with no extra tracks .