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Music innovator uses all he has

■ Ela Lambin incorporates a variety of objects, instruments and physical properties to create his eclectic sounds

By Jonathan Allen
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Take a four-foot long drum. Panel it with mirrors on the inside, and tell someone to put their head inside the opposite end.

Close a small door at the end — capturing the person's head inside a wall of mirrors surrounded by the drum — and what you get is a kind of sculpture-instrument that Ela Lambin has invented, taking the ideas of self-sufficiency and musical production to an entirely new pitch.

Lambin, 28, made this 'drum' when he was 17 years old at the Atlanta College of Art and is closing in on a collection of 100 different types of sculpture instruments.

"When I went away to college and enrolled in the sculpture program, I kind of just started making things," Lambin said. "I realized that things I made that weren't supposed to be instruments ended up being good instruments."

Lambin, a native of southern Oregon near Williams, said that he even made a mobile once for a friend that had a moon and a sun with rays hanging from it. They found out that you could pluck the different rays of the sun, and it made a wonderful sound.

But Lambin, who was home-schooled before attending college in Atlanta, has learned that it takes a great deal of time with each instrument to learn how it wants to be played. He no longer has the mirror-drum, but he still has one that he made when he was 18 — a flower arrangement of sawed off nitrogen tanks at different lengths. He stands in the middle of the tanks and makes music by striking them with mallets.

"That one I've been playing for the longest," Lambin said. "The neat thing is the instrument teaches me things ... I learn from it how it wants to be played." Lambin also researches the physics involved and learns "things about the physical properties about how the instrument works."

As if fusing sculpture with music isn't pioneering enough, Ela has teamed up with his wife, Leah Mann, to create a new form of musical production that they call "Lelavision."

Lelavision's Web site explains, "The name of the group is more than a play on the names of the founders; derived from two Sanskrit terms meaning 'creation' and 'creative spark,' with inferences to 'play'; it denotes the spirit of the performance group."

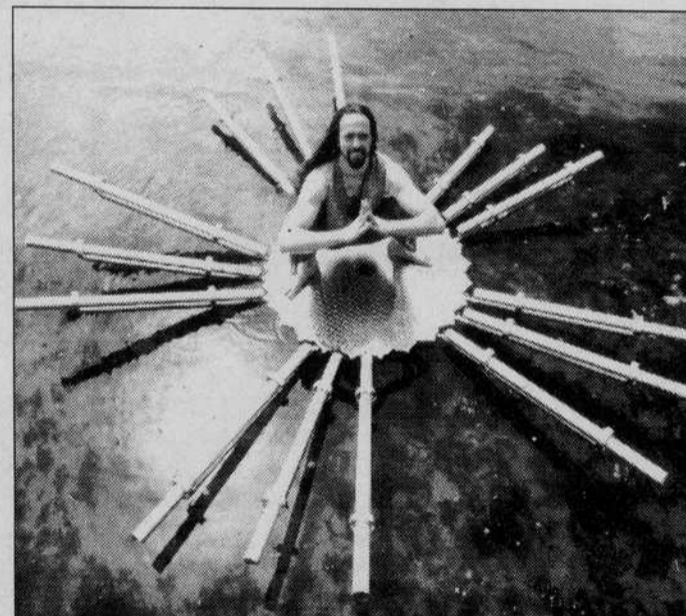
And the group is even more than Lambin's creations and the creative spark that engineers them. It is also a fusion of dance and music, creating a production that is one of a kind.

"Before meeting Ela, I'd only done traditional musician-dancer relationships where the musician was off to the side, and I was dancing to music," Mann said. "Then Ela and I started playing with 'What if the musician was actually on stage?'"

Mann started her own dance company in Atlanta called "Moving in the Spirit," which is still run by a friend there and has extended to an urban outreach program that teaches dance to urban youths. Mann and Lambin met while in college in a yoga class and their two artistic forms have blended together to create Lelavision.

"When we moved out here and got married, we started really trying to combine our two forms," Lambin said. "The dance is making the music. We're trying to combine them so that we're both dancing and playing the instruments at the same time."

One instrument that Lambin calls "Singing Stones" is composed of more than 100 river rocks suspended from music wire with three to four stones per wire.



(above) Cutline goes here and must be at least three quarters of the photograph long. (below) Santa Claus leaps to his death off the roof of Gateway Mall.

They hang up in an arch, which looks like a rainbow of stones, and the wires all go up to a sound box near the ceiling. The arch is 20 feet across and the longest string raises 17 feet.

Like the nitrogen tanks, "Singing Stones" is performed with a combination of dance and the instrument. It becomes a kind of dance of the hands in this case, with each gesture ringing new sound to the audience.

Another new instrument is one where Lambin and Mann bounce up and down on bungee cords,

with a drum kit in the air and snare drums on the ground.

"Things like that sort of allow you and the instruments to be the entire landscape of the stage," Mann said. She also said that they do a great dance piece within that performance.

Lambin's creative desire to sculpt instruments is at the heart of his performances, and both he and Mann express a great desire to teach others the value of making things with your own hands. They are actively involved in teaching people how to make instruments and use their artistic abilities.

"I'm a real believer in making things, in actually forming things with my own hands," Lambin said. "That's why I try to teach others because it's real important to make things with your own hands. That's the magic of making something yourself. It's going to be completely unique due to the fact that you made it with your own two hands."

"Our performance work is a big intention toward community," Mann said. "Our focus is to teach people about creative problem solving to art. You don't have to be a consumer necessarily to solve a problem. It can be created

out of your own inventiveness."

Lambin was at early July's Oregon Country Fair with a piece he calls "Stamen Phone," which he made in college and has been playing for 10 years. He and Mann don't have any Eugene plans before next year's Country Fair, but they do several shows in Seattle and are open to people coming to visit the studio and play with whatever instruments are set up. Lelavision can be reached at (206) 329-3724, or you can check out their Web site at www.lelavision.com.

At The Movies: reviews of new films

"Nutty Professor II: The Klumps" — This sequel to Eddie Murphy's monster 1996 hit is one big fat mess, and that has nothing to do with the oversized girth of its main characters. What weighs this movie down is weak storyline and juvenile, crude humor.

Unlike the first "Nutty Professor," the follow-up is charmless and even boring. Although Murphy turns in hilarious performances as various members of the Klump family, it's not enough to carry the

movie. And Janet Jackson, who plays the fiancée of obese scientist Sherman Klump, adds nothing except pretty scenery. PG-13.

"Wonderland" — A gray, damp London fills the screen in "Wonderland," the Michael Winterbottom movie that may be less ironically titled than it seems. There's no disputing the often sorrowful, sad lives of its characters, starting with the three sisters at its center. But without a trace of sentimentality, the film dares to hint at an in-

nate decency in people that can survive any amount of drear, even if it comes expressed in nothing more dramatic than the quintessentially English offer of "cheese on toast." The talented cast charges up the most potentially mundane of moments. Special credit to Gina McKee ("Notting Hill"), here playing a loveless woman who, the script suggests at the end, may just have struck it lucky. R.

Associated Press

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