

Pulse Emitter



Bring On the Noise

Eugene NoiseFest brings unexpected sounds to downtown.

Car horns and alarms, ringing cell-phones, barking dogs, music blaring from car windows: Noise permeates our urban lives. From June 16-18, DIVA will host the Eugene NoiseFest, which raises this question: Why would you pay money — not much money, to be sure, but still — to hear ... more noise?

Noise music is a catchall term that encompasses a range of sounds, from the descendants of industrial rockers like Art of Noise or Throbbing Gristle to free jazz to avant electronica — any music that uses unexpected and/or discordant sound sources. But its roots extend back a century to the Italian Futurist painter/polemicist Luigi Russolo, who contended that the inescapable clangor of industrial society had broadened our sense of what music can be.

In 1914, he staged a concert that horrified the audience by using an orchestra of noise-makers. But the real progenitor of noise was the French composer Edgard Varese, who saw that Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* had opened up new sonic possibilities for what he called "organized sound." Varese's percussion pieces directly influenced Lou Harrison and John Cage in 1930s San Francisco, leading to their famous "junkyard percussion" ensembles of tuned flowerpots, brake drums and other instruments.

Cage then took the concept farther, writing pieces that combined sources like recordings, random radio stations and percussion to make sonic tapestries. Cage's experiments were picked up by European composers such as Pierre Schaeffer (who called his tape-generated sounds "musique concrète") and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and later, Japanese noise artists. Punk rockers, the Velvet Underground and its New York avant garde predecessors and other musicians welcomed the new sonic possibilities. Today an underground noise music scene extends around the world.

Noise music has found a Eugene home at DIVA over the past year or so, and this month's festival will include more than a dozen artists from Los Angeles, Vancouver and points betwixt (including Eugene's Warning Broken Machine and more), as well as video art. Portland's Pulse Emitter uses old

modular synthesizers to produce murky soundscapes, while View uses old electronic medical equipment to generate sounds.

Some of the performers are teenage girls, which shows the breadth of the movement. Not all the sounds will be harsh — some are relatively ear-friendly sonic tapestries — but they do emerge from unexpected sources, making NoiseFest an opportunity to stretch your musical horizons.

Another source for new sounds in Eugene is the University of Oregon. Some of the school's irrepressible, forward-looking music students have created the Eugene Contemporary Chamber Ensemble to play contemporary and 20th century music, including works by UO student composers. This last show of the season, 1:30 pm on June 10 in Beall Hall, features a major work by today's leading living composer, John Adams.

"Gnarly Buttons" is an utterly delightful romp for clarinet, which was Adams' instrument as a child and teenager, and chamber orchestra. It draws on his memories of his father (a swing clarinetist), shape note hymns, folk tunes (its hoe-down movement includes banjo, mandolin and guitar and samplers that play accordion and cow) and more.

The concert also includes the world premiere of Luke Carlson's "Eternal Horizon" for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion and piano. Music by the influential early 20th century composer Anton von Webern, Alfred Schnittke, one of Europe's most important postwar composers, and a 1986 wind quintet by Montana-based composer David Maslanka round out the program. None of these pieces are easy to play though they're all easy to listen to, and I applaud these intrepid UO students for bringing some of today's most fascinating sounds to Eugene's ears.

World music fans have been spoiled with good Indian music this spring. On June 14 the Dharmalaya Meditation Center (a sustainable straw bale building at 356 Horn Lane) brings the Mishras, a prominent father-and-son sitar and vocal duo from Benares, to play classical Indian ragas, accompanied by tabla and tamboura. Bring a pillow, a donation and a meditative spirit.

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