

NOIZEMASCHIN!! : A NEW MODEL OF LIVE PERFORMANCE IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA FROM 2011 TO THE PRESENT DAY

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents the creation of the experimental concert series Noizemaschin!!, and the emergent model of live performance on which the series was built. Noizemaschin!! was created in response to the lack of a regular experimental music night in Perth, utilising an innovative format that emphasized variety. In an attempt to stand out from the existing culture of experimental music, and experimental music performance, Noizemaschin!! billed itself as a noise gig, and reinforced this with a unique approach to curation, format, and community engagement. With Noizemaschin!! celebrating its fourth birth-a-versary in 2015, this paper concludes with a discussion of the role we hope Noizemaschin!! will play in Perth's experimental music future.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to document the how, what and why of the experimental concert series Noizemaschin!! The central conceit of this series was to celebrate noise, not only as a sound quality, but as an idea from which we could build a philosophy for live music. This shaped a unique model of live performance, initiated at Noizemaschin!! #1 and continuing largely unchanged to the present day.

In July 2011, the experimental music scene in Perth was changing. Popular experimental series The Ambassador From Everywhere had ceased its activities a year earlier (TURA New Music, 2010) while TURA New Music's Club Zoo, which had been running for 11 years at that stage, reduced its concerts from eight in 2009, to five in 2010, and just four in 2011 (TURA New Music(2), 2010). Meanwhile, Claire Pannell's (aka Furchick) new series Analogue to Digital had a strong following but was far from a regular event¹ (Hey Event, 2010). While Perth was far from suffering a vacuum of experimental concerts, no series was a regular, dependable presence.

SKoT McDonald and I saw potential for a monthly music series to fill some of the space around these more 'concert orientated' experiences. In doing so, we knew that Noizemaschin!! needed to be unique, offering something different to the established concert format. But most of all we wanted to allow artists an opportunity to experiment, to try out new ideas in a public setting, but most importantly to *do*.

Embracing The Artifactory's DIY philosophy of "Don't think. Make.", we organised the first Noizemaschin!! concert for the 10th of July, 2011. The lineup featured myself, Mitchell Mollison, Salamander, Chris Arnold, Hmm Dpt, Michael Terren, Henry Andersen, and I.n0jaQ. Noizemaschin!! will celebrate its fourth birth-a-versary in July 2015, and in recognition of this milestone, this paper is an attempt to summarise how Noizemaschin!! came to be and why it is the way it is.

2. THE NAME AND SOUND: WHY 'NOIZEMASCHIN!!'?

The Noizemaschin!! name was a spontaneous decision by SKoT McDonald and myself, literally arising from a case of "ok so we have decided to put on a gig, what the hell are we going to call it". In keeping with the spirit of the series, the title Noizemaschin!! was created and decided upon in the space of about fifteen seconds. The name has a different significance, depending on who you ask.

For SKoT, Noizemaschin!! holds a conceptual link to a manifesto he wrote years earlier with Steve Baker entitled "Tekno Machin Manifesto". The manifesto was a wry parody of the electro-punk bands that were popular in Shoreditch, London at the time (2006). The manifesto details a proposed top-down approach to music making, emphasising non-musical design first - the branding, visual and theatre - and the music last.

*In order of start and completion: (each stage
must be completed before the next is attempted)
Design Tekno Machin Logo*

¹ Between March 2010 to January 2012, seven instalments in the series took place.

Band member stage characters to be dreamt up
A stage presence/set, performance, and uniforms will be designed and created
On-stage dance moves and band member interaction to be loosely scripted
A list of song titles is to be created
Music Video storyboarded
Songs are to be DESIGNED so far as style and overall feel, but no actual notes or lyrics written
A website extolling virtues of Tekno Machin is to be launched
A gig is to be booked (Note! MUST be before songs written! If demo needed, write minimal set of sets required!). Ideally, in some Shoreditch dive that deserves it.
Songs are actually written. Preferably no more than 1 week before gig.
Implications: songs+performance must work around band members' suite of dance moves and allowed interactions.
The Gig is performed.

(McDonald, 2015)

For me, the title Noizemaschin!! appealed for its directness and refusal to be serious. The name fuses a more onomatopoeic spelling of noise with the flagrantly incorrect spelling of the word 'machine'. The title itself, always with two exclamation points at the end, brands the series as a noise gig and yet retains a sense of irreverence. The illusion to a machine, or may parts working together to create a functional whole, is an allusion to the unique format of a Noizemaschin!! concert.



Image 1. Sam Gillies and Mitchell Mollison perform at Noizemaschin!! #3.

The decision to brand Noizemaschin!! as a noise gig came from a desire to create something different. Gigs that specifically declare themselves as noise-orientated are rare in Perth, and so initially this was a way to differentiate ourselves from other experimental music concerts. But more than that, by adopting noise as the main descriptor, instead of experimental, we are providing a different prompt to the artists we program, eschewing any preconceived ideas that may come with the label 'experimental' in favour of the less well worn preconceptions that come with the label 'noise'.

The term noise is a controversial one. Most commonly the term is used to describe the acoustic phenomenon of a significantly complex sound, approaching the spectrum of white noise (Bohn, 2015). Most music readily accepted as part of the genre of noise music deals with this sound world. While Noizemaschin!! certainly caters for this kind of music, other ideas of noise were equally influential on the series, and helped to redefine for us what a noise concert could be.

Noise is most commonly defined by its relationship to music. Attali articulated this relationship in his 1971 text *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*.

All music can be defined as noise given form according to a code ... that is theoretically knowable by the listener. (Attali, 1985, 25)

For Attali, sound that fulfils a commonly accepted code is interpreted as music, while sound that exists outside of a musical code is regarded as noise. Thus we can think of the idea of noise as representing a negative space, a larger, collective term for music that exists outside of the sphere of convention. As described by Paul Hegarty:

Noise is negative: it is unwanted, other, not something ordered. It is negatively defined - ie by what it is not (not acceptable sound, not music, not valid, not a message or a meaning), but it is also a negativity. In other words, it does not exist independently, as it exists only in relation to what it is not. (Hegarty, 2008, 5)

In this way, Noizemaschin!!! wants to occupy this negative space. We don't care what genre or style a performer associates with, at Noizemaschin!! we provide a space that encourages the artist to explore the negative space of their own music.

3. THE VENUE: THE ARTIFACTORY

On the 16th of June 2011, myself and Mitchell Mollison were booked to perform as Brain Full Of Light at Manhattans in Victoria Park. Manhattans is gone now, having since been converted to a cafe or something similarly genteel. Due to a combination of no promotion by the venue, the gig taking place during the university exam period, and Manhattans being notoriously poorly positioned for walk-ins, we performed to an empty room that night.

During our performance the sound technician was wandering throughout the venue, constantly checking how loud the performance was. He would check his device and continually reduce the volume of our performance. By the end of the set we were so soft we could barely distinguish our performance from the sound of the traffic outside - a far cry away from the volume that noise music should be listened to. We spoke to the sound technician about this, and he explained that the neighbours had been complaining about the noise levels for the past few months, and that the venue now had to obey very strict sound restrictions.

Now this restriction wasn't necessarily Manhattans' fault, but it exemplifies the kind of restrictions we were keen to avoid. At the time, I had started to give some serious thought to starting up a gig series for noise, but the venue would have to be flexible enough to meet the requirements of the music. This performance at Manhattans helped me to figure out exactly what I didn't want in a venue. If we wanted to program artists that performed at a dangerously loud volume, then we needed to be able to do that.² I was discussing these concerns with SKoT McDonald a week or so later when he suggested The Artifactory as a venue.

SKoT was instrumental in founding the Perth Artifactory, a membership funded hackerspace dedicated to providing a place where people with an interest in technology can come together to work on projects, share ideas and socialize (The Artifactory, 2015). The Artifactory had recently relocated from a shed in Mount Lawley to a warehouse in Osbourne Park, and was now large enough to host a gig and flexible enough to change to fit the requirements of the sets and the size of the audience. More importantly, we had no neighbours to elicit complaints and we could operate how we wanted, within the confines of the law and occupational health and safety.

The space is perhaps best described by Gail Priest in her review for Noizemaschin!! #3:

The venue, The Artifactory, is itself pretty interesting, a warehouse full of gadgets, calling itself a hackerspace - a membership based collective of nerds, noodlers and geeks exploring all manner of electrical wizardry out in the suburbs. (Priest, 2011)

This setting proved extremely useful for a gig series with no budget - on more than one occasion SKoT was found frantically re-soldering audio cables 30 minutes from showtime so that the PA system would work. It was this DIY attitude that proved so important in getting Noizemaschin!! to where it is today.

The Artifactory was not initially set up for concerts, and so, for much of the first year, performers were setting up amongst the work benches and oscilloscopes, with minimal foldback facilities. For the third concert, as part of the 2011 Totally Huge New Music Festival, we were able to borrow a bass amp, which was eventually replaced several shows later by a subwoofer. The speakers themselves were gradually upgraded, and later rebuilt from scratch for the space, by members of The Artifactory. By mid-2012, The Artifactory membership had constructed a stage in the corner of the warehouse, establishing a permanent performance area. We were able to leave the days of performing amongst work benches behind us.

That The Artifactory was open to any form of performance an artist could dream up allowed for collaborations and unique projects that could not take place in any other venue. Noizemaschin!!'s ongoing collaboration with Optic Nerve's laser show has proved

to be a favourite of regular attendees. The flexibility of the space allows Optic Nerve to rig his lasers in any way he sees fit (that still obeys occupational health and safety codes). Past concerts have projected complex lattices of laser light, while others have reflected beams from the roof to create a sort of searchlight motif, allowing for a unique interaction between sight and sound.



Image 2. Chris Cobilis performs at Noizemaschin!! #12.

Similarly, we were able to host Adam Brown's *Taybull* project, a musical collaboration with carpenter Jiah Fishend. As Jiah builds a table live in front of an audience, the sound is manipulated by Brown and converted into a live performance. One would struggle to think of a more perfect performance piece for a hackerspace, and is the sort of idea that would struggle to find a place to be performed anywhere less comfortable with power tools than The Artifactory.

We never wanted Noizemaschin!! to be exclusively for one kind of experimental music or group of people, and by setting the series at The Artifactory, it seemed that we had found some neutral turf. The goings on of the hackerspace were not inherently related to music, rather we found that music was something that could take place amongst this electrical wizardry. Diversity was key, and achieving this required a unique approach to the format of Noizemaschin!!

4. THE FORMAT: SHORT, SHARP, LOTS OF VARIETY

In creating Noizemaschin!! we wanted to create a concert experience unique to us. There were two main concerns. Firstly, that the program should be as diverse as possible, open to any approach to the idea of noise, and secondly, that we could get back to the idea of experimental music being experimental, providing a space that would encourage performers to take risks and to try things out in a low pressure environment. Ultimately both of these concerns gave rise to Noizemaschin!!'s unique concert format.

In 2010, Australian experimental label Room40 released a promotional album entitled 10 (Various Artists, 10). The album collected short snippets of larger tracks,

² Of course earplugs are always provided in such instances, we're not sadists.

ranging from 27 seconds to five and a half minutes. These tracks seamlessly segued from one to another creating an immersive, uninterrupted, and incredibly varied listening experience. Each track could be listened to on its own, but together they created a holistic listening experience that never got dull. If you didn't like a track it'd be over shortly, replaced with something else that you might like instead. It was this experience, as much as a general desire to break from the 20-30 minute set format, that I wanted to channel into Noizemaschin!!



Image 3. Optic Nerve's live laser show during Noizemaschin!! #49. Photo courtesy of Trilby Temperley.

SKoT and I discussed this idea and came to the conclusion that we would attempt to pack 8 artists onto a bill for sets of 5-10 minutes. Each artist would have to transition into one another's performance, and there would be an interval for artist changeovers. This also had the effect of removing any sense of there being a 'headliner' from the concert. Artists are thanked and credited in one go, and applause is saved for the end of each half. This was a deliberate choice to ensure that, as important as the artists are for a Noizemaschin!! concert, the overall result is a shared experience.

Having such short sets had several unintended effects. Firstly, more established experimental artists, comfortable with the standard 20-30 minute sets of other concert programs, had to consider how they would work within this unique time restriction. Initially we expected that they might struggle to condense their performances into the time frame. However, many responded positively to the time restriction, enjoying the more relaxed vibe which often resulted in, in my opinion at least, a much tighter set.

The lack of pressure to fill a standard performance slot helped to encourage acts that did not necessarily identify as 'noise' artists to be involved and create something unique for Noizemaschin!! Alongside noise artists such as Sub Ordnance, Cat Hope, Furchick and Lee Yorish, we programmed shoegaze rockers Diöde, electronic pop artist Kučka, hip hop artist The Boost Hero

Man, and guitarist Axel Carrington, amongst many others. To this day we have never said no to an artist that has asked to perform, regardless of their musical focus, although some have had to wait a bit for an open performance slot to become available. Noizemaschin!! always strives for a diverse and eclectic program that fits within the extremes of music style, and short sets have seemed to encourage artists that toiled at the fringe of their genres to perform and experiment.

Shorter sets also provided a way for artists who hadn't performed in a while, or who had fallen out of the Perth music scene, to reengage with live performance. Music makers who were intimidated at, or simply disinterested in, the prospect of trying to organise full length sets for gigs at existing Perth night spots were often more interested in performing at Noizemaschin!! With less pressure to fill time, artists were able to reengage with live performance and the experimental music community. What this ultimately means is that by having shorter sets we were able to foster an environment for artists to experiment. The notion of what experimental music is or should be is a contentious one, and will largely differ from person to person. In the words of John Cage:

What is the nature of an experimental action? It is simply an action the outcome of which is not foreseen. It is therefore very useful if one has decided that sounds are to come into their own, rather than being exploited to express sentiments or ideas of order. (Cage, 1961, 69)

More contemporarily, AllMusic defines experimental music as:

Experimental Music is a general label for any music that pushes existing boundaries and genre definitions ... when a musician or composer's approach is a hybrid of disparate styles, or incorporates unorthodox, new, distinctly unique ingredients, the music could be classified as experimental. (AllMusic, 2015)

Regardless of how you define it, by having shorter sets Noizemaschin!! provided an opportunity to take risks. If an artist has an idea, instrument, or project they want to experiment with in a live setting, a 5-10 minute set provides them with the perfect window of opportunity to realise this idea and develop their practice. This openness to risk was something I was not finding at many other gigs in Perth at the time, and given it's partnership with The Artifactory, it was something we felt Noizemaschin!! was perfectly positioned to provide.

Finally, SKoT and I decided that the series should be a monthly event. We set the regular date (although this is subject to change) of the final Tuesday of every month. Monthly, Tuesday evening concerts were once the domain of TURA New Music's Club Zho. However, in 2011 this no longer seemed to be a recognisable pattern and so it was adopted by Noizemaschin!!



Image 4. A hastily thrown together promotional poster for Noizemaschin!! #3 in association with TURA New Music for the Totally Huge New Music Festival 2011. Disseminated via the internet.

The reason for making the series monthly was two fold. Firstly, it reinforced the importance of experimentation. By ensuring we had 12 concerts a year we could provide more opportunities to performers to try out ideas. The more opportunities there are to perform, the less important any single performance is and the more inclined they are to feel comfortable experimenting and taking risks.

Secondly, we wanted to grow Noizemaschin!! organically, and we believed that the best way to build an audience, without a heavy investment in a marketing plan that may or may not work, was to provide an excellent product on a regular basis. When the audience knows that Noizemaschin!! happens once a month without fail, then that is less energy that we need to spend reminding interested people that Noizemaschin!! was happening once a month without fail. To this day we run a minimal marketing campaign, usually just a facebook event coordinated from our opt-in facebook group, although we have received coverage by other sources such as the TURA newsletter and RTRFM's Difficult Listening program.

5. THE ORGANISATION: BEHIND THE SHOW

Noizemaschin!! isn't here to make money for myself or SKoT McDonald and it's not a viable model for artists to earn an income. This is something we accepted up front. The central idea of Noizemaschin!! is that of community, people perform because they want to perform and organisers organise the event because they want the show

to happen. With a firmly DIY aesthetic, we approach Noizemaschin!! with the philosophy that it exists because the people involved want it to exist, and that those involved can use the series to get something from it other than money. This is something that all performers are informed of when they first approach us wanting to perform.

The Artifactory itself is a non-profit organisation that is entirely membership funded. An evening that a Noizemaschin!! concert takes places is an evening that the space is not available to Artifactory members that are paying to keep the space alive. In recognition of this, there is a ticket price of \$10 and all money taken from tickets and bar sales go back to the space to cover the rent and utilities for the evening, with leftover funds going towards upkeep. This is effectively the same model used for The Artifactory's workshops and design evenings wherein non-members pay a small fee to be involved with the space.

The issue of artist compensation was an issue we struggled with in conceiving Noizemaschin!! The prevailing models of artist compensation for a performance is largely based around the value of a conventional performance lasting 20-30 minute with, say, a maximum of four acts. The Noizemaschin!! format consists of eight artists performing 5-10 minutes sets, and, once we cover the costs of putting on the show, the door takings are reliably reduced to almost nothing. Ultimately, we decided to reimburse the artists in two ways.



Image 5. The Artifactory 'bat-signal', used to demarcate the location of the Artifactory at the end of a poorly lit alleyway in Osborne Park.

The first was through the time honoured currency of alcohol, with each performing artist given two free drinks from the bar. Secondly, each concert is recorded, mixed and mastered, and made available as a free download at the Noizemaschin!! bandcamp page (Bandcamp, 2015). This is a payment-in-kind, with time and energy spent to provide a recorded document of their performance which can then be used however they wish.

Because Noizemaschin!! is intended to be a showcase for experimentation, we wanted to ensure that these performances were not lost once the concert was over. We believe that recording these concerts for posterity is essential for the experimental music scene in Perth to progress and evolve. Beyond being a positive service to the artists, these recordings are an important record of what we have achieved as a program. We have

recorded, mixed and mastered each and every Noizemaschin!! concert thusfar, and we make these recordings are readily available for stream or free download to anyone who wanted to hear them. To date, the Noizemaschin!! catalogue is approaching 370 individual recordings, with 37 concerts available in full at The Artifactory bandcamp page.



Image 6. The Perth Artifactory serves thirsty punters during intermission.

Ultimately, it is this understanding which has allowed for us to make Noizemaschin!! a monthly series. While some instalments will not make enough money from door sales or the bar to cover the cost of using the space for the evening, other events will, while others will bring about a small excess to offset our losses. This has allowed us to bypass financial concerns with running the series, as the space receives the compensation of the audience themselves, whatever the concerts success. This money in turn goes back into improving the space for future concerts and performers (and, of course, into repairing the occasional blown subwoofer).

6. CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE

As Noizemaschin!! celebrates it's fourth birth-a-versary, it's timely that we consider where we can go with this idea in the future. Fundamentally, we remain focused on providing an alternative outlet and venue for all makers of music outside of commercial venues.

Aside from the eclectic and varied concert programs, Noizemaschin!! has offered a three-month residency since Noizemaschin!! #7. The residency is open to applications at the end of the previous resident's term, and provides full access to The Artifactory, including its facilities, workshops and extensive community knowledge, as well as three guaranteed performance slots at the Noizemaschin!! concerts during the period. The residency was created to allow an artist to work on a single project over an extended period and to present the development of this project publicly. Previous residency recipients include Christopher de Groot, Nathan Thompson, Mace Francis, and Jean-Michel Maujean, and in the future we would like to extend this opportunity to an even more diverse range of music makers that might want to take on the opportunity to develop their practice in new and unique ways.

In the lead up to my own departure from the series in mid-2014, we made a conscious effort to extend the network of artists involved in the organisation and decision making of Noizemaschin!! This has been a positive step, ensuring a wider range of artists and musical styles are represented at Noizemaschin!!, while sharing the workload that goes into organising a concert,

hopefully making the organisation of the event more manageable for all involved.

This expanded Noizemaschin!! community has brought new music-related endeavours to The Artifactory. This includes regular DIY Modular Synthesizer workshops, hosted by Andrew Nonlinearcircuits and Nathan Thompson, new facilities such as a basic sound studio/rehearsal room, a MIDI-controlled lighting/effects rig, as well as workshops on instrument building and the construction of home studio sound baffles. We hope to attract new groups of creators to The Artifactory, and continue to facilitate opportunities for them to share their knowledge and experience with other, likeminded individuals.

Additionally, there has been talk of the possibility of assisting with the organisation of Noizemaschin!!-style concerts in other locations. Noizemaschin!! #51 launched a Mandurah chapter on the 23rd of September, 2015. The Mandurah event was organised by Rhys Channing, in consultation with the Noizemaschin!! organising committee, and made possible by funding courtesy of the Creative Mandurah Grant Program from the City of Mandurah and RDA Peel. This chapter looks to be less regular than the main Noizemaschin!! series, but seeks to bring a taste of experimentalism to a more regional setting. The next instalment is currently proposed to take place in February 2016 as part of the HUBBUB Festival and Perth Fringe Festival.

More recently, a London chapter of Noizemaschin!! was launched on the 3rd of November, 2015 at the Amersham Arms in New Cross, South East London. Breaking away from the found space locations of the Australian Noizemaschin!!'s, Noizemaschin!! London's pub setting explores the viability of this format outside of a DIY community. After the first instalment, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and unanimous in the view that the format of this series offered something unique to South East London, while facilitating valuable opportunities to experiment for the community of musicians, composers and artists.

As such, there is the possibility for Noizemaschin!! to act as an informal network for all weird music enthusiasts, providing advocacy for experimental music and the DIY music scene in Perth and beyond.

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