



PAUL RODRIGUEZ

SOUND IN SPACE 2

INTERVIEW BY DREW DENNY

"I expect them to quiver in their branches."

Lara Bank is a conceptual artist who collects wishes, creates black holes, and runs Sea and Space—a "place artwork" in Eagle Rock that will be hosting Sound in Space 2, a *billboard* of sound art events beginning February 5th and closing February 28th. Lara and two of her Sound in Space collaborators, Clay Chaplin and Aaron Drake, spoke to Drew Denny.

AD: Sound in Space started as a collaborative project between Clay Chaplin, Lara Bank, and Aaron Drake. The idea of the sound festival is to present a series of 13 events that branch out from the standard experimental music concert menu in order to provide an "anything goes" atmosphere for sound making. When the three of us get together to talk about how we'd like to organize the events, no idea or suggestion is unreasonable.

CC: Each concert or event has a theme, which range from an evening of standard laptop shenanigans to a Fluxus-inspired participatory sound event. Our goal is to provide an open and fun space for musicians, improvisers, and sound artists to present their work without too much interference in terms of proving their worthiness to a panel of curators.

LB: We also wanted to provide an additional space to the main performance space/gallery. Last year we had the idea of the Endurance Van where works were selected and presented in a passenger van in front of the gallery. This year we've kept the endurance idea and are presenting works inside a storage shed—the Endurance Shed. The motto for both the van and shed is "commitment through confinement"—that the works in some way are difficult to experience in a confined space. All events are free of charge and are at Sea and Space Explorations.

Are you sound artists? What kind of sounds do you make?

LB: I'm a conceptual artist. I use sound or any medium when it makes sense for the work.

AD: I'm a composer, sound artist and improviser—I'm a three-ring Venn Diagram—depending on the project, so the sounds follow. Recently I've been working with the weedy top ten on *Billboard*—sound manipulations and karaoke. I like the interplay between prerecorded and live performance.

CC: I'm a composer, improviser, sound and video artist, and recording engineer. Recently I've been playing around with manipulating field recordings in real time but I also like to use text and speech that is mangled beyond belief by a laptop. I'm working on a new piece that uses chroma-depth 3D videos—which should be fun—in combination with a structured improvisational score for the California Ear Unit.

When did you come up with the idea for Tree and Space and the Portable Forest?

LB: I started Tree and Space a year ago. I was trying to think of places for art besides a gallery. And why not have it be a tree? But the original tree died. I struggled with keeping it alive. In its first year a tree must establish itself and it's been tough getting enough water to the locations. I have planted two that have both died and I'm on my third location—that's where the Portable Forest comes in. It's much easier to care for trees locally in pots and just move them when need be. So the Portable Forest is an offshoot of that project that I started a few months ago. And so far I haven't lost anybody yet. At Tree and Space we have had Deborah Hay circle dances to '70s vinyl, wishes placed in the tree and graffiti on the plaque—not sponsored, but whatever. The Portable Forest has represented itself in an art exhibition recently with documentation of Tree and Space. For the Sound in Space Festival in February, they will stay here at Sea and Space and will travel sonically throughout the natural world. Hopefully that will be their favorite place. They will hear chainsaws and axes, fire, rain, the Amazon jungle, birdsongs, the beach, Pennsylvania elk mating calls, frogs, wolves, earthquakes, and so on.

How do you think your trees will react when they hear the sounds of chainsaws?

LB: I expect them to quiver in their branches.

Have you ever thought of trying to measure or record their reactions?

LB: No—because it's absurd and meant to be absurd. Trees don't have ears.

What's the story behind Sea and Space? Could you define your term "place artwork"?

LB: Sea and Space was no place and runs as a dream for me. I started the space to give a place to artists like me who really have no space in the commercial art world. The idea for "place artwork" came from this obsession with finding and giving a place for others, as I really could find none for myself without creating it from scratch. A "place artwork" is a place created or defined and maintained by an artist to be filled with the actions, ideas, or objects of others. The gallery I founded, Sea and Space, is such a place. So is Tree and Space. So is the Wish database online. I have been making these types of projects for years—I just never defined them as places. But that is what they are.

What are the political implications of such a place? What, if anything, are you critiquing? What are you promoting?

LB: The works critique how we use and define place. They question where art can be. They also complicate authorship by making the place a collaborator. I promote the projects and ideas of others and myself simultaneously. As for the political implications, they are social and personal which affects our political landscape subtly but still significantly on the local level.

How much of a personal investment is Sea and Space? How do you maintain it?

LB: Sea and Space is, as any artwork, an intense personal investment both in terms of time and money. We are going non-profit, but I have been paying out of pocket from my teaching salary—about \$12,000 a year to run this space. The space doesn't earn much. We get a bit of money in donations, about \$1200 a year. Thank you public! I hope to get grants in the future once we have our status. As it stands, I do the legwork and curatorial as the director. We have a board that is helping with more official business. The artists who show here really take a lot of the responsibility for their shows and they put a lot in terms of time and money as well without the hope of sales. So all of us are doing this to make this the kind of place that we want to exist and not for any monetary gain.

How does the space affect your work as an artist?

LB: Things have really started to blur together at times, as I am thinking of space creation, maintenance, and promotion as a large part of my art. As objects, some of my work has started to look like documentation these days. Which is fine. For example, I am showing all the Tree and Space photo documentation and bringing the Portable Forest for a group show at Woodbury Hollywood Exhibitions in March.

You often work with circuitry, sensors, LEDs and computer programs. Besides being an artist, teacher, and gallery director, are you an electronics engineer and computer programmer? What advice would you give to other artists who'd like to learn such skills?

LB: I dabble in just about anything I need to know to do a project. I'm an expert in nothing, but knowledgeable about many things. If I don't know something, I learn it or find someone who can show me. Really you just have to believe that you can learn or do whatever you need to do, and if you can't, you compromise a bit or try to get help.

Which of your projects was the most technically difficult?

LB: I tried to build this laser trip sensor once. It was kind of a disaster. I swore I looked into the beam a bit too often. It never came to be and I had to use infrared door-jam sensors instead. I really wanted a visible laser beam, but it's dangerous—among other things.

SOUND IN SPACE 2 AT SEA AND SPACE EXPLORATIONS, 4755 YORK BLVD., HIGHLAND PARK. INSTALLATIONS OPENING ON SUN., FEB. 8, AT 1 PM. OPENING PERFORMANCE WITH CLAY CHAPLIN, AARON DRAKE, ALLAN KAPROW, LEWIS KELLER, JULIANA SNAPPER, COOPER BAKER AND MORE ON THU., FEB. 5, 8 PM / FREE / ALL AGES. SOUND IN SPACE 2 RUNS FROM THU., FEB. 5, TO SAT., FEB. 28. COMPLETE SCHEDULE AND MORE INFORMATION AT SEASPACE.ORG OR SOUNDSPACE.ORG. ALSO VISIT LARABANK.COM, MUSIC.CALARTS.EDU/~CCHAPLIN AND AARONDRAKE.ORG.

A.C. NEWMAN

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KISS was the first band I really got crazy into. And then Cheap Trick and Queen. You know, obvious stuff. I remember my brother going to a local record store—it was when punk rock was beginning to happen—and he said, "What's your best punk rock album?" And the guy at the record store gave him the Talking Heads '77. So I remember being a little kid and listening to '77 and just thinking, "This is the new music. This is crazy." It was interesting being a little kid at that time. The music scene—I was so fascinated by it. I remember walking into the record stores and seeing posters of Elvis Costello and Devo and thinking, "Wow, this music is so weird."

What's the first song you ever wrote?

I have no idea because I've never been much of a singer-songwriter. When I started playing music, it was essentially in a band where we got together and jammed, and somebody played a loud guitar riff, and I yelled over top of it. And I'd think, "Does that count as a song?" I don't know. Those might be the first songs I ever wrote, but I don't consider them songs, really. I just consider it: I put some chords together and yelled over top of them. I never really thought of it as songwriting, so I never had an epiphany moment where I went, "Oh my God, this is my first song," and rushed out to play it for my girlfriend or something. I can never remember where songs come from because I'm not the kind of person that, you know, wrote a song one night in a mood room and can say, "And that was 'Early Morning Rain,' and that was the night I wrote that song."

So you won't be doing *VH1 Storytellers*?

No. So many songs, they just unfold. I'm too busy trying to figure out how to make them work to remember how it happened. It's a lot of hard work. Songs don't magically just come out of me—I have to work at it. And I have to use some of my critical faculties, as a music fan. I make the music, and then I sit back and go, "What would I think if I heard this song?" Sometimes it's interesting when you record something very quickly, like a demo, and then you don't listen to it for a few days. Then you come back to it, and you don't remember how your own songs go. That's usually a good measure of whether the song works or not, when you're listening to a song and you actually shock yourself, and you go, "Oh, this one's pretty good." You know, few musicians get that kind of objectivity.

Do you have a favorite lyricist?

There are some of them. I really like Arthur Lee, maybe because lyrically I feel a slight kinship with him in that a lot of it's kind of insane and doesn't make any sense, but it works amazingly well. I really like Vic Chesnutta—he's amazing. People who are friends of mine I think are amazing, like Dan Bejar [*Destroyer, the New Pornographers*] and Will Sheff [*Ohliveria River*]. It's kind of intimidating having people like that around you in your life, because it makes everything you do feel really shitty.

At the same time, though, does it kind of force you to rise to the challenge?

Yeah, I think there's a definite healthy competition there. When we were working on *Mar Bonanno*, Neko just put out *Furniture Remains*, and Dan had put out the *Destroyer* '77 record. And I listened to those records and thought, "I gotta try to keep up with the Joneses here. These records are really, really good." So it definitely helps to get pushed. I feel like I'm just trying to keep up with people. And it's good to play in a band with somebody like Neko. It keeps your head from ever getting big.

What instrument do you most like the sound of?

I've been really into flutes recently. Flutes as a rock instrument, in a kind of marching band way. I just love baritone sax. You know, like old Sonics records. That baritone sax, when it's just kicking out that low, distorted note—I've always thought that's amazing. I love to use that as a trick—like when the chorus starts, just kick in a loud baritone sax. It kicks the song into another gear.

A.C. NEWMAN WITH DENT MAY ON THU., FEB. 26, AT THE TROUBADOUR, 9009 SANTA MONICA BLVD., WEST HOLLYWOOD. 9 PM / \$15 / ALL AGES. TROUBADOUR.COM. A.C. NEWMAN'S *GET GUILTY* IS OUT NOW ON MATOR. VISIT A.C. NEWMAN AT ACNEWMAN.NET OR MYSPACE.COM/AC-NEWMAN.

PHANTOM SURFERS

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Maz: You can't talk about Rudy Ray Moore in San Francisco without telling the story about pushing him in his wheelchair and running into the Ventures.

Mike: We got to the elevator, and I can't remember what the Ventures were doing in town that night, I don't think they were playing, but two of the Ventures were in the elevator. I forgot that it really happened. I thought it was in a dream. Rudy Ray Moore in a wheelchair with me and two of the Ventures in an elevator.

Of the superstars of the original surf/instrumental era, who have you played on the same stage with?

Mike: Link Wray. We did a three-show tour in Spain with him, and the first night his wife was somehow convinced that her son had some of our records, which I can't believe. So the second night, Link called for Mel to get up on stage. Deke Dickerson was also on that tour, so Deke got on stage as well, so it became sort of a monster jam. So then we determined that the last night was going to be the monster jam to end all monster jams, and we just got everybody from the other band the Church Keys, and we had somebody out there pointing a bottle of rum down backstage people's throats. I had a Spanish devil mask on and was kind of capering around the stage. Somebody had a tambourine, a harmonica, we had about fifteen people on stage. And Link, bless his heart, Link has gotta be one of the sweetest guys I've ever met. He'd keep yelling out songs, but with instrumental songs, nobody can remember the titles, and even he couldn't keep the songs straight. He'd yell out 'Ace of Spades' and play 'Jack the Ripper.'

Do you think if the Beatles hadn't happened, do you think surf music might have grown into its own thing?

Mike: No. It's fairly limited what you can do with it while it's still surf music. That's one of the things we've constantly been playing with. I think one of the things that often gets overlooked is that there is a lot of surf influence after everybody was aping the Beatles. All those people who had bands in the '60s started off playing instrumental music if they were the right age. Do you know Randy Holden? He's best known as one of the later guitarists for Blue Cheer, but he was in a band called the Fender Four that did some classic singles, like 'Margay.' He was in a band called the Sons of Adam that were on the L.A. scene, and you can hear the roots of what became psychedelic. He was on the short list of people that the Yardbirds were considering after Jeff Beck quit at the end of their U.S. tour, since they were in L.A. The Yardbirds opened the door to a lot of stuff. I think they were a lot more innovative and a lot more tasteful than the Beatles. But even though there's a lot of surf influence that's gone unnoticed, I don't know if surf music in its most basic form could have really gone much longer. Surf music has a good run back then, and we do what we can with it as a folk art, as it were. As good as instrumental music is, people have a limited capacity to take it in. You reach a point of saturation with people. It's like, "Oh, I'll put this on while I clean the house." The rock historians give a short shrift to it, but it served its purpose. In the immortal words of Babe, "That'll do, pig."

THE PHANTOM SURFERS WITH MARK AND THE ESCORTS, THE AMBERTONES, THE ROCK 'N' ROLL ADVENTURE KIDS, TUFF TITTIES AND MORE ON SAT., FEB. 21, AT THE REAL BOSS HISS BLOW OUT AT THE ELKS LODGE, 14440 FRIAR ST., VAN NUYS. 3:30 PM / \$15 / 18+. REAL-BOSSHOSS.BLOGSPOT.COM. PRE-PARTY WITH THE JINXES AND THE TLETONICS ON FRI., FEB. 20, AT MR. T'S BOWL, 5621 N. FIGUEROA, HIGHLAND PARK. 9 PM / CONTACT VENUE FOR COST. 21+. VISIT THE PHANTOM SURFERS AT PHANTOMSURFERS.COM OR MYSPACE.COM/PHANTOMSURFERS.