

The new sound of progress



PHOTO COURTESY SCOTTY IRVING, CLANG QUARTET

Clang Quartet's Scotty Irving integrates his Christian beliefs into his shows, melding performance with his use of new sounds and textures.

NOISE ARTISTS CRAFT NOVEL SOUNDS FOR GROWING BASE

BY LINNIE GREENE
DIVERSIONS EDITOR

As a noun, “noise” carries with it a connotation of cacophony. When something is branded as “noisy,” it’s often the lawn mower that wakes you up on Saturday mornings or the neighbor’s obnoxious dog.

A group of local musicians is out to prove that noise is more than jarring, pedestrian sounds — it’s an entire genre that’s pushing sonic boundaries, in and outside the Triangle.

“Somebody will say, ‘Oh, I heard a noise outside.’ What they’re usually saying is they don’t know what they heard — they just heard something outside,” said Scotty Irving, the sole force behind N.C. outfit Clang Quartet.

Even for the plethora of local musicians who traffic in noise, defining the genre proves tricky.

“It’s different things for different people. I guess that’s kind of expected,” Irving said. “To a certain extent, it’s unstructured sound, but it’s also in some ways still structured. It may seem unstructured to an untrained ear, but there’s still some structure there.”

Bryce Eiman, curator of the 919 Noise Showcases held frequently at Nightlight, puts it more simply. “If it doesn’t sound like music, it’s probably noise,” he said.

It takes an open-minded audience to appreciate the unconventional elements that are integral to noise, and Irving has seen such fans during his years performing in the area.

“There’s a reason that most of the people that perform something that resembles, that falls under the heading of this genre — they always tend to gravitate toward Chapel Hill is because the audience is there,” said Irving. “The people there seem to understand it and seem to appreciate it more.”

But when the genre itself encompasses everything from free jazz to the whirs of kitchen appliances, it’s often difficult to classify the bands who operate within it.

“I wouldn’t say that the noise scene is much of a ‘noise scene,’” said Julion Fols, who performs under the moniker Electric Cactus. “There are some noise groups, but there’s a lot of groups that are just sort of weird industrial synth-pop kind of stuff even.”

There’s plenty of eccentricity in noise performances, but Irving is adamant that there’s depth below the surface.

“There’s definitely some visceral qualities, but there’s a lot of cerebral qualities, too. I think some people think that there’s so much going on below the belt that there’s not enough going on above.

“I find that amusing that somebody could watch a performance like mine and not think that there was something going on that I wanted your brain to focus on as well as — well, let’s not get into where the other direction might be,” said Irving, whose performances integrate his Christian beliefs alongside drums and layered sounds.

While noise isn’t lacking in profundity, it’s certainly not straightforward, and area musicians are well aware of that.

“I’d say as a scene, it’s not really marketable and that the

people who like it, like it, and the people who don’t, don’t, and they probably never will,” said Fols.

But in Eiman’s eyes, there’s still been plenty of growth.

“I think it’s pretty prolific. It’s got a pretty strong fan base here,” he said.

As alien or bizarre as noise might seem to new listeners, Boat Burning’s Andras Fekete sees its influence spanning numerous styles.

“Even today in hip-hop, you have lots of sampling and loops,” he said. “Twenty, 30 years ago, that was in academia. That was very out-there, experimental egg-head stuff, and now it’s in dance clubs. It’s more pervasive than people think.”

Despite its amorphous meaning, noise’s ultimate defining characteristic is its progressiveness. For Eiman, there will

always be an element of discovery.

“Every time there’s a noise performance, I usually hear something I’ve never heard before,” he said.

Even beyond experimentalism, Fekete sees the genre as vital to both music’s past and present.

“If you think about it, noise is like the mother of all music. It all kind of started out that way, and then from time in the world, it was like, ‘Well, what kind of pattern can the brain sort of assign to these random noises?’

“You start getting rhythm and melody, and that process is still continuing.”

SEE THE 919 NOISE SHOWCASE

Time: 9:30 p.m. today
Location: The Nightlight
405 1/2 W. Rosemary St.
Info: www.nightlightclub.com

Contact the Diversions Editor at diversions@dailytarheel.com.

online | dailytarheel.com/dive

FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD The Movie Trail will get you up-to-date with a smattering of upcoming movie previews to check out.

CONCERT PHOTOS We’ve been out and about this week, and even if you’re in bed with the flu, you can see what we saw too.

FRESH TRACKS Looking to find a new mix for your next party? Trying to remember that one-hit wonder you forgot? We’ve got you.

column

MIXING THINGS UP

You’ve made your fair share of mixtapes, but have you wooed a lover with Joy Division or Liberace? Didn’t think so.

PAGE 7

music

FAMILY MATTERS

Akron/Family’s latest is an exercise in weird freak-folk, full of unexpected influences and innovative compositions.

PAGE 7

movies

TALKING BACK

“The Way Back” shows a snowy Siberian landscape after World War II as prisoners flee a labor camp.

PAGE 6

Q&A

SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

Hawthorne Heights is rolling into town for an acoustic show at Local 506, and Dive caught up with vocalist JT Woodruff.

PAGE 6