

Artist Statement: Sara Landeau

Sara Landeau is a guitarist and sound artist whose work is brashly experimental and multidisciplinary, spanning the gamut from unorthodox solo guitar compositions to whimsical bespoke “instruments”/sound installations that combine cheap electronics, mundane objects, and electroconductive materials (fabric, paint, etc.). Also, she has toured internationally with various bands, and plays guitar with the seminal feminist punk bands Bikini Kill and The Julie Ruin.

A primary theme of Sara’s work is the role of contrast in music—how, for example, noise and melody or loudness and softness might interact in a given piece and across various genres. Also, her music explores long-standing yet decidedly unstable notions of what defines a feminine sound (quiet, slow, soothing, etc.) or a masculine sound (loud, fast, distorted, etc.); and how these stereotypes of texture and timbre are ripe for subversion (or at least a sustained examination).

The instruments Sara builds are visually arresting creations made from fabric, wire, electroconductive thread and paint, tea towels, and a host of other diverse, easily sourced materials. These homemade synthesizers are potent vehicles for presenting contrast among ideas of gendered sound, such as delicate interfaces/components (doilies, flowers, and other objects coded as “feminine”) that produce harsh, dissonant sounds (metal pipes, amp feedback). They also showcase Sara’s wit and collective/D.I.Y. spirit—anyone can play these instruments to some degree, and they’re typically presented in a venue that encourages audience participation.

Sara’s guitar compositions expand the instrument’s limitations with pedals and prepared guitars, among other deviations from the basic instrument; and sometimes incorporate such unlikely instruments as dog toys, hair spray, and a sewing machine—which resonate in ways no standard musical device ever could. The hairspray, for example, is associated with Sara’s youth, and the defiant punk look that was part of her identity. Some of the contrasts that mark her compositions include pairing classic fingerpicking with the acute use of pedals or playing intricate figures against immersive soundscapes.

Sara received an M.F.A. in sonic arts from Brooklyn College; and a B.A. in art history from Columbia University. She is also a long-time music educator, and has taught courses at Brooklyn College and UC Santa Barbara, among other institutions. Additionally, she was a guitar instructor, mentor, and co-founder of the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls in New York City.

Sara Landeau has forged a distinctive musical vision, built on a foundation of technical skill, broad experience, and sheer ingenuity; which has led to her uniquely eclectic and ever-expanding achievements.

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