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LIVE REVIEW

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## METAL MACHINE MUSIC

by RICH KANE

### SO.CAL.SONIC FESTIVAL OF EXPERIMENTAL AND IMPROVISED MUSIC

CAL STATE LONG BEACH  
SUN., APRIL 24

One thing we knew right away: this final event of the six-day So.Cal.Sonic experimental music festival would *have* to be a better, smarter aural experience than the one we had last time we saw music at Cal State Long Beach—that would be the '03 Warped Tour.

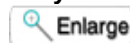
So we found the locale—an outdoor courtyard wedged between two fine arts buildings—and were greeted with the music of a man named Sumako (Ooo! An arty, one-word name!), who wiggled assorted esoterica from the tremolo bar of his guitar. He used springy metal whatzits, pushed pedals and twiddled knobs, and what he crafted from this was often very quiet and meditative, if occasionally interrupted by the landing jets at Long Beach Airport. Perhaps irked by the intrusions, Sumako's music grew steadily more abrasive, and by the end of his brief set he seemed to be mixing moods: part gentle, wispy moan; part drunken-possums-fucking-beneath-the-moonlight; part this-is-what-Brian-Eno's-gastric-juices-would-sound-like-if-they-started-a-band.

We left for a spell and returned to find a trio, guitarist Kris Tiner, horn player Noah Phillips and drummer Nathan Hubbard. Tiner would jam metal rods into his instrument and drag a bow across the strings—yeah, we know, so Jimmy Page—but then he'd whip out other tools like paintbrushes, whisks, scouring pads and Altoids tins and use those too. Hubbard clanged away on a mini kit, with a side setup that looked not unlike a radiator grill stolen off a '76 Ford Granada. Phillips, meanwhile, sat and bleated away on his trumpet. The result was very free-jazz Ornette Coleman, when they weren't coming off like the Grateful Dead's trippy "Space" segments—fine and all, though their second number wasn't nearly as interesting, more like the twisted thud of a car crash happening *veeerrry slooowly*.



Aaron Ximm: No, *this is rock & roll*

Photo by Matt Otto



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The next trio, flutist Emily Hay, cellist Michael Intriere and upright bassist Anthony Shadduck, were obviously more classically minded, and the music was better for it, often sounding like the soundtrack to a Russian Dada film—dramatic and sweeping, like somebody was about to get stabbed or shot, with bows rumbling menacingly across strings. Not as good were the moments when Hay would do percussive breathing exercises into her mic, which was a little like scat singing as done by Diamanda Galas. It grew steadily more annoying and took away from the whole performance—remove Hay’s mic and flute while she’s going through her vocal routine, and she merely becomes some schizoid homeless person having an imaginary conversation.

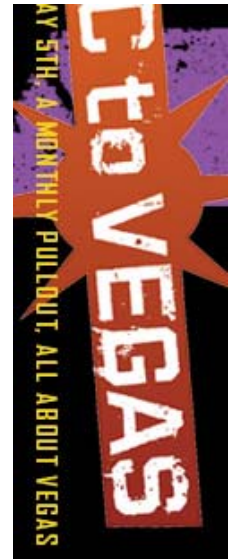
Yet that was still more musical than what Aaron Ximm brought, as he perched himself on a rock in the courtyard and turned knobs and pushed MiniDisc buttons. He’s a field recorder, often trekking to Asia to capture sounds, so the “music” we got from him was a sonic collage of what, to us, sounded alternately like gurgling water (or indoor plumbing; or a bong; or chronic diarrhea), creaking wood, a car starting, clanging Tibetan prayer bells, children’s voices, wind, more gurgling water, crickets, and the endless, droning throb of air conditioning units—slap 200 beats per minute on it, and he’s got a huge European club hit on his hands. Look, we know that it’s natural “music” you’re supposed to listen *really deeply* to, but we just guffawed over the people who sat around—eyes closed, heads bobbing—and acted like what he was doing was true art. Maybe in the Mark Kostabi sense of getting other people to do the grunt work while the “artist” signs his name to it, but really, Ximm’s a fraud. If he’s an artist, then hey, so are we, based on that tape of farting noises we made when we were 10.

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