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Blunt Instruments

Mad scientists create sweet music from cobbled-together crap

Think of the annual Maker Faire as a kind of county fair, but with AV-squad grads instead of carnies, and potentiometers and actuators instead of prize pigs and funnel cakes. In May, nearly 45,000 tinkerers descended upon San Mateo, California, to check out handmade rockets and robots, as well as an array of instrument hacks—music-making devices created from a mishmash of wood, silicon, and detritus. We singled out four particularly groovy DIY audio inventions and talked to the chick magnets who designed them. *CHRIS BAKER*



THIMBLETRON

"The great thing about new instruments is that there's no preconception of what they are going to sound like," says San Francisco's Mark "TradeMark" Gunderson, 40. With a click of his thimble-covered fingers, Gunderson sets off a flurry of audio loops: shrieks, whistles, guitar riffs, and James Brown vamps. "I feel like Doc Brown discovering time travel in *Back to the Future*," he says. "And I look like him, too."



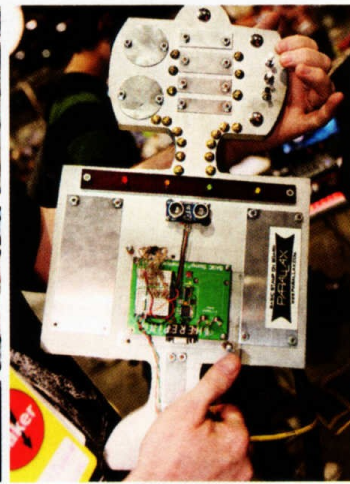
SELF-PLAYING GUITAR

Compressed air powers an elaborate network of mechanical levers that hammer and pluck blisteringly complex preprogrammed fingerings. "You can do six different rhythms on the six different strings," says Jeremy Boyle, 32, of Easthampton, Massachusetts. "That's impossible for a human." In your face, Zakk Wyld!



LIVEPAD

"It looks like an alien music space pod from the future," says Millbrae, California's Craig Dorety, 34, of his contraption, which doubles as a sample-triggering controller and psychedelic eye candy. Embedded with 20 colored light-emitting diodes that fire off as Dorety taps out glitchy electronica breaks, the LivePAD makes him resemble a walking laser show.



THE THEREPING

This paddle-shaped gizmo is played like a Theremin—waving a hand above the sonar sensor will activate warbling, Gameboy-like tones. Vern Graner, 43, of Austin, Texas, can customize the designs to geek-friendly specs. "Some are shaped like rocket ships, some like space aliens, and some like robots with antennas," he says. We can only assume that a Kristen Bell-shaped model is under development.

Buzzcatcher

UNDER THE RADAR AND BLASTING FROM OUR OFFICES

Zykos

WHO: These five Austinites blend layered harmonies with a Southern-rock twist and a hint of new-wave twitchery.

LATEST: *Zykos EP* (self-released)

FOR FANS OF: Bright Eyes, Straylight Run

Robbers on High Street

WHO: A breezy indie-rock trio who augment their maximum R&B jangle with rootsy keys and brass, capped off by frontman Ben Trokan's world-weary tenor.

LATEST: *Grand Animals* (Scratchie/New Line)

FOR FANS OF: The Walkmen, Spoon

Hot Dollar

WHO: Jermaine Dupri's latest signee possesses a hypnotic, casual flow that he wraps lovingly around Mississippi-bred tales of ballin' and blingin'.

LATEST: *The Crackhead Mixtape* (self-released)

FOR FANS OF: Paul Wall, UGK



← The Fall of Troy

WHO: A Washington trio that couldn't decide between charred-throat screamo, wiggly prog rock and frothy pop punk—so they combined all three into a brain-frying mash of anthemic hooks and naked confessions.

LATEST: *Manipulator* (Equal Vision)

FOR FANS OF: Hawthorne Heights, At the Drive-In