

# Karen Stackpole's new recording "Machine Shop"

"... sometimes I dream about strange creatures but they're usually friendly..."

--- Karen Stackpole\*

Karen Stackpole in collaboration with Die Elektrischen just released *Machine Shop* DIE-016 (dielectricrecords.com). Karen is a master percussionist and teaches sound arts at Ex'pression College for Digital Arts in Emeryville, California. She plays gongs and teamed up with Die Elektrischen to create this gorgeously imagined and executed work -- ten years in conception and 18 months in production. Die Elektrischen, electronics processing wizard and top notch audio engineer, recorded the album and plied his processing and editing magic to the raw gong improvisations to create some truly unique gong music. (The duo plans to recreate the music live in the not so distant future.) The technical approach to each track is adequately described in the CD notes: from the many gongs and percussion instruments to the Schoeps, Sennheiser, & Shure mics, as well as eq, verb, and distortion where applicable, so let's move right along to the 'strange creatures' and their sonic habitat.

The six pieces ranging from about five to ten minutes each comprise aural landscapes populated with myriad strange and highly articulate creatures. Some may even be slightly familiar if you've listened to Tibetan music or the nature recordings of Bernie Krause. Perhaps they are cousins or more distant relatives to the beings of vast mountain ranges, deserts, the jungle night, or even the canyons of a bewildered metropolis. However, these spaces and their inhabitants will not be met on your way to work or in your cubicle during the hours of inane & pointless labor unless you remain attached to your MP3 or CD player. It should be kept in mind that all of the sounds on this album are made by Karen Stackpole manipulating physical objects, mostly gongs, and only later processed by Die Elektrischen with some input to the mixes by Karen. Here's a list of the gongs and other instruments used on this CD; mostly manufactured by Karen's sponsor, the Paiste Company: Paiste 40-inch Symphonic Gong, Paiste 38-inch Sound Creation Earth Gong, Paiste 30-inch Symphonic Gong, Paiste 24-inch Sound Creation No. 4 Water Gong, Paiste 22 inch Sound Creation No. 7 Fight Gong, Paiste 20-inch Sound Creation No. 2 Fire Gong, UFIP 28-inch Targo, Wuhan 43-inch Tam-Tam, Wuhan 22-inch Tam-Tam, Paiste No.2 Rotosound, Hammerax

Dustbowl, Key Chimes, Asmat Drum w/head of Monitor lizard skin from New Guinea... rather strange and magnificent creatures in themselves.

1. EFFECT OF OXIDATION 7:01 • Marsupial Ya-Yas arrive softly in yellow saffron fields and their number and delight swells with the richness of the harvest. Even the rocks turn slightly and mumble soft words of thanks.

2. QUANTITATIVE TREATMENT OF REFLECTION 5:25 • A round, geeky guy, Nars Luden, wafted unconcerned, indistinguishable amongst the riffling integers. He, for all the world, was content, knowing that he belonged. Even buffeted by reversing currents, Nars retained his soft smile until it broke off rather abruptly.

3. COEFFICIENT OF FRICTION 9:15 • Sixteen vestal Vixsaurians bearing TM7s (see > [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QavTheKQJQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QavTheKQJQ)) filtered quietly through the veins of Gothopolis. Theirs was a heavenly chorus rubbing insistently against the darkness creating little swizzling stars until the 43-inch Tam Tam set their woofers pounding.

4. MODULUS OF ELASTICITY 6:58 • Volupté flash sharp, metal skirts. Washes undulate in breaking waves of indulgence. The thud and dong of nine short bongs sequentially decay announcing the Dervishes who read an eclectic epistle in the fading desert light. Prayer bowls resound and produce long tales. Bells peal and the Crier's cries from the Watchtower slowly transcend the silent night.

5. WHOLE BODY MAGNETIC RESONANT ARTIFACTS 10:39 • The dynamos of Kerguelopolis rumble and hum beneath the turbulent waters of the southern Indian Ocean where the sunken micro continent known as the Kerguel Plateau straddles the Antarctic Polar Front and insouciant citizens with eel-like bodies and cabbage heads swim lazily down the streets shopping for rare dongles, iPods, and sex toys as the municipal organs swell with majestic fullness and metallic overtones until, within the deeply filtered bluegreen noon sea light, the Great Gong sounds to remind the denizens of their mortality.

6. SUPERPOSITION OF COLLIDING IMPULSES 5:12 • A curtain of gongs and cymbals

opens on the tropic night and sixteen tongues on the lizardskin drum loop and drive the Dance of the Yam. The natives believe that this ritual will bring forth an abundant return.

You may interpret these tunes differently than I. That's good because 'I' am not particularly well-balanced, and this fine music is open to many ways of being appreciated. More precise technical details will be found in the CD notes. By kluging about at [www.dielectricrecords.com](http://www.dielectricrecords.com) you will be able to order the CD (hint: try 'shop.'). Do It.

\*note: Karen speaking on the tune 'Bob's Bios,' Left Coast Improv Group • April-May 2002... EDT 4014, [www.edgetonerecords.com](http://www.edgetonerecords.com) (2002) look under artists: 'Jim Ryan' •

Review © Jim Ryan 5/11/10

**NEW! MUSIC LESSON/REHEARSAL ROOM**

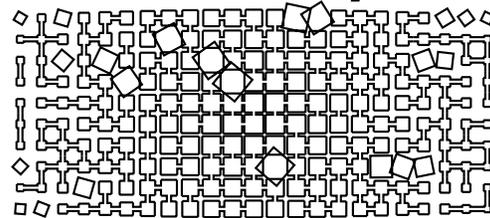
\$15/hr.

upright piano • sound system  
wireless internet • natural light

**Meridian Gallery (415) 398-7229**

[www.meridiangallery.org](http://www.meridiangallery.org)

## Tuesdays



at Tom's Place

June 15, 7:30 PM (doors open at 7)

Frank Gratkowski (Berlin/Cologne, reeds),

Chris Brown (Oakland, pno+elec) &

William Winant (Oakland, perc)

3111 Deakin Street, Berkeley, CA  
Directions: <http://4-33.com/directions.html>

# Wind Moon Concert

At the end of April, I attended the **Wind Moon Concert**, the latest installment of the Full Moon Concert series at the **Luggage Store Gallery**. As the name implies, the theme of the evening was “the wind, and its moonlit travels through tubes”. Both sets featured wind instruments, but also wind-like sounds on other instruments, and an attempt to bring the disciplines of wind performance to all the instruments, as described in program notes for the second set by **Sabbaticus Rex**:

*The instruments themselves are treated with reverence and are given as much if not more command over the path that the music takes. Inasmuch as metal particles or stalks of bamboo want to become instruments, at the point at which we discover them, the gongs and shakuhachi themselves are approached in a highly collaborative manner, i.e. letting sounds emerge from them, guiding rather than forcing, generally unifying with the instrument as much as possible.*

The first set featured **Ghost in the House** performing the *Wind Moon Suite*, an “elemental arrangement” of pieces. It began with a procession led by **Karen Stackpole** on a hand drum, followed by **Tom Nunn** with a conical metal instrument called a *waterphone*, **Kyle Bruckman** and **David Michalak** with wind instruments. Upon reaching, the performers added their other instruments, Stackpole on gongs, Michalak on lap steel and Nunn on his various musical inventions. Nunn’s skatch box opened with long “angry wind” sounds howling and moaning, with more ethereal sounds from the others filling the spaces in between. Sounds gradually entered the mix with slowly moving pitch bends that sounded more “electronic” to me (perhaps even like samples with pitch bends). The metallic and wind sounds began to coalesce around a harmonic structure with minor chords. Within the structure, the lap-steel guitar emerged with its own minor chords and softly moving pitch bends. This was followed by a piece featuring an expressive solo by Bruckman (oboe and english horn) set against long tones on the gongs and the skatch box. Eventually, the melodic line of the reeds gave way to more long tones.

The next piece, which had the memorable title “I killed someone in my dream last night”, began with a strong “growly” note. The sounds of the reeds were set against bowed gongs, and it seemed that both instruments began to sound quite similar despite their obvious physical and acoustical differences. In this section, Nunn played an interesting instrument called the *Crustacean*, featuring wires on a metal plate set atop orange balloons, another allusion to the combination of metal and air. This

was followed by multiphonics on the oboe or english horn set against the skatch box and distorted guitar tones, which eventually gave way to long tones on the gong and high pitched notes from the reeds. Scratching guitar tones added roughness. The piece then built to a strong climax before fading into metallic sounds.

For the final pieces, the group was joined by **Cornelius Boots** on bass clarinet. His featured role in the piece described as the “Alfred Hitchcock” piece included long notes set against long low drones from the ensemble. This gave way to higher, shorter notes, loud harmonics and resonances. The final piece began with a melody on the bass clarinet. The sounds that entered from the skatch box at first reminded me of waves and then of gently moving sand, both of which are shaped by their interaction with the wind. Low drum sounds and a spinning “whirly” reinforce to the return to the elemental theme of wind. The music became more animated as more sounds are added to the mix, metal rods and wires, shakers and whistles. At one point, Cornelius Boots blew into the mouthpiece of the bass clarinet without the body, and then alternately into the body of the instrument without the mouthpiece. These sounds were set against the waterphone played by Nunn. As the piece drew to a close, the performers returned to their original instruments and departed the stage in a procession just as they had entered.

The second set featured **Sabbaticus Rex**, a trio of **Cornelius Boots** on shakuhachi, taimu-shaku-

hachi, and throat-singing, **Karen Stackpole** on overtone gongs, and Mark Deutsch on *bazantar*, an upright bass with sympathetic strings, much as one might find on Indian stringed instruments. It began with a solo on the *bazantar* by Deutsch, with lots of bent notes and excitations of the sympathetic strings. Soon he moved to bowed bass, which was set against bowed gongs. Once again, neither instrument was a wind instrument per se, but the long bowed tones gave the impression of the wind that set the stage for Boots’ entry on the shakuhachi. The three performers combined together in long drones. The bass moved gradually between standard pitched tones and harmonics, while the shakuhachi played against the longer droning sounds. The overall feel of the music was quite contemplative. This was followed by a louder, more percussive section where the strings of the bass were scraped and struck with mallets, and rubber mallets were rubbed against the gongs. The effect of the rubber on the gong was very resonant and loud intense rises and a wealth of harmonies. At moments, they almost sounded like loud voices singing. Throughout the remainder of the set, there were lots of expressive moments with throat singing and wind-instrument playing that resembled talking, set against continued drones. The *bazantar* floated freely between low bass tones and harmonics. There was lots of space, harmonically and temporally, with opening and closing and sounds emerging in between. The music became stronger and louder and more rhythmic, with the bass acting as a drum, before drawing to a close. ●

Creeping has turned out to be a real pain in the ass. Think about it.

VEINS

Group I  
♩ = 192

2nd section on cue  
♩ = 360

2010

sperryfest  
www.matthewsperry.org

HOME GROWN

luggage store june 3  
tag team trio shift

june 5 21 grand  
sfSound