

# Magic show

**The musical sleight of hand of one-man band That 1 Guy**



**M**ike Silverman was once an active player in the Bay Area jazz scene, until 1996 when the San Francisco Conservatory-

by  
**Bill Forman**

**Preview:** That 1 Guy performs Friday, Feb. 7, 9 p.m. Austin Farwell ("that other guy") opens. Tickets: \$13 (eventbrite.com)

**Lost on Main**  
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trained musician set aside his double bass and starting playing the Magic Pipe. The 7-foot-tall

homemade musical instrument was invented and built by Silverman, who also created the stage persona of That 1 Guy and for the past 24 years has made weird and funky songs about weasel potpies and meat

raining down from the sky with his one-of-a-kind percussion/stringed instrument.

Recently, however, Silverman has brought another kind of magic to the stage: actual magic.

"I didn't really get into magic until my early 30s, when I started going to Vegas at the end of tours," said Silverman. After many fruitless forays into Sin City magic shops that mostly traded in novelties, the budding trickster caught a break. "I went into this really cool magic shop called Denny and Lee's, and the guy there was so nice," Silverman explained. "He's like, 'Hey, come back tonight, we have a lecture.' So I look around this tiny little shop, and I'm like, 'In here?' And he goes, 'No, in here.' And he pushes on the bookshelf and it opens up and there's a whole theater in the back of the place. I just lost my shit and, that night, I met my teacher, who is really one of the best in the world when it comes to

sleight of hand. I'm like, 'I'm never leaving this place, I'm just going to move here right now.' And I did."

Silverman soon started showing off a few magic tricks before and during his concerts, and even goes so far as to do it while playing his instrument onstage, and doesn't care if anyone notices.

"A lot of the time, I'm triggering stuff with a different appendage than [the ones] I'm making it look like I'm triggering it with," he said. "And I just love doing that! I think it's sort of an inside joke to myself more than anything."

Of course, music is still his main focus, mostly via touring. That 1 Guy has had half a dozen releases in the last 20 years—and one with The Frankenstein Brothers, a collaboration with guitarist Buckethead—but Silverman's bread-and-butter is live performances, as many as 200 shows per year.

"The royalty checks don't come flying into the mailbox, and what I do is really a live-driven thing," said Silverman, whose most recent album, *Poseidon's Deep Water Adventure Friends*, was released back in 2014. "Also, life is better for me when I'm out here touring, just in terms of my health and everything. Because I'm working so hard, I'm always in better physical shape and my energy is higher. Although lifting the gear can be a little bit hard on the back."

**Mike Silverman and his Magic Pipe.**  
PHOTO COURTESY OF THAT 1 GUY

The reason for that, of course, is the cumbersome Magic Pipe. Most of the instrument's components are reasonably lightweight: the dozen or so trigger sensors that attach to the pipe itself, a classical bass string that runs down the front of it, a couple of contact microphones and a bunch of effects pedals. The problem is in the steel pipes and fittings. "Everything together is hundreds and hundreds of pounds," he said.

The contraption enables him to access a remarkable range of sounds and textures, and his convoluted displays of dexterity result in sounds similar to fellow funky experimenters Primus—but with just one man instead of three.

Silverman places Captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa and Dr. Demento high on his list of influences, which helps explain why his lyrics are both surreal and goofy.

"I've always written lyrics like that," he said with something resembling pride. "I tried to write pop, love song-y things, and I just couldn't do it. They were so bad, so terrible. So I went back to writing in a crazy stream-of-consciousness style, and then a couple years later I heard Captain Beefheart. That was the first time when I was like, 'Oh, you can do that? This is totally legit.'" □

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