



# Sonic waffles

BY AMY BEE

As churchgoers finish their Sunday services and head out for family brunches or youth group activities, another kind of group congregates at the Red Museum for their own invocation of sorts.

Misfits, introverts and musicians come with the lure of homemade waffles and piping hot coffee every third Sunday. But they stay for an array of noise artists, clashers of metal, makers of trash instruments and lovers of dissonance. This is Sacramento Audio Waffle, or as co-organizer Lob Instagon prefers “church for outsiders.”

During an early winter showcase, the venue had a welcoming, inclusive vibe. Attendees filled large, bench-like pews and an array of mannequin parts (that could pass as a choir) were displayed on a back-lit balcony as a group of straggly musicians hunched over their noise contraptions as if preparing their sermons. Audience members spoke in hushed tones and quietly sipped store-brand coffee from thrift-store mugs. Everyone exuded an air of casual reverence. The more

initiated had headphones wrapped around their necks in preparation for whatever cacophony the noisemakers would summon. The mood: expectant, but peaceful.

Toward the back of the venue, Denise Chelini, another organizer of Audio Waffle, wrangled up two flavors of waffles from scratch: classic and the month’s special, holiday spice. Chelini swears the secret ingredient in her waffles is love. (It’s actually flaxseed.) But the waffles were so tasty and hit that Sunday-nostalgia button so well (even for this atheist), they may as well be made from an omniscient love. The selection of toppings such as whipped cream, butter, syrup and peanut butter easily out-wowed any youth group’s measly offering of donuts and danishes. I grabbed a plate and a mug and found an empty spot on a bench to enjoy my afternoon breakfast to the tune of ... well, would there be any tunes? Melodies? Bridges?

The short answer is no. Sure, there’s a repetition of sound that your brain is going to want to define as

“song,” but really that’s just noise decibels flirting with your ears. I was constantly almost hearing a melody with each performance, whether it was the solitary guy sitting with his guitar on his lap, striking and, at times, caressing the strings with different sizes of metal measuring cups, or the dude shooting a toy space laser, hitting a wood block and shouting a hearing exam into the microphone.

Although it’s difficult to explain the appeal, noise art hits the eardrums in an extra special way. Like people speaking in tongues, we hear a line of logic amid total chaos. It’s easy to write it off as nothing more than watching people fiddle with things. But there is art at play here. It’s a personal experience expressed as performance. Emotion distilled down to noise. Noise that gets you lost and yet keeps you firmly rooted in the moment.

My advice: Go check it out. Besides, everyone gets waffles. □

Bring earplugs to the next Audio Waffle on Sunday, February 10. Visit [facebook.com/SacramentoAudioWaffle](http://facebook.com/SacramentoAudioWaffle) for more info.

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