Noise Peddler

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1 Program Notes

Noise Peddler are a live duo of symmetrical no-input pedalboards, transmitting part-composed, part-improvised sonic structures. Walking the line between composition and improvisation, experimental noise and melodic hooks, their music explores the limits of what can be achieved with the pedalboard as a network-instrument [2]. The result is a performance where pedals are the signal generator, processor and sole interface.

Their practice probes an inherent paradox in pedal design: intended to be sat at the performer's feet, yet with the potential for finer real-time control of each parameter by hand. By removing another instrument as an external sound source, and replacing this with self-oscillating pedals, the performance engages directly – and exclusively – with the pedals themselves, inviting unique performative gestures and a palette of idiosyncratic timbres and sounds. The result is a performance where pedals are the signal generator, processor and primary performance space.

Through this re-appropriation of guitar effects, informed by their unique approaches to instrumental and electro-acoustic music, their work pushes against the resistances of repurposed technology, exploring the limits of what can be achieved with the no-input pedalboard as an instrument in its own right. What are the affordances of the guitar pedal as an instrument? How does this push us toward unique modes of engagement with the interface? On a musical level, can it be steered away from the more immediate possibilities of drone-based noise music to create works with complex structures, rhythmic synchrony, repeatable harmonies and performable melodic lines? Straddling the boundary between artistic practice and research, Noise Peddler's musical output ranges from glitchy space static, through sawing synth-like harmonies and melodic solos, to hard hitting beats and rhythmic polyphony..

2 Project Description

The no-input pedalboard is a modular and reconfigurable network-instrument [2] which repurposes tools designed as signal processors for guitars (and other instruments) as the primary instrument for composition and performance. The traditional use of another instrument as a sound source is replaced by guitar pedals that can be driven to self-oscillate, or that are capable of generating sound of their own. The sounds from these pedals are then fed through signal chains of other pedals, where all performable parts of the network are originally designed to colour the sound of another instrument, but have now become the primary interface for musical composition and performance.

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Fig. 1. Noise Peddler live at Salvation Studios, Brighton, UK.

As a project, Noise Peddler is guided by the following basic manifesto:

1. Guitar pedals are the only permitted sound source;
2. All performable units in the signal chain must feature a stomp switch or other foot controller (e.g. treadle), or must be originally designed for use as part of a pedalboard – this precludes the use of laptops, synthesisers or other traditional instruments;
3. All performable units in the signal chain should be off-the-shelf products available to the general public;
4. Guitar amps are the primary source of sonification;

One of the fascinating things about the guitar pedal, leveraged by Noise Peddler, is the paradox in its design. Inherent in the name is the suggestion that it is made to reside at your feet, and the unit has a stomp switch to engage the effect. At the same time, fine control over the various parameters is intended to be manipulated by hand, although this is hard to achieve when it's on the ground, and your hands are wrapped around a guitar. It is through the elevation of the pedalboard to a tabletop interface and the liberation of the hands from another instrument that the great potential of the pedal is unlocked.

The no-input pedalboard supports creative work through its reconfigurable and modular nature. This aspect of the design of the network-instrument affords a great number of musical and creative possibilities which are available through the imaginative application of the user. In particular, the architecture of the network-instrument, the mapping of parameters to controls, and the relation of these two features to performance gesture, is an integral part of the performability and useability of the instrument, and one that is intimately bound to the personal practice of the performer.

Whilst the no-input pedalboard has no traditional repertoire or set of practices – no existing habitus [1] – aspects of its musical voice are embedded in the components of the network-instrument, their order in the signal chain, the way they interact with one another, and the kinds of interactions that their

design encourage from the user. As such, the no-input pedalboard forms a highly personalised system, at the same time bringing with it the embedded knowledge and affordances of the guitar culture from which it stems. As a result, the site of the composition itself moves from being an emergent product of the instrument, to becoming the design of the network-instrument itself.

3 Technical Notes

The performance takes place within a 2.4 x 1.3 m space, with two performers overseeing symmetrical pedalboard networks that face one another on stage. The pedalboards are elevated to table height, and performed with the hands, opening up the potential for finer, real-time manipulation of the parameters across multiple pedals simultaneously. The signal path is routed in a manner which allows for multiple different oscillators providing unique source material, utility pedals splitting this audio down discrete signal paths, looping capabilities in numerous points across these chains, and a highly unconventional order of effects which defies guitar pedalboard traditions, whilst a MIDI hub is used to communicate clock and MIDI messages across the network. All of these factors result in a system which facilitates multi-voice, contrapuntal musical material from a single instrument.

An optional projection of a top-down view of the performance space allows for closer audience engagement with how the instrument is controlled throughout the performance.

Performance duration: 20 minutes.

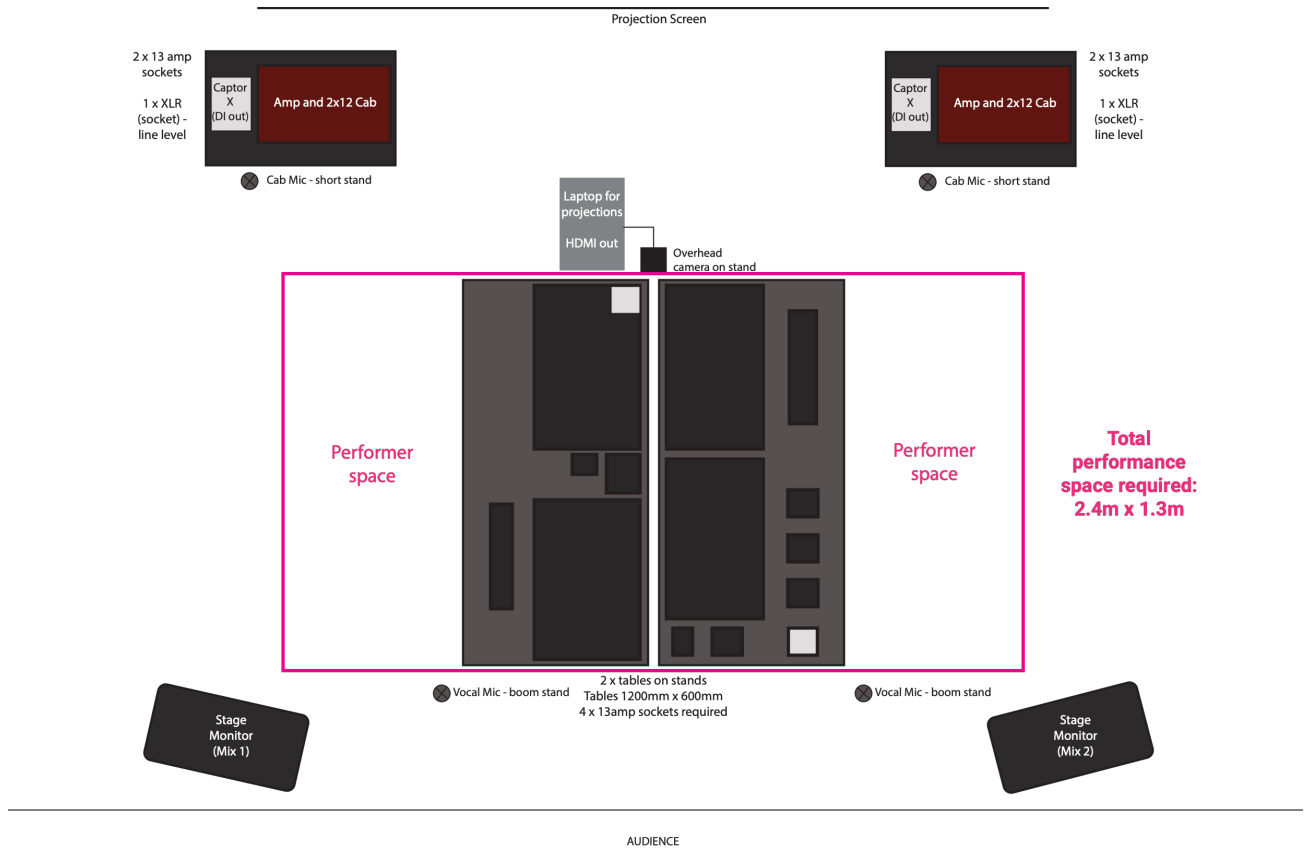

Fig. 2. Stage Plan.

4 Media Link(s)

- Video: https://youtu.be/Xu7_8tOcz1M?si=KdrYAKZvT8zk1w0T (Please note, the video linked is an example of a live performance. The performance at NIME will be of a selection of material)

Acknowledgments

Noise Peddler are associated artists of The Rose Hill, Brighton and their album is published by Rose Hill Records.

Ethical Standards

This project is undertaken by and based in the artistic practice of the authors. The research has been carried out in line with the ethical standards and practices of their affiliated institution.

References

[1] Kathleen Coessens and Stefan Östersjö. 2014. Habitus and the Resistance of Culture. In *Artistic Experimentation in Music*, eds Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore. Leuven, Leuven University Press, pp. 333–48.

[2] Osto Lähdeoja, Benoit Navarret, Santiago Quintans & Anne Sedes. 2010. The Electric Guitar: An Augmented Instrument and a Tool for Musical Composition. In *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, 4:2, 37-54.