

# FANBELT MILWAUKEE

If you want to hear a symphony, just open your window



Words/interview by Adam Lovinus

It's bit of advice from sound artist JR Robinson, the brainchild behind [Wreckmeister Harmonies](#) (CHI), an ensemble of

sonic abstractionists that performs [Thursday night at Sugar Maple](#). The latest record, *Music in Public Spaces*, plays like a

sonic lab report: In short, if you relate to words like “ambient,” “drone,” “gauzy” or go to [Peter J. Woods](#) shows, this is for

you – no verses, no choruses, no chords – just layers of sonic textures and wonderful dissonance.

This track was recorded live at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, hence the title. It's a pretty good exemplar of the

aesthetic Robinson explores.

"Pittsburgh," Wreckmeister Harmonies

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For the explanatory interview with JR Robinson

F-b: In researching you guys, I came across this Hungarian art film called "[Werkmeister Harmonies](#)." What's the

connection there?

JR: It's a bastardization of the title of that film. I wanted to pay homage without totally fucking ruining it. One of the

characters of that film goes on this diatribe about how music has been compromised when they changed to the 12-tone

scale from the original 26, and all art created with the 12-tone scale is false.

F-b: So your music employs twice as many tones as regular music?

JR: Yes. [19<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian composer] [Arnold Schoenberg](#) came up with a whole new tone scale, a really mature tone

scale that's what music should be about. I work in tones; that's what I do. I go to a public space and use these compressed

analog tones and samples that I squeeze together to capture the unique acoustical signature of each place. I'll have these

resonant tones bouncing off walls and people, and constantly changing with the room.

F-b: Do you compose in the moment? Or are your songs worked out before they're recorded?

JR: It's all about the process really. The first part is getting the analog tones that I'll use. The next part is collaborating

with another artist, kicking in their recordings into the mix; the third step would be taking all this to a public space and

projecting the tones out into the environment, and the fourth step would be to record that. Then I go back to the studio and

pare down, like, three or four hours of material into 40 minutes or so.

F-b How free are you to improvise in that kind of setting?

JR: It's all about improvisation actually. It's all about randomization. I can't predict what's going to happen; I can try to

make things happen by mixing certain tracks at a point in time. What I can't control is what happens in the space I'm

recording in. Like if someone drops something on the floor or something; that changes things because I'm using extremely

sensitive stereo microphones. I get the tone fields going, and capture people moving around, like, if someone's wearing

heels or somebody closes a book, you get these great percussive sounds.

F-b: So there's kind of a participatory thing happening between you and the environment?

JR: Exactly. It's human beings living their lives and that interests me. It's the symphony that's around you all the time. If

you want to hear a symphony, open your window. If you're aware of it, that's really great. I'm creating with the sounds that

are all around us.

F-b: How do you translate this in a live setting?

JR: That's kind of a new part of it for me. I'm taking these recordings into a performance setting rather than a creative

setting. I'll come and play, for example, a piece I recorded at a national gallery in Oslo. I will have Mark Shippy [guitar,

[US Maple](#)] and Fred Lonberg Holm along, and they'll be contributing sounds as well.

Tags: Sugar Maple, Wreckmeister, Avant Garde, Schoenberg

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