

TONY

KELLY

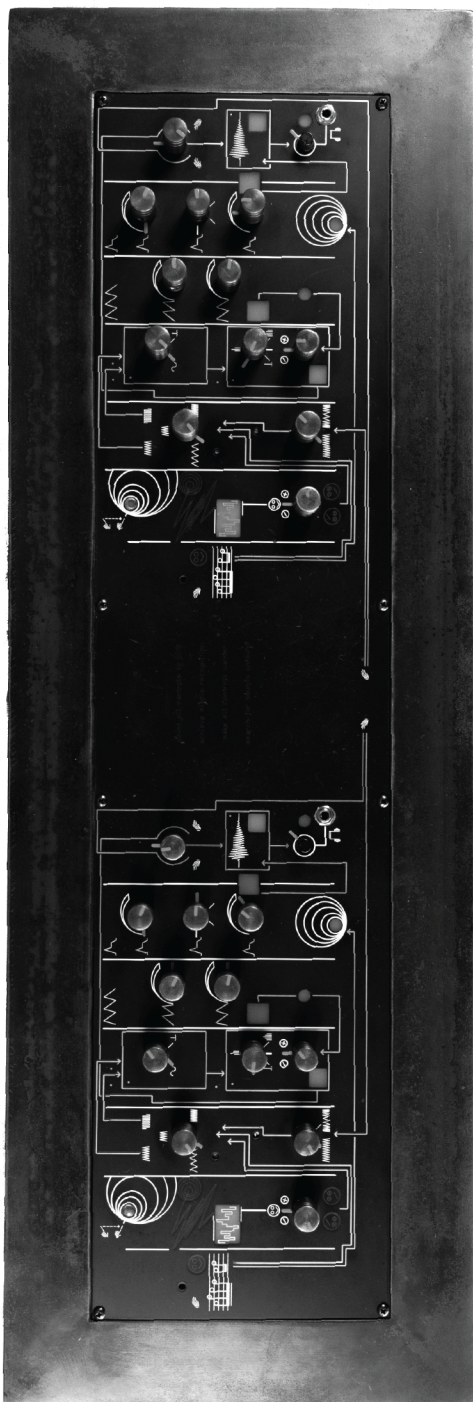
ERIC

ROBERT



**THE 0-COAST MADE ITS DEBUT
AT NAMM IN JANUARY, 2016**





THE ONE-OF-A-KIND **SYNTH FOR TWO COASTS**

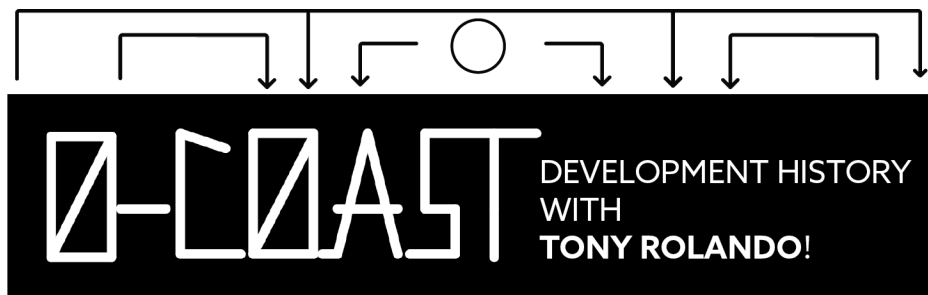
A UNIQUE INSTRUMENT DESIGNED BY TONY ROLANDO, COMMISSIONED FOR THE 2017 SONIC ARCADE AT THE MUSEUM OF ART AND DESIGN IN NEW YORK CITY, CO-CURATED BY ROBERT A.A. LOWE.

THE INSTRUMENT WAS INTENDED TO EMPHASIZE WHAT TONY SAW AS TWO CORE TENENTS OF CLASSIC ELECTRONIC MUSIC:

1. ISOLATING TIMBRE FROM NOTE
2. THE USE OF ELECTRONICALLY-GENERATED RANDOM NOTES

THE SYNTH FOR TWO COASTS CONSISTS OF TWO MODIFIED 0-COASTS IN A CUSTOM METAL CHASSIS. THE TWO SYNTHESIZERS CAN ONLY PLAY BACH'S FOURTH INVENTION, BUT PANEL CONTROLS ALLOW FOR TIMBRE MODIFICATION AND THE INJECTION OF RANDOM NOTES.

THE SYNTH FOR TWO COASTS NOW RESIDES AT MAKE NOISE HQ.



The 0-Coast was unveiled at NAMM in January of 2016. When did you first get the idea for it?

The initial idea was actually way back in the early 2000s, when I was still working at Moog. I noticed that laptops had become affordable and almost everybody was using a laptop for electronic music. At the time I had a Blacet modular system that was made up of some Blacet stuff, some DIY stuff and the PAIA kit [the 9700 series].

It was quite large and I had this thought about how it would be really great to have a little modular synth that was as thin as a laptop so you could take it with you places. It was an early dream then, it wasn't like I had an idea for the voice architecture or anything. It was just this idea of something the size of a book, and by book, I mean more like a light summer read as opposed to, like, you know, a Bible.

When it came to actually doing the project, it was a pretty fast development cycle, very different than how things have happened in the last ten years, because the market was a lot more open and there wasn't as much competition. I think at that point what happened was that I had been talking about this for years and then Moog did the Mother 32. Kelly said something along the lines of, "you know, I think you should go for it. I think you should do a little notebook modular."

How is it pronounced: No Coast, Oh Coast or Zero Coast?

It's all three, and that's on purpose. I'm constantly finding myself changing how I say it. I just thought it would be fun to have an instrument that didn't have any single name, but rather everybody kind of say it how they wanted to say it.

Was the name of the instrument born out of its design philosophy?

I think the name came about after the fact. So I guess it would be that the name was born out of the design.

The 0-Coast ended up being the first of three desktop units in the same form factor. How did you arrive at that size and how did the form factor of the 0-Coast inform the design of Strega and the 0-CTRL?

The goal was to make it as small as possible, but also there was the time factor involved [to have it ready to show at NAMM 2016], so I didn't want to try to do something that I hadn't done before, which is why it's the same height as Eurorack. I just figured I already know good ways to lay out things in 3U, so really all we have to decide on is the width, and then we have to take great efforts to keep the design as shallow as possible. So in other words, don't put parts on the backside, don't do double boards... just make this a single board with no parts on the backside so it can fit in that super shallow enclosure.

And then I started prototyping the enclosure with aluminum. I used a local metal bending shop here in town. All I remember is in that the front office, where you went to pick your stuff up, the guys smoked a lot of cigars— it was really, really heavy cigar smoke.

And there were massive dogs that just lived in the office, too. Scary big dogs.

But they did a good job. They basically would bend up whatever I gave them to do. And they didn't work with computer files, it was all just hand-drawn stuff. It's what they wanted.

The aluminum enclosure ended up being way too light, and the device would slide around on the table. I switched to thicker metal and steel to add weight so that it would be less likely to move around.

And then that informed the other two. The 0-CTRL was going to be wider than the 0-Coast and people really disliked that, so we had to shave off some features in order to squeeze it in to be the same width and also make the same kind of design considerations to keep it the same depth.

And then with Strega, that was just Alessandra Cortini saying "I want it to be the same size as the 0-Coast." And of course his initial ideas for the Strega instrument would have easily filled 4 or 5 0-Coast sized enclosures. So that was a really tough process taking that down to a single 0-Coast enclosure size. It's a compromise. It's never fun but you have to do it.

As a synthesizer voice the 0-Coast is extremely full-featured. Was landing on the collection of functionality an iterative process, or did you know from the outset what should be included within it?



I think from the outset, we wanted to get the basics of the Shared System in there. Initially it had two VCOs, but in order to make room for some of the MIDI and the random voltages that second VCO had to be chopped. We decided having MIDI and the ability to plug a keyboard in and play it like a Minimoog was important.

Essentially the idea was to take the Shared System and strip it down as much as possible into something that could fit into this small form factor.

When did you first hear the terms East Coast and West Coast in terms of synthesis, and what is the biggest misconception you hear people mention when discussing this topic?

In the 90s, none of us knew really what Buchla was, and by “us” I mean, people my age who are now playing modular synthesizers. You could see pictures of ARP 2600s and Moog modulators, but finding information about the Buchla stuff was pretty tough in the 90s.

I feel like Buchla first started coming into the synthesis conversation with the internet and mailing lists like Analog Heaven and Synth DIY. A bunch of people were on that list who went on to make modules that people are still using to this day, like David Dixon who designed modules with Intellijel. He was on that list; Ian Fritz, who designed the chaos modules, the Tweezer oscillator and a bunch of other really cool circuit designs. He was on that list; Grant Richter was on that list, and a bunch of other names that I'm not going to remember right now.

So, for example, Grant Richter was somebody who talked a lot about Buchla on the Synth DIY list, and people were also talking about it on the Analog Heaven list.

I think that's where I first started hearing the “West Coast” term, “West Coast versus East Coast,” etc., because people were talking about lowpass Gates and believe it or not, there was a period of time when most people didn't know what a lowpass gate was, myself included.

And around, say, 2003 I was reading about lowpass gates and asking questions on these mailing lists, people are referring to the West Coast synthesis and talking about how those circuits were different from East Coast synthesis. And I guess compared to the Buchla circuits, the Moog circuits were in greater supply— they had greater visibility, more people were using them. Especially the Minimoog.

Normalization on the O-Coast was an inspired choice, both to get the instrument running with the minimum number of cables, but also as an educational opportunity for those new to patching. Was the instructional side of the O-Coast a consideration in its design?

Yes. So that's part of the reason why there's a lot more activity windows on the 0-Coast than our modules, because of those normalizations. The idea was with the normalizations you can hear the results, but the new user might not make that connection right away. So we'll include an activity window anywhere there's a normalization, with a light flashing along with the change in the timbre.

And then additionally there's the gold lines. The idea was those gold lines were part of a map of the signal path and the normalizations, and the activity windows would show the activity happening through these normalized connections.

They show it when it's patched too, but the initial thought was someone's going to turn this thing on, they're going to start getting sound, and they're going to be wondering, "why is this sound changing?" And maybe this map of the signal path and the modulations in the normalizations combined with these activity windows would give them some idea of where the signal was going and why certain parts of that signal path were changing the sound, or at least where that sound change was happening.

In your work, do you find yourself patching the 0-Coast with other desktop instruments or with your larger your Eurorack system?

I use an 0-Coast almost exclusively either via a MIDI or with a 0-CTRL. I can't really think of a time that I patched it with the other synths.

For me, it's like it's own little organism. I think the beauty of it is the simplicity and the size. I think the other piece I didn't mention with modular is that it can be very overwhelming. And it can take up your entire field of vision.

This can be good sometimes, but other times you maybe need a break from that. And 0-Coast being so small, it's very unassuming. It's it's light. It's minimal. So it definitely encourages a different way of thinking and composing and playing music.

So for me, it's its own thing, which is why I never wanted it in the system, because it was supposed to be separate from the system. It's not a module, it's an 0-Coast.

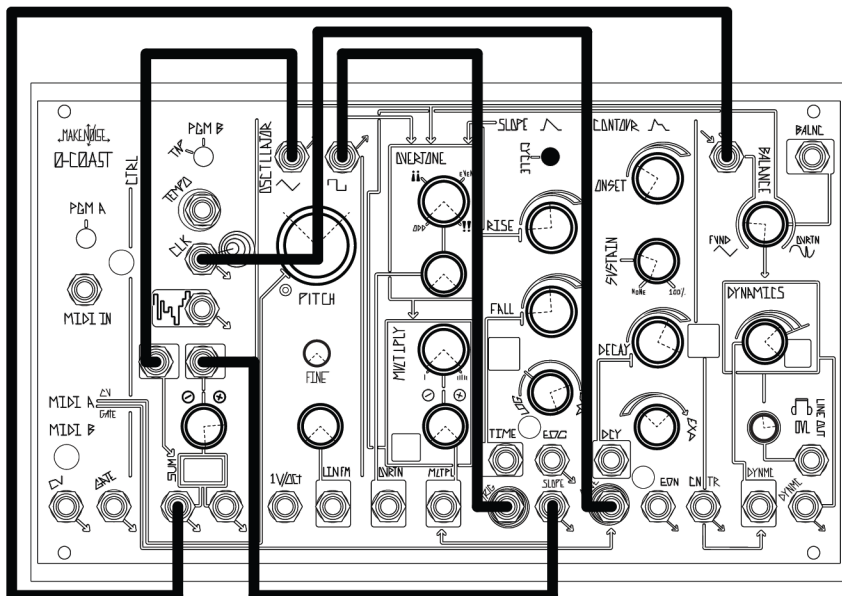
But also maybe you just don't want the whole modular universe. You just want this one little, this one little moon that's kind of orbiting the modular planet, running around in that orbit of the modular but not necessarily a modular so it allows you to focus more.





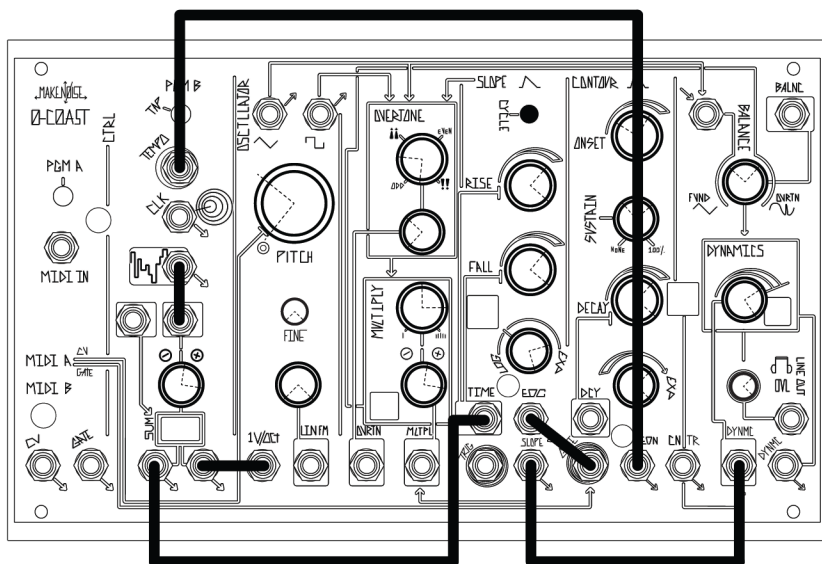
RATCHET PATCH

The Slope parameters control how many modulations occur per Clock event. Modulate Time to control this modulation frequency!



SUBHARMONIC PATCH

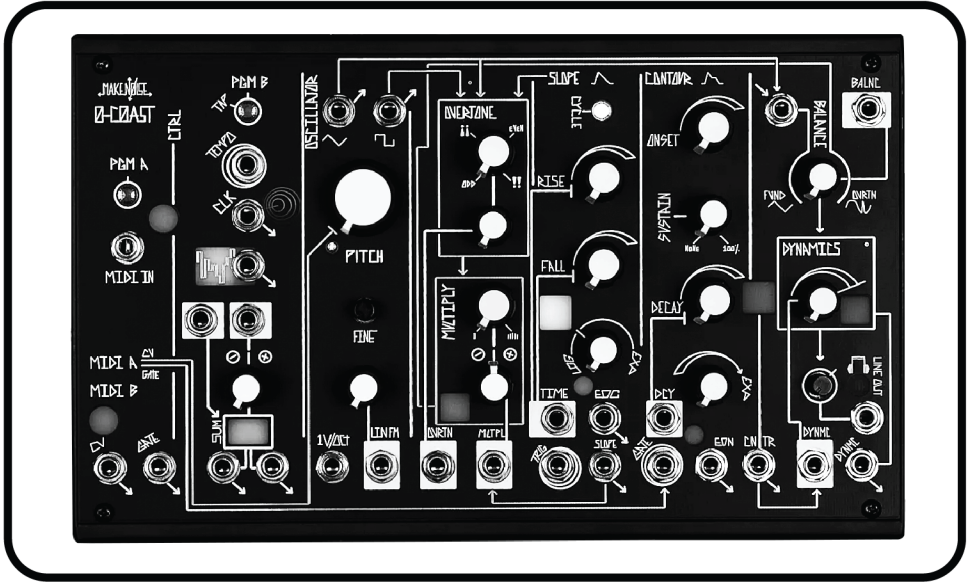
Set Slope's Rise parameter to set the maximum division amount, and adjust Fall to set the timbre of the subharmonic voice.



KRELL PATCH

Todd Barton's famous Krell Patch! Adjust the Slope parameters and Voltage Math attenuverter to control the patch's timebase.

"NEAR FAILURE TO LAUNCH" by Kelly Kelbel



Tony first had the idea for a book-sized, smaller than a laptop, able to fit in a backpack or even a large purse, synthesizer in 2004, before Make Noise even existed. When he founded Make Noise 4 years later, with a laser focus on modular, he forgot about his idea.

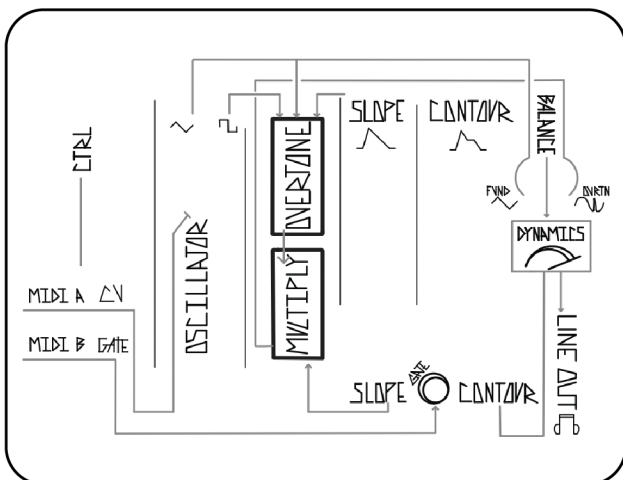
In 2015, he designed the O-Coast, his homage to West Coast and East Coast synthesis, with an allegiance to neither. Matt Sherwood worked on midi. Walker, along with the crew, beta-tested.

With our friends Rob and Karie at Shelter, we designed a booth for the NAMM show featuring collapsible plywood tables, and a backdrop of art from Zach Smith. This was the first year we shipped a whole exhibit to be handled by the union, our crate slated to land in our 10x10 spot before we arrived. Finally, our own booth. And upstairs, away from the ukuleles and karaoke machines, near the larger synthesizer manufacturers. It all felt---scary.

Before Walker and Lee wrote the manual, before dealers took orders, before the crew built, tested, packed, sold, and shipped them to you or showed you all the fun you could have with an 0-Coast, there's a whole other story. The 0-Coast, now ten years in, almost didn't launch!

We put the tables together, hung the backdrop. Several someones who worked at the convention center walked in and out of booths to check that they were following protocol. I was not worried as I read that manual multiple times. A woman in her sixties with curly brown hair came by with a clipboard to check that everything had been treated with flame retardant. That was in the manual? I said yes, definitely, of course we did that. In the next booth, I watched her make a synth company dispose of parts of their exhibit over the same issue. I called Shelter to confirm. No answer. I remembered they were on vacation in some kind of paradise. The woman who made sure we abided by the rules returned, and I repeated yes, definitely, of course we did that. I told her I called the designers, which was true. She checked us as cleared to show.

The crate and the flame retardant were not the reason the 0-Coast almost never got into your hands (and dare I say, into your hearts, too). That story will be shared at the 10-Coast Concert at the AyurPrana Listening Room on September 12th...



"REMINISCENCE" BY WALKER FARRELL

On October 12, 2015, I received an email from Tony entitled "A Voice." In it he detailed an idea for a module that would condense the most essential circuits of the DPO, add a VCA and two function generators, and thus include the entire voice structure in a single panel. He also mentioned that he had an idea for an affordable enclosure so we could ship this unit ready to play (without needing a case).

Before this, the least expensive synth we were able to provide was the System Zero, a bare-bones two-voice system with no sequencing or control included. It consisted of a DPO, Optomix, and MATHS in a skiff with patch cables, and had a price tag north of \$1000.

The real reason to do something like the voice module that would become the 0-Coast, is to make it accessible. Make it feel a lot like patching a set of modules even when it's only just one... or, better yet, even when it's not a module at all. The design that started as "a module that can also be used standalone" rapidly evolved into "a tabletop synthesizer with Eurorack compatibility."

On a "professional" level as a representative of Make Noise, I was excited by the prospect of this instrument - it would be easier to use, afford, and integrate for those who had not "made the leap" into modular synthesis. But on a personal level I wasn't really that excited. I had been using modular synths for nearly a decade at this point, and a reduced-function version that wouldn't provide any new capabilities I didn't already have seemed like a smart business decision, but not so much inspiring to me personally.

That is, until Tony brought out the first prototype.

Like many early prototypes of modules, it had no panel, no labels, no knobs. The digital elements (MIDI, random generation, tap tempo clock) didn't work yet. Nothing was labeled. It was just a circuit board with some pots and jacks and LEDs sticking out, sitting awkwardly on the surface of the table. I plugged straight into the headphone output, and I quickly changed my tune. It sounded amazing and was fun to play in a very different way from a full modular system. Tony had very precisely limited the ranges of parameters to create a synth that was all sweet spots, and in the context of late 2015 when almost all of our voice and timbre structures were laden with vactrols, it had an immediacy and punchiness that was surprisingly different from the DPO/Optomix pairing we'd been oriented around. I soon found myself just as ensconced in patching magic on the 0-Coast as I would be on my personal system at home.

To me, the 0-Coast is by far the easiest so-called "semi-modular" synth to use. It's the only one that shows you right on the panel with clear gold arrows where all the normalizations are, without a shadow of a doubt. This makes it the ultimate tool, in my opinion, for teaching how synthesis actually works. I used hardwired un-patchable synths for years before I ever patched modular, and when I finally started patching I realized just how little I knew. If my first synth had been an 0-Coast I might have been better off!

Tony referred to the instrument as "No Coast" for weeks as a placeholder name, with alternatives like "Lightning Bolt" never really catching on. Finally on December 19, the day the project was put out for quote, Tony wrote:

I'm leaning toward:

0-COAST

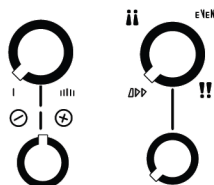
Mostly because it means something like No Coast, but looks better when drawn as a Logo and could be said as "zero coast" or "ohh coast." both of which sound similar to "no-coast."

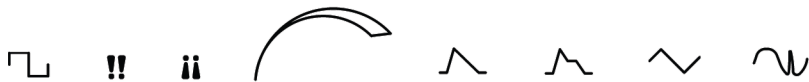
He supplemented this with a mockup of the logo:



On January 19, barely three months after that first email expressing the concept, Tony was in Anaheim with a working 0-Coast prototype, and unsure whether this concept was exciting enough to launch the next day at the NAMM show. He almost didn't announce it, but in the end he went forward with it and sure enough it almost immediately

became a huge part of the Make Noise legacy. Not many of even the most classic synthesizers were ever in continuous production for an entire decade, and when we consider that 0-Coast is, to most eyes and ears, a pretty weird little instrument, it's a real thrill to know that so many people have been loving it for such a long time.





WHAT ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

with the

MAKE NOISE CREW!

TONY:

- Jeff Parker ETA IVtet - "Happy Today"
- Caterina Barbieri & Bendik Giske - "At Source"
- Robert A.A. Lowe - "Manifestations in the Shadow of an Uncertain Land"

KELLY:

- Emahoy Tsege Mariam Gebru
- Suzanne Ciani - "Seven Waves"
- Jeremiah Chiu & Marta Sofia Honer - "Different Room"

WALKER:

- "Peace Anthems" compilation (Red Hook Records)
- Phillip Golub - "Partisan Ship"
- "Walker" (film, dir. Alex Cox)

BAYLEY:

- Evelyne/Masao - "Testpattern"
- Ambitious Lovers - "Greed"
- Wownow - "How?"

ERIC:

- How to Destroy Angels - "s/t"
- Coil - "Love's Secret Domain"
- *The Vampire Lestat* (TV show)

SAM:

- *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* (book, by Haruki Murakami)
- *High Art* (film, dir. Lisa Cholodenko)
- *The Love That Remains* (film, dir. Hlynur Pálmason)

MEG:

- Björk - Debut
- FKA Twigs - Eusexua
- Wolfsheim - Spectators

LEE:

- Danny Gatton - "Redneck Jazz"
- *Our Gang* (TV show)
- *Phantoms* (book, by Dean Koontz)

MARK:

- Bitchin Bajas and Natural Information Society - "Tonality"
- Valentina Magaletti & YPY - "Kansai Bruises"
- Charanjit Singh - "Ten Ragas to a Disco Beat"

BEN:

- Austin Weber - "Love Songs for No One"
- Paul McCartney - "McCartney II"
- Labi Siffre - "Remember My Song"

RYAN:

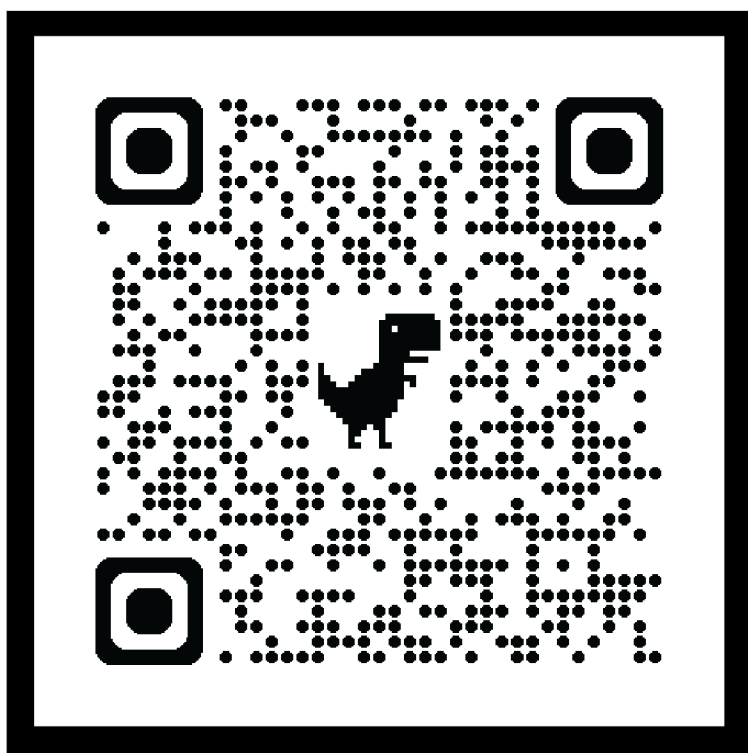
- Obsession (film, dir. Curry Barker)
- *Field of Vision II* - Live Stream (festival)
- John Carpenter - "Cathedral"

PETE:

- *No Picnic* (film, dir. Philip Hartman)
- Speedy West - "Steel Guitars"
- Caroline K - "Now Wait For Last Year"

LEWIS:

- Hiroshi Yoshimura - "Wet Land"
- *Mission Hill* (TV Series)
- *The Hunt for Red October* (on VHS)



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ALL 10 ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD FROM
OUR WEBSITE - FOLLOW THE QR CODE ABOVE OR HEAD TO
MAKENOISEMUSIC.COM/SUM-OUT/ZINES TO READ THEM!

