

# A Horrible Guide to Reasonable Noise

CHRIS ZIEGLER

published: May 05, 2005

So a guy walks into the experimental music show, hears some fart noises, and calls the artist a fraud—this is why I can't tell people I'm a music writer, because they'll think my whole life is frauds and fart noises.

Funny, too, because Aaron Ximm—the fraud in question—was one of the most thoughtful and modest artists I've talked to for months. His found-sound performance pieces wiped years of bar rock right off my brain, a meditative antidote to the bands whose entire lives you can read in the stickers peeling off the window of their van: Calvin peeing on a Misfits skull, SOCIAL DISTORTION next to WEST COAST CHOPPERS; just music made by people who like to stand on a stage wearing baggy boardshorts.

But now we got a nerd fight. Last week, Rich Kane, my cellmate at the *Weekly*, called Aaron a fraud ("[Metal Machine Music](#)," April 29). It's a claim that's already tough to handle when we accord Marijuana the Band ([Locals Only](#), March 25) artistic legitimacy. Objectively: if you can ascribe value to a Grateful Dead jam session, then there's no reason you can't handle Aaron's found-sound shows, unless it's a problem of translation—Ximm's performances sound like gurgling water/creaking wood/cars starting/pigs snuffling/etc. because that's what they are, and you can't listen to it like it's going to go verse/bridge/chorus/guitar solo!/oh yeah! because that's not the point; that's like writing off Pearl Jam because they didn't mix enough train-track clatter into the drums. It's not the kind of thing that just curls up in your lap; you have to prepare for it to make it work and that's great—if you get out of music what you put into it, that explains why all that sit-back-and-relax radio chow is just a long boring line of zeroes, and if you don't wanna follow Aaron's helpful instructions—it's a little weird when the artist sets up *conditions* for the audience, sure, if you're just used to wandering into a club with a press pass—that's fine too; every listener is their own critic; every listener doesn't have to listen.

But a guy like Aaron Ximm isn't tricking people. He came to his kind of quiet after a lot of consideration and study, and he found some value in it, and he's put it all together so anyone else who wants it can have it. Like he said before: "You basically tempt people with a carrot to get them to walk out in a garden, and then they realize, hey, they got the reward of walking out in a garden." Noise hasn't been an insult for 30 years; for someone like Aaron, it's a genre to dismantle—he goes quiet when everyone else is loud, he lifts his sounds from the outside world when everyone else pinches them out of a computer. Laugh at it—okay, that's valid. But to say Aaron's faking out an audience too stupid to understand anything anyway—that's kinda below-the-belt. I wrote Ximm an apology note when I saw it. There are people who are *real*frauds—that's quite a distinction, to be a *real*fraud—but Aaron isn't one of them, and calling fake when we shouldn't makes our opinions that much less credible when we spot someone who really demands a shoot-down.

But Aaron's also a nice guy, used to catcalls from the my-kid-could-do-that! crowd, so he wasn't upset at all. "A withering critique grounded on the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary sound art and acoustic ecological practice—that I might be depressed by," he said. "This kind of thing is just funny!" But he wanted to know if he should write us a letter, explaining how and why he works with found sound, just to help people understand. "I guess," I told him, "but we'll probably just make fun of it."