

# The New York Times

## Listen to Five of the World's Newest, Wildest Instruments

A Lego guitar and a “war tuba” are among the highlights of this year’s Guthman Musical Instrument Competition.



Steve Parker’s musical instruments make no sound. Instead, this trombonist repurposes brass instruments as sculptural listening devices. His inspirations are the early-20th-century military sound locaters — some called war tubas — that were used to detect approaching enemy aircraft before the invention of radar. Parker’s instruments exude a similar gangly menace, with yards of Seussian tubing ending in the flared bells of trombones and sousaphones.

Parker’s devices — some wearable, some attached to a gallery wall — become part of compositions that play with the dimensionality of sound. They also connect music with aggressive modes of listening like surveillance and espionage.

“They are picture frames — but they are more than that,” Parker said in a video interview from the American Academy in Rome, where he is currently a fellow. “They not only select and amplify certain sounds; they also resonate at certain frequencies. Because the instrument vibrates when the sound hits it, it harmonizes it in a subtle way.”

Parker says the effect on the listener is disorienting. He likes how the repurposed marching band instruments — rich in associations with warfare, protests and modern gladiator sports — can be transformed into tools for communal listening. And he enjoys the “bit of bricolage” that goes into disassembling instruments and soldering their components with copper pipes from the hardware store. In the process, he said, “I’ve become quite friendly with my plumber.”

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