

SO! Amplifies: Nameless Sound

Sounding Out! Authors

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Abstract

SO! Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome! Nameless Sound is a Houston institution, currently celebrating 25 years of bringing free experiences of experimental music making to the local community.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Music Technology and Sound Studies (Topic), Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (Subfield), Children's Issues, Civic Engagement, Community Organizer, Curation, Improvisation



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SO! Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome!

Nameless Sound is a Houston institution, currently celebrating 25 years of bringing free experiences of experimental music making to the local community. The organization, founded by trombone player/composer/improviser [David Dove](#), started out as a small workshop in improvisation for teenagers at the [MECA \(Multicultural Education and Counseling through the Arts\)](#), an arts community center in Houston's 6th Ward. Dove realized through musical practice with his students that the opportunity for creativity was often missing in traditional musical education and that improvisation was, for him, the most immediate and inclusive way to collaboratively engage young people in creative music making. Despite widely varying musical expertise, the students were able to able to meaningfully collaborate with one another. Beginners were captivated and engaged, while students with more musical education were challenged and ready to experiment. Shortly after this realization, Dove became part of the Advisory Board of

[Diverse Works](#), an arts organization in Houston's museum district, he began organizing concerts with leading experimental musicians, inviting them to lead sessions of his kids' workshop at MECA.



courtesy of **Nameless Sound**

It was Houston's own [Pauline Oliveros](#) who encouraged Dove to formalize this residency model—experimental musicians come to town, give a public performance followed by a community workshop for young people—that would become the blueprint for Nameless Sound's work today. The organization actually began as a branch of the Pauline Oliveros Foundation in 2001 (and would come to be called the Deep Listening Institute Houston when Oliveros's organization took on that name). That year they brought 9 artists to Houston and started a ongoing campaign of improvisation workshops in public schools (known then as *The Houston Tour*).

In 2005 Jo Ann Williams, art therapist and founder of [ArtBridge Houston](#), invited DLI Houston to start giving workshops for children in some Houston homeless shelters. This was an important

turning point for DLI Houston. It widened the age group that the organization worked with. It began a practice of facilitating workshops for people who previously had no experience playing music at all. Perhaps most importantly, Nameless Sound began to witness the potential for social-emotional learning in the improvisational process, and they began to understand how a secure framework for creative music making could also provide a safe-space for emotional vulnerability.

In 2006, with the blessing of Oliveros, DLI Houston broke off from its parent organization and became Nameless Sound, a fully independent 501(c)3 non-profit. Over the past 20 years, Nameless Sound has continued to evolve. Its concert series has become known for a diverse range of international artists who represent the most important and influential names in the music, as well as the emerging cutting-edge.

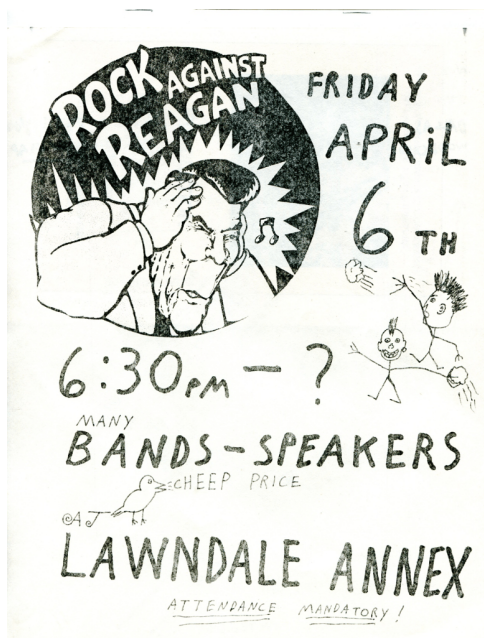


<https://youtu.be/aq9aZX7rbKM>

The series features commissions and world-premieres, as well as special projects that entail collaborations between visiting artists and local musicians. Site-specific events in some of Houston's most interesting art environments often bring in visiting audiences from outside of the city. Visiting artists have included [Susie Ibarra](#), [Damon Smith](#), [Keiji Haino](#), [Louis Moholo](#), [Maja Ratkje](#), [Cooper-Moore](#), [Matana Roberts](#), and [Hamid Drake](#). Occasional interventions bring ears to seemingly unlikely public listening spaces. And one of our ongoing projects outside of Houston brings audiences to [The Hill of James Magee](#), an art installation on private land in the West Texas Chihuahuan Desert.



<https://youtu.be/SLuwSqB9ZHQ>



Flyer from the online collection of [Ozone City Outrage : Houston's Punk History](#)

One of Nameless Sound's most popular interventions is *They, Who Sound*, which started out as a series of casual sessions at local Houston bars. After some challenges and changes in location, Nameless Sound officially took on *They, Who Sound* in 2018 as a weekly series of concerts in partnership with [Lawndale Art Center](#). For Lawndale, the series represented something of a return to roots, as in the 1980's, Lawndale's original location was the site for some of the most memorable experimental music and underground rock events in Houston. Sun Ra, Anthony Braxton, Pauline Oliveros, Cecil Taylor and the Art Ensemble of Chicago all performed there, as did Black Flag, The Minutemen and the Replacements.

For Nameless Sound, *They Who Sound* was an opportunity to provide a stage and shed light on Houston's diverse, vibrant, and unique experimental music scene. It has endured as a meeting place for Houston listeners and experimental musicians, and as a lab for new developments. In

response to the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine, Nameless Sound continued to innovate and serve the community, creating They, Who Sound Special Delivery. For a small fee, anyone can schedule a They, Who Sound musician to come to their home and perform a 10 minute piece of experimental music from a safe distance.



https://youtu.be/nr2kx7zzu_s

They, Who Sound continues in concert with the Lawndale Art Center every Monday from 7:30 to 9:30pm (Doors open at 7pm). Coming up September 28th, 2026 Nameless Sound will host Emily Beisel/Lisa Cameron & Laura Dykes/Kodey Saldaña/Thomas Swindell. For videos of past performances and to subscribe to receive future updates, you can check out [Nameless Sound's Youtube Page](#) or follow on [Vimeo](#).



Nameless Sound remains committed to a vision of personal and community evolution supported by the practices of creative music. Creative music improvisation provides a unique opportunity to cultivate group awareness, self-awareness and healthy vulnerability, with potential outcomes of knowledge exchange, creative work, play and healing. The skills developed through musical improvisation emphasize listening, creativity, spontaneity, dialogue and self-expression. There are free ongoing workshops [through September 2026](#) and more to be announced.

Other upcoming events for Nameless Sound to close out 2026:

- **October 10, 3 – 5 pm, *Dimensions Variable*** at [Moody Center for the Arts](#), Rice University. Laura Dykes and Aryn Ward on/with Nanibah Chacon's *Where Two Rivers Meet*. As part of

The Moody Center's *Dimensions Variable* series, in conjunction with the exhibition *Radiant Geometries: Vectors of Knowledge from the Indigenous Americas*

- **November 12, 7–8 p.m., [Vitalized Vitalized](#) at [Menil](#).** : The **Nameless Sound Ensemble** creates and performs scores based on works by **Terry Winters**. Presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Terry Winters: Vitalized Geometry*, This program takes place in the main building, located at 1533 Sul Ross Street. As always, Menil programs are free and open to all.

Nameless Sound is currently in [Fall Fundraising mode](#), with an anonymous donor matching every gift up to 8,000 dollars through **TODAY, September 21**. Here's to 25 more years of Nameless Sound [with ongoing support](#) from local and global sound communities!



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