

# **Noise Peddler**

## **A Live Exploration of the Pedalboard as Performance Interface**

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### **Abstract**

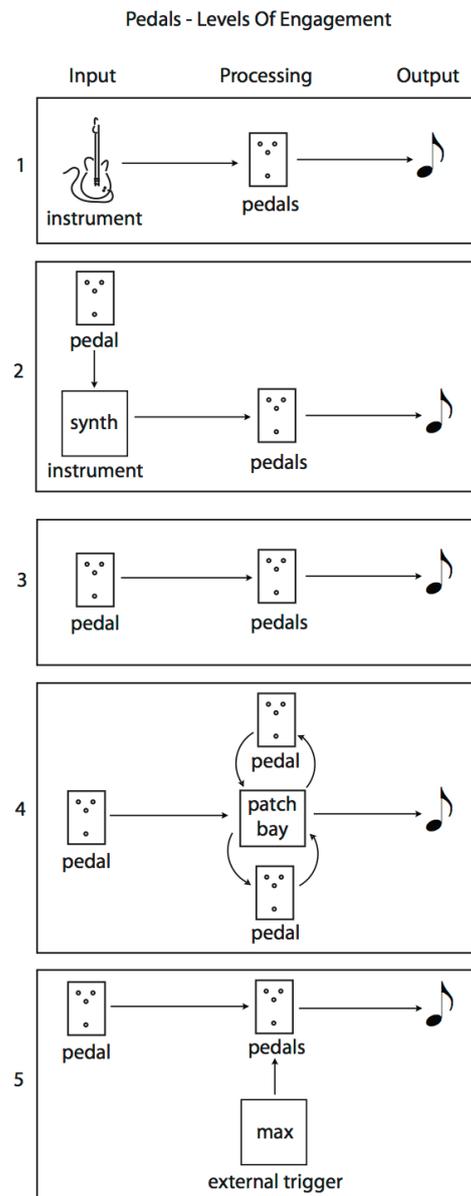
Noise Peddler is a part-composed, part-improvised performance for two people, two pedalboards, and four amplifiers involving the re-appropriation of guitar effects pedals to create independent musical interfaces capable of generating and manipulating their own sounds. The result is a visually symmetrical live performance that utilises dual stand-alone pedalboards, generative MIDI/CV control, and video projection, to explore the area between composition and free improvisation. The hybrid performance system employs a selection of cutting edge modern pedal technologies, alongside well-established analog circuits, and explores their potential as an independent interface, away from the guiding force of a traditional acoustic instrument.

The project's interfaces are constructed from a handpicked hybrid system of smaller, stand-alone modules originally intended for use with instrumental input signals, rather than a preconceived, integrated network. This hybrid system is expanded further through the addition of CV and MIDI parameter control, some of which is generative, via a custom Max patch. Each pedalboard generates two output

streams, which are directed into four guitar amplifiers, allowing the performers to create varied textures across a spectrum of simple-complex spatialised soundworlds.

The past decade has found expanding functionality blurring the boundary between pedals and modular synthesis, with CV in/out, MIDI control, effects/feedback loops, and programmable automation of parameters becoming commonplace amongst the more forward-thinking exponents. The proposed performance builds on a number of areas of current and historical practice – especially the intersection between popular and experimental electric guitar performance, and contemporary sound art/experimental performance. It seeks to explore what role the pedal, and pedalboard, plays within these areas of practice, and how it can be considered as a performance interface in its own right. The work draws influence from early proponents such as Jimi Hendrix, who developed and deployed what could be considered a performer/instrument/pedal/amplifier based cybernetic feedback system (van Veen, 2016: 76) to create soundworlds and textures beyond the capability of the instrument alone. In many cases these sonic textures were entirely dependent on the combination of the individual pedal circuits into a chain (for example, ‘Machine Gun’ from Band of Gypsies (Hendrix, 1970) at

3:59 and ‘Star Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock (Hendrix, 1970)). A more contemporary example is composer/performer Zeno Baldi (Baldi, 2017), whose work often utilises guitar pedals to create intricate sonic textures in both experimental performance settings and contemporary classical composition.



Although the pedalboard, and the use of guitar pedals, in experimental music is not uncommon, Noise Peddler seeks to investigate exactly what role the pedal, and pedalboard, can take by exploring the levels and modes of engagement that we can have with them as performers/composers (see figure 1). As such, it moves away from the first and most typical mode – where an input signal is modified by a chain of pedals - and instead will present a series of segments each exploring no-input pedalboard systems as performance interfaces. In doing so, it builds on previous work by the performers/composers that has involved pedal-dependent sonic materials and live manipulation - Swells, Shrieks & Judders (Westwood, 2017) - and part-composed, part-improvised compositions incorporating generative MIDI controlled analog pedals – Fracterruptions (Bright, 2017). This practice-based research engages with guitar pedals as the primary interface to performance, and seeks to explore the modern guitar pedalboard as a critical bridge between commercial

guitar technology, often sonically conservative guitar culture, and experimental performance, sound art, and contemporary electro-acoustic composition. In turn, it informs the development by the performers of a critical and contextual framework for considering the various roles guitar technology, and in particular the guitar pedal, plays in enabling sonic experimentation, and alternative modes of performance interface.

### Keywords

Effects Pedals  
Repurposing  
Hybrid Systems  
Performance  
Composition  
Improvisation  
Noise  
Generative Control  
Electronics  
Performance Systems  
Electronic Performance  
Control Voltage  
MIDI  
Guitar  
Duo

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