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## From the Artists

### Andrew Bird

As a composer, I am interested in how one's environment and the scale of a landscape affect one's musical imagination; how seeing a storm approach, pass overhead and continue eastward can calibrate the mind to hear music beyond the 8 bar phrase. How the surrounding walls of sand stone at Zion National Park provoke their own frequencies, or the wind strumming through a field a of prairie grasses has its own phrasing. A steamy mossy forest in the northwest has a certain grain and texture.

I'm interested in how when the mind focuses on a single voice, it's forced to track its trajectory like a story, but when there are too many voices to process, the mind submits and relaxes to the din of many. The music was composed on site and is a response to the MCA's atrium environment. Two pieces, "Skin" and "Nyatiti," are taken from earlier records--I wanted to see how their counterpoint would sound dispersed amongst different clusters of horns. My hope is that it all has the effect of slowing the listener's perception of time.

### Ian Schneller

As a sculptor I am fascinated with form. As an inventor I am interested in utility. As a musician I am preoccupied with sound. As a luthier I am concerned with precision. All four of these concerns are interrelated in my work, and I see basic physics and historic principles as being the key to their successful integration. I want to celebrate these disregarded and neglected technologies, not only because they are often so much more sensible than more current ones, but because they are innately beautiful.

There is so much beauty in the simplicity of the vacuum tube triode, or in the vibrating strings of a guitar, that I could spend a lifetime savoring their various manifestations. Likewise I am endlessly fascinated by basic physical phenomena like sound waves expanding within a horn. The shapes I create are applications of natural phenomena, their ultimate utility being my alibi for rampant creativity. In my work I journey back through time and I try to convey a sense of the simplicity, the mechanical history, the true and tried technologies. My Specimens are all honest representations of the most fundamental concepts in nature. They are for me and for you.

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# Andrew Bird & Ian Schneller

## *Sonic Events*

Wednesday & Thursday,

December 21 & 22, 2011

**Museum of  
Contemporary Art  
Chicago**

## Sonic Events

Today's performance is integral to the installation *Sonic Arboretum*. The event and installation are conceived and created by composer/violinist Andrew Bird and sculptor/ inventor Ian Schneller as part of their ongoing investigation into how sounds fall in a landscape.

On view through December 31, 2011, *Sonic Arboretum* can be described as a symphonic field of poppies, a prairie of sound, or a forest floor, that allows Bird to create musical impressions. It consists of 75 of plant-shaped horn speakers ranging from three-feet to a towering nine feet in height, some rotating, and powered by custom-made tube amplifiers based on 1930's technology. Schneller's Chicago shop, Specimen Products, hand-made each speaker using compressed recycled newsprint and dryer lint. Bird recorded compositions for this arrangement on site using a 48-channel playback system. His layered loops of violin, guitar, and glockenspiel play continuously as museum visitors meander and follow the music's lead.

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## About the artists

**Andrew Bird**, a multi-instrumentalist and lyricist, picked up his first violin at the age of 4 and spent his formative years soaking up classical repertoire completely by ear. When it came time for a restless teen-ager to make his own way, it wasn't such a giant leap to Hungarian Gypsy music, early jazz, country blues, south Indian, etc. It's fitting that now, though classically trained, he has opted to play his violin in a most unconventional manner, accompanying himself on glockenspiel and guitar, adding singing and whistling to the equation and becoming a pop songwriter in the process.

His work was first acclaimed in the concert setting by the curious attraction of one man generating the wealth of sound normally produced by an orchestra, seemingly composing, or at least structuring the songs. Passages of violin, guitar, voice and glockenspiel are looped and layered forging a texture of definitive hooks and rhythms out of spontaneous stabs and strums. Each night is unique; Bird rarely replicates the album version, as beloved as they may be.

Since beginning his recording career in 1997, he has released eleven albums, most recently his instrumental album *Useless Creatures*. His 2009 album *Noble Beast* won praise from *Esquire*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *NPR*, *Rolling Stone*, *Spin*, and many others. The tour that followed the album's release with a worldwide tour that kicked off at Carnegie Hall and included appearances at Lollapalooza, Bonnaroo, Radio

City Music Hall, The Hollywood Bowl, the Sydney Opera House and the TED conference, along with a few hundred more destinations. He ended his tour with a series of solo instrumental "Gezelligheid" concerts exploring a different atmosphere and setting for his music, which utilized many of Schneller's horn speakers and inspired the Sonic Arboretum project.

**Ian Schneller**, a sculptor/luthier, has been designing and building his own line of custom guitars, tube amplifiers and audio horn speakers for a worldwide clientele for more than 25 years. Schneller first created his Specimens while completing a Master's Degree in Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1999 he began creating a series of audio horns for instrument amplification, including the single-horn speaker, with which Andrew Bird began recording and performing, then the Janus Horn (a spinning double horn speaker), followed later by his XL Horn Speakers, all of which Bird uses extensively. Schneller's horn speakers have graced the stage alongside Bird at Carnegie Hall, Chicago's Lyric Opera House, Hollywood Bowl, on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, *Austin City Limits*, and the 2010 Ted Conference.

Schneller's work has been featured in *Rolling Stone*, *Surface*, *Cool Hunting*, *SPIN*, *ELLE*, *Playboy*, *The Absolute Sound*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Tone Audio*, *Guitar Player*, *Wired*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Fretboard Journal*, and *Chicago Magazine*, and many other publications. His patented Little Horn Speakers blend modern and vintage aesthetics and technology and were selected by *I.D. Magazine* as one of 2009's "Sharpest New Products" and were featured in a national Apple iPad television commercial. Schneller is also founder of the Chicago School of Guitar Making, where he teaches the art and craft of guitar repair, guitar building, and tube amplifier construction.

## Credits

*Project Producers:* Andrea Troolin and Nadine Schneller

*Installation & Live Sound Engineers:* Neil Strauch, Tom Carlson, Neal Jensen

*Project Assistance:* Victoria Roe, Justin Becker, Imogen Schneller, Chester Ong, Corey Rosebrook, Jessie Bayani, Emily Elhaj, Michael Silvestri, Malcolm Black, John Asta, Nick deLannoy, Pete Mueller, John Busch, J. Niimi.

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## Composition Titles:

The Fatal Chord c. 2012	Stilted Conversation c. 2012
Columns of Glass c. 2012	Skin c. 2003
Skine of Teeth c. 2012	Nyatiti c. 2008
Not a Girl but a Puma c. 2012	Bouncy Conversation c. 2012
Incantation c. 2012	Desert Sea c. 2012
An Era of Thieves c. 2012	Wedding March c. 2012
Bunch a Swells c. 2012	Red Zion c. 2012