

MAGAZINE

Electric Eclectics: Annual Festival Fuses Sound, Art, Fans and Fun

By [Becky Rynor](#) on July 23, 2013



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Artists [Gordon Monahan](#) and Laura Kikauka barely flinch at the prospect of hosting several hundred people at their farm in Meaford, Ontario every August.

“Approximately 1,200 people come over the course of the weekend,” says Monahan, a sound and media artist, composer and a 2013 recipient of the Governor General’s Award for Visual Arts. “We can

put about 30 people in beds in various outbuildings on the property. The rest camp and can buy food from a variety of food vendors that are on hand.”

The draw is the annual [Electric Eclectics](#) music festival held over the August Civic holiday weekend and now in its eighth year. It’s an avant garde event that has become a pilgrimage for fans and musicians seeking—or already on—the cutting edge of sound as art. Monahan, for example, is internationally recognized for his kinetic sculptures, computer-controlled sound environments, sophisticated compositions and video installations. His Governor General’s Award-winning work, [Resonant Platinum Records](#), comprises four aluminum discs, piano wire, and small motors which send vibrations down the wire and into the discs.

The weekend features electronic, experimental and cross-over musical acts and DJs, art installations, sound-oriented films and workshops, including one for kids on percussion.



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“I would say it is pretty true to name in that it is really eclectic,” says festival co-founder Chris Worden. “There is a blend of genuinely experimental music, noise music and sound art. Then there are cross-over acts which have enough in common with experimental music or have enough elements of the avant garde that it makes sense to book them.”

This year’s line-up includes [The Gories](#), [No Joy](#), [Shelley Hirsch](#) and [Mary Margaret O’Hara](#), who Worden says is “is well respected, a very unique vocalist and a Canadian artist.” The Gories, he describes as “a Detroit garage band, in terms of their feel. They are also responsible for the revival of, and bringing a new aesthetic to, garage music.”

Michael Evans is a long-time friend and a percussionist from New York City. He’s been attending [Electric Eclectics](#) from the beginning.

“I’m a cook, a performer, a DJ between acts, and I always teach percussion workshops,” he says. “It’s like a working vacation for me. It’s a lot of work, but I make it fun. I’ll cook for two to three days

previous to the festival, and churn out anywhere from 30 to 75 meals per day for artists, performers, staff and organizers.”

“It’s about keeping old friendships going, and finding ways to have a good time and create artistically within that friendship,” says Monahan about the festival. “We don’t treat it as being separate from our social life, so much as it just becomes an expansion of what we do artistically and socially anyway.”



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The result is a fusing of sound and art set against the backdrop of the 100-acre “Funny Farm.”

“It’s meant to incorporate the stage performances and installations with the experience of the property itself,” says Worden. “It’s a unique location on the west-facing slope of a small mountain, looking over a valley. You have beautiful sunsets; there’s a forest where the DJs tend to be located. A lot of the installations end up being site-specific.”

Monahan agrees, “it’s a great way to use the farm. We’re able to relax and enjoy it now, too. We get paid a small amount for actually doing the festival, but I’d say all the way around it’s worthwhile for the social impact. It helps us with our own artistic careers. Rather than being artists, we’re presenters and curators; so you put on a different hat, and you make and develop different contacts that way.”

The 2013 [*Electric Eclectics*](#) festival will be held 2–4 August in Meaford, Ontario, northwest of Toronto.