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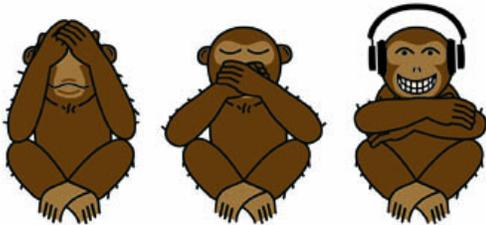
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**MUSIC**

AUDIOPHILES

Sound brings a wide array of artists and artisans together for the second annual Megapolis Festival

By **Bret McCabe** | Posted 5/12/2010



JENNIFER DANIEL

**Megapolis**

May 14-16 at various venues.

Visit [megapolisfestival.org](http://megapolisfestival.org) for full details and schedule.

**Aaron Henkin** wants to hear your scariest dreams. Your most harrowing nightmares. Your most blood-curdling fears. The darkest regions of your psyche that make sleep your worst enemy.

"It's a totally off the top of my head idea, which is to sequester people one after the other, as many as I can,

and interview them about the worst nightmare they've ever had," says the co-producer of WYPR-FM's *The Signal* by phone in his public-radio-smooth voice. "So what I'll end up with is a diary of people's worst nightmare experiences, which I will then, Frankenstein-style in my audio editing laboratory in the wee hours of the night, cobble together all the random bits of narrative from all these different nightmares and imagery tones and moods of the people as they're talking, and just find things where people's nightmares overlap and use it as a way to put these people in dialog with each other, complete strangers, in a post-production setting, where they're all creating sort of a Jungian collective consciousness worst nightmare."

The project is titled "Nightmare Scenario," and it isn't part of his usual public-radio narrative programming. "I've always had this idea of interviewing strangers in such a way that you can create a creative non-fiction piece, where it's sort of playing with the truth--where people's real stories will overlap in unreal ways with other people's stories," Henkin says. "But it always seemed like too tricky for me until I seized on this nightmare idea, which, obviously, logic is not a necessary component for nightmares. They're much more about images and feelings, and I think there will be a lot more room for this kind of overlap. It's just a fun way to get to play a little bit more loosely than I usually get to. This is an opportunity for me to delve into more abstract realms of audio projection than I usually am entitled to do, even for my wacky little show *The Signal*."

"This" is the second annual Megapolis, a jam-packed festival that descends upon the Station North Arts District this week with three nights and two days of audio art and workshops that run from experimental music and sound art installations to innovative radio ideas to circuit-bending and hacker workshops. What makes Megapolis unique is its organizing idea: audio as a creative worker's primary medium, a broad net that opens the fest up to both sound artists and radio programmers, experimental musicians and DIY circuit benders.

Conceived and originally organized by Justin Groteleuschen and Nick van der Kolk, Megapolis debuted last year in Cambridge, Mass., where both were then based. For them, Megapolis--the Lewis Mumford term for a closely linked series of urban areas, which geographer Jean Gottman used to describe the Washington, D.C. through Boston region linked along I-95--is a melding of two different festival audiences: experimental music and sound artists and innovative radio artists and sound transmission creators. The festival is a way to bring two sometimes different groups together under one unifying rubric.

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They hatched this idea during the fall of 2008, as the economy plummeted and many tech-employed sound workers and artists were rethinking their lives. "It came about during a time when the economy crashed, so we knew a lot of people who were struggling and trying to figure out what they were going to do," Groteleuschen says by phone from New York, where he now lives. An instantly affable 32-year-old--he turns 33 three days before the festival, but isn't celebrating until the weekend is over--Groteleuschen talks about the fest's capacity to connect artists with programmers and hackers with performers with an infectious enthusiasm. "People still had a lot of energy, because they were reinventing themselves, they were reinventing their careers, and they had a lot of experience, even if they were in their 20s or early 30s, in their artistic disciplines that they could share. So the idea was to create a festival around that.

"So the idea was to combine some of those things--an urban exploration across this gigantic urban organism and then sharing skills and bringing people together from a lot of different disciplines, from education, visual arts, musicians, radio producers to share ideas in a low-impact, high-energy weekend," Groteleuschen continues. "And the idea from the beginning was to do it in multiple cities. So we did it in the Cambridge area, because I had lived there for seven years and Nick grew up there, so we were like, 'Let's test it out here first and see how it goes.'"

Megapolis 2009 occupied multiple venues in the Cambridge area with performances at night and workshops during the day, a model the fest continues for the Baltimore installment. Based in the Station North area--Hexagon functions as festival HQ, with events/workshops happening at the Windup Space, Cyclops book store, the Echo Gallery, the Baltimore Node, the theater in the Load of Fun, and 2640 Space and WYPR (see [megapolisfestival.org](http://megapolisfestival.org) for full line-up and schedule)--Megapolis features a tidal wave of programming: 11 "create" workshops (including Laure Drogoul's "Knitting Jam," NPR's *Snap Judgement* producer Roman Mars leading a remix project involving sound sources culled from the New York duo Books' sound library, artist/musician/writer Eric Lindley's interactive galvanic skin response-biofeedback sound generator), three "build" workshops (such as Chicago transmission artist Brett Ian Balogh's DIY transmitter workshop), 24 music/sound "experiences" (performers include Audrey Chen and Robert Van Heumen's ABATTOIR, Andy Hayleck and Dan Conrad, John Berndt's Geodesic Gnome, Mobtown Modern co-founder DJ Dubble8, Hans Tammen, and multiphonic guitarist Benjamin Miller), 13 installations (including Neil Feather's invented instruments and Henkin's "Nightmare Scenario"), 11 "learn" sessions (presentations/listening sessions, including co-founder van der Kolk's psychoacoustics workshop), and three featured artists: Los Angeles' impish collaborative music force Lucky Dragons, NPR correspondent David Kestenbaum, and German multimedia electronic artist Felix Kubin, who presents a radio play.

Megapolis 2010 planning started shortly after the debut 2009 event ended, and Baltimore was decided upon as the next location shortly thereafter. Groteleuschen and van der Kolk weren't based here, though--in fact, Groteleuschen and his girlfriend moved to Nicaragua for five months last summer and van der Kolk took a full-time job in Chicago, leaving a great deal of the Baltimore coordination to a local organizer, Megapolis regional director Katherine Gorman.

Getting involved with Megapolis gelled with Gorman's view of her own work. "I've always thought of what I do as nonfiction art," she says. "I sit down and try to mangle people into very structured coherent sentences, so getting involved with something that looked at a wide variety of sound projects as art just seemed to fit in with what I do. I wanted to get involved in this, because I think Nick and Justin have a really good idea, and I thought we could make it work in Baltimore. It sounded like a lot of fun."

She met Groteleuschen and van der Kolk at the 2008 Radio Without Boundaries Festival of Deep Wireless in Toronto, and attended last year's inaugural festival. "I didn't know what to expect," she says during an evening interview. Gorman, an energetic and witty 24-year-old Detroit native who moved to Baltimore in 2008 to become a producer of WYPR's *Maryland Morning*, says she arrived in Boston without a place to stay, crashed with other Megapolitains, and ended up having "this amazing weekend talking about radio and storytelling and learning all these new production techniques. And I came back totally energized about storytelling and my job and saving the world and everything."

Such creating networking opportunities is one of the festival's goals. Megapolis is "really based around experimentation and trying out new ideas," Groteleuschen says. "You can take any field, and once you start to think about how you can experiment and innovate in a particular area, and how you can explore, you realize that somebody who is an educator and somebody who is an improvising musician start to think about their art in the same sort of way, really just pushing the boundaries and going out. So there's things that people can learn from each other, and real connections come out of that experience."

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