

## Australia's only regionally based experimental arts festival, *unsound*, takes place every second year in

### Wagga Wagga.

BY SARAH LAST



**THIS YEAR, UNSOUND06 PRESENTED A RANGE OF DIGITAL AND analogue art media. Of great significance was the specially commissioned Loco Motivus train, which featured eight carriages of installations by fifteen artists travelling through the Riverina landscape.**

In the landscape of contemporary art emanating from a regional context, *unsound* is an event of national significance. WSP was formed in 1998 by a collective of artists who subscribed to the philosophy that their arts practice is enhanced by being regionally based. Coupled with this was the recognition that opportunities for Riverina residents to directly access contemporary art forms were somewhat limited. Initially WSP facilitated small art 'happenings' and publications such as zines and audio CD compilations featuring Riverina artists.

The success of these initial activities reaffirmed the belief that being regionally located provides a broader context for the production and presentation of art, a place where the physical and psychological distance from dominant hegemonies of the arts industry such as critical mass, institutions, patronage and curators provides opportunities for conventions to be challenged. This philosophy accommodates the experimental nature of the art that has become a defining feature of *unsound* and other WSP projects, such as the Loco Motivus residency project.

#### What is *unsound*?

*unsound* is a celebration of the physical and philosophical spaces enabled by being regionally based. WSP invites artists who engage in emerging art forms to work in unconventional contexts such as train carriages, heritage buildings, industrial sites and paddocks. Over the past six years attendances to *unsound* have swelled and the event has expanded into visual media, incorporating the Loco Motivus artists residency project, 16mm films and a resident blogger.

#### Features of *unsound06*

WSP presented two nights of live performances by a range of artists. From laptops, synthesizers, 16mm film, homemade

instruments, laser light shows and vaudeville, *unsound06* offered a broad cross section of contemporary artists and art practices.

On Saturday 11 November over 150 people participated in the Loco Motivus project. Throughout the day Loco Motivus traversed the Riverina townships of Wagga Wagga, Coolamon and Junee. These variable contexts with specific spaces, performances and art installations, deliberately made it difficult to define when and where an art 'event' was taking place, and with many of the artworks being dependent on audience interaction, the distinctions between audience and maker were also continually blurred.

The day started at Pindari, a local farm located at one of the highest points of the Riverina region. Audiences were transported by bus to view, listen and interact with Alan Lamb's Aeolian harp, a unique musical instrument constructed of two 60 metre strands of tightly strained fencing wire bolted into granite boulders. On their own accord the wires often harmonically 'sing' or roar as they react to environmental factors such as heat and barometric pressure. Contact microphones were attached to the wires, and when listened to through headphones listeners were exposed to



## December – January

Until 30 June

👁 *Wagga Beach* At the Museum of the Riverina's Botanic Gardens site. Shares the cultural memories of bathers, beach bags and sandwiches across the years. **WAGGA WAGGA** Tel 02 6926 9655

Until June 2007

👁 *In Living Memory* 1,000 historical photographs of Aboriginal people, uncovered from the official records of the former NSW Aborigines Welfare Board. The **SYDNEY** Records Centre Tel 02 8247 8660

6 December – 21 January

👁 *Shooters* 2nd annual snapshot of events, people and life in **WAGGA WAGGA** as seen through the lenses of the region's best photojournalists. Museum of the Riverina Tel 02 6926 9655  
Web [www.wagga.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au)

12 December – 17 January

👁 Artist of the month is embroiderer Jean Collyer. Ceramics, spinning, weaving and crafts are also on display. **GOULBURN** & District Arts & Craft Centre Tel 02 4822 7889

an amplified universe of sound that sonically reflects things we cannot see as well as audience interaction with the wire (such as tapping and singing into the polystyrene sounding boxes). The sounds produced are best described as a deep space atmosphere with hums and electro-pings. Even spiders can be heard as they collide or strut up and down the wire!

From Pindari the audience moved to Coolamon, to the historic Up-to-Date for a site-specific installation by Ernie Althoff. Using fans and turntable motors to generate movement and sound, Althoff's kinetic installation had many associations to the store's unique Lamson Cash Conveying system. From here the audiences experienced a wonderful sense of community through the lunches specially provided by Coolamon retailers and organisations such as the CWA.

At the Coolamon platform, audiences assembled to board the Loco Motivus train, here they were welcomed by the vaudevillesque banjo and tap dance act of Al Duvall (USA) and Singin' Sadie, which also garnered an impromptu sing-a-long of Waltzing Matilda. From the platform the Von Krapp family acted as pied

pipers by leading the audiences into their carriage of noise, surveillance cameras, sonic backpacks and chocolate wheels; providing an acerbic commentary on the current culture of fear, supposed national values and emerging concepts of 'Australianness' and 'un-Australianness'.

For the next four hours audiences enjoyed installations and performances in each carriage and the opportunity to gaze out windows into the passing Riverina landscape. Many of the carriages provided immerse environments such as: Shannon O'Neill's generative surround sound work; Abject Leader's performative screenings, editing and foley sound scapes to 16 mm films; Gary Bradbury and Dave Noyze's multichannel sonic cacophony in a claustrophobic sleeper car; and Robin Fox's laser light show down the narrow corridor of another sleeper carriage. Some artists produced subtle works that did not attempt to dominate the space or the experience of the train. Alex Gawronski, used two small TV monitors featuring video documentation following train tracks at a rather odd/not quite right angle; WSP members Adam Bell, Melissa Delaney and I each contributed sonic works that were audible only when in the confined space of individual sleeper compartments.

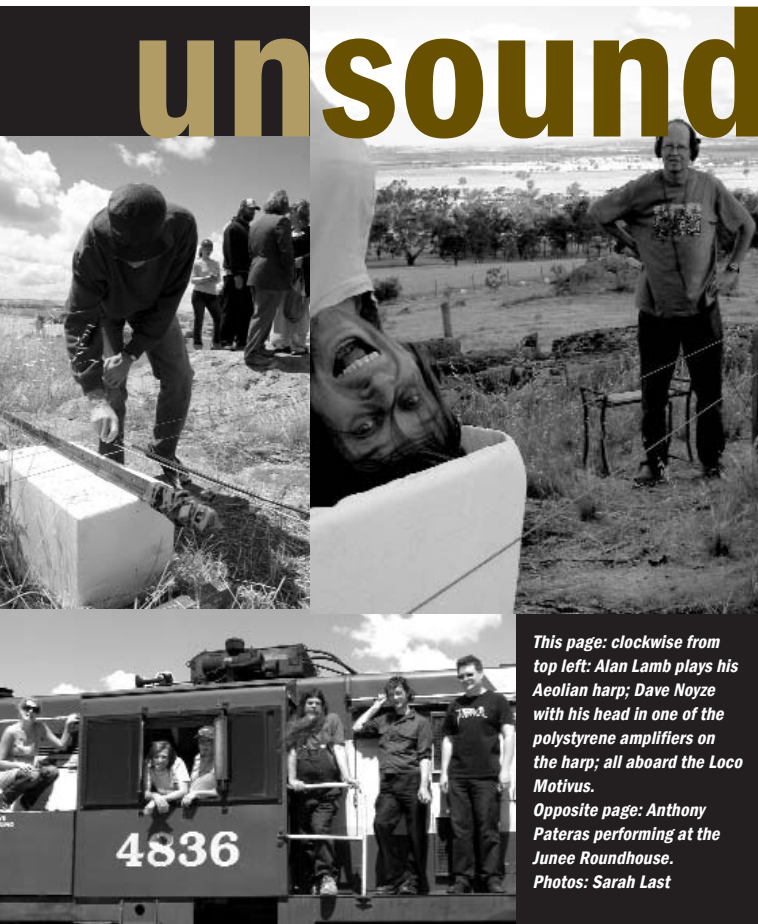
The train journey paused for a stopover at Junee Railway Roundhouse where audiences were confronted with the juxtaposition of a stark white baby grand piano amongst the grimy detritus of a working industrial site, Melbourne composer Anthony Pateras performed an improvised prepared piano piece.

On the return trip between Junee and Wagga Wagga the train pulled into a silo siding to tune into a live CB radio transmission of Alan Lamb's wires being played through a PA system. At times the wires were played by 'Pindari' residents, Jo Roberts and Jason Richardson, and provided a delightfully symbolic gesture of the ability of lo-fi do-it-yourself technology to traverse space and time, whilst challenging arts conventions of creation and presentation.

Loco Motivus presented an unforgettable range of arts experiences, many of which were only possible through the sustained networks and relationships that WSP has formed over the years. In particular we would like to thank Andrew Clinton of Junee Railway Workshop, Liz Lawton of Coolamon Shire Council, staff of Wagga Wagga City Council and our team of tireless volunteers that powered the festival. ■

**Another unique aspect of the Loco Motivus project was the inclusion of a resident blogger, Bernard Cohen, who provided fictional and non-fictional accounts in the lead-up to and during the festival. Website and blog at [www.unsound.org.au](http://www.unsound.org.au)**

**Sarah Last is the unsound06 and Loco Motivus curator**



*This page: clockwise from top left: Alan Lamb plays his Aeolian harp; Dave Noyze with his head in one of the polystyrene amplifiers on the harp; all aboard the Loco Motivus.*

*Opposite page: Anthony Pateras performing at the Junee Roundhouse. Photos: Sarah Last*

## December

14 December – 4 March

👁️ *In The Town and the River*, Trish Callaghan's evocative pastel paintings capture the changing mood of land and sky in the Tweed River area. **TWEED RIVER** Regional Art Gallery. Tel 02 6670 2790

15 December

📣 The tenth **ORANGE** Christmas Street Party: including stalls, street performers, craft and nativity displays and a youth concert and Fire Show Finale. Tel 1800 069 466

15 – 16 December

🎵 *Festival of the Sun* features an eclectic mix of some of the best bands and solo talent in the country. Sundowner Breakwall Tourist Park **PORT MACQUARIE**. Web [www.fotsun.com.au](http://www.fotsun.com.au)

15 – 17 December

🎭 Bathurst Theatre Company present *The Adventures of a Bear Called Paddington*; a children's favourite for decades. **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre