

His offbeat sound machines

It started with a few wind chimes Layne Garrett built for friends in 2003. “Those were the first small-scale stuff I built,” says the 37-year-old experimental musician. Pretty soon, however, Garrett was developing instruments from found objects and household items. “As I started playing around more and more with less conventional sounds and less conventional ways of producing sound,” he says, “I started to want to be able to produce sounds that the instruments I had could not produce.” ¶ More than a decade later, the Takoma Park resident estimates he has made 20 pieces ... and counting. “I have endless projects’ worth of raw materials,” he says with a smile. Here, Garrett showcases a handful of his one-of-a-kind creations.

BY KRIS CORONADO



“WHIRLER”

Powered by a small rotary motor, this 2½-foot-tall “whirler” has guitar strings and a spinning base made from a swivel chair part. As it twirls, one unattached guitar string strikes the other 32. “It doesn’t always hit the same strings as it goes around,” Garrett says.

He uses a contact microphone to amplify the whirler, which, he says, “sounds a little bit like low, plucked strings. It’s a little muddy. ... You can play around with the sound a lot by varying the position of the mike.”



GUITAR

Garrett says his Johnson resonator guitar can produce unpredictable sounds when he weaves found items into its strings. “You relinquish a good deal of control,” he says. “It’s more about being open to the sounds that the instrument gives you, and working with those.”

Those household items include metal pipes or a popsicle stick. “It becomes a more textural and percussive instrument,” he says. Garrett also uses items such as a door lock or steel wool, to play the strings.



KING HENRY'S HARP

The 4½-foot-tall King Henry's Harp is modeled after the begena, an Ethiopian instrument also known as the Harp of King David. Garrett's is made of piano strings, tines from a rake and zither pins. The low and rough sound comes off “a little bit menacing,” he says.