

**Blacktronika: Sound for Humanity**  
**April 28-29, 2021**

**ARTIST STATEMENTS**



**Lisa Vazquez**  
**Artist Statement**

Sound and music is a way to connect to those from any background and convey emotion. When curating a song or a set such as this, I think about conveying pure emotion. That's how I chose my samples or create my melodic layers and vocals...I want to feel something and hopefully make the audience feel something too.

**Biography**

Lisa Vazquez is an Argentine-bred, Oregon-born Wonder Woman of her craft. Self proclaimed labrat, beatnerd and analog enthusiast. A Hip Hip/Soul Producer, Vocalist and Multi - Instrumentalist that is always pushing the boundaries within the music. Think RJD2 meets RZA meets Lauryn Hill. Before the world shut down Lisa was continuing booking festivals, shows and workshops around the globe.

Drawing from Jazz and various world musical influences, she creates textured rhythms with her MPC and layers sultry vocals layers with a looper before she sings or raps over the final creation. Truly a unique live performance.

Currently she is working on a full length album and will go back to international touring once travel allows. In the meantime you can find her on IG or FB @lisavazquemusic or YouTube with her Beatmaking Series Flip it Friday. Teaching music production has also become her passion beyond performance and sound design.



**King Britt x kalechi agwuncha**  
**Artist Statement**

King Britt's performance is a sonic response to many events that have effected him over the past year. A bit dark but finding light within it, each sound adds to the healing process. He intentionally collaborated with visual artists and M.F.A. visual arts student, kalechi agwuncha, whose live VJ work here is a sonic response to his music.

**King Britt Biography**

Pew Fellowship recipient, King James Britt (his real name) is a 30+ year, producer, composer, and performer in electronic music.

His position as Assistant Teaching Professor in Computer Music carries a unique perspective, bringing a non-linear approach and knowledge to the department by focusing on various modern forms of electronic music pedagogy, while continuing to be an active force in the music industry.

As a composer and producer, his practice has led to collaborations with the likes of De La Soul, Alarm Will Sound Orchestra, Saul Williams, director Michael Mann (Miami Vice) and many others, as well as being called for remixes from an eclectic list of giants, including, Meredith Monk, Solange to Calvin Harris. Most recently collaborating with MacArthur Fellow, Tyshawn Sorey for an upcoming album project.

In his role as performer, he has travelled globally playing thousands of venues and festivals, including, AfroPunk (NYC), Berghain (Berlin), MoogFest (Durham), Le Guess Who Festival (Utrecht) and The Kitchen (NYC). King was also the original DJ for the Grammy Award-winning Digable Planets.

Blacktronika : Afrofuturism In Electronic Music, is a new UCSD lecture course, created by King, researching and honoring the people of color, who have pioneered groundbreaking genres within the electronic music landscape. Genres span from Chicago House, Detroit Techno and Drum & Bass music. Using his position in the industry, the class has been attended by many, including Questlove, Julian Priester and Goldie.

### **kelechi agwuncha Biography**

kelechi agwuncha is a Chicago & San Diego based filmmaker & VJ. They harmonize video, film, and sounds to migrate vague childhood memories into symbolic gestures / movements of black bodies. This pulses towards Igbo-Nigerian heritage.

Their work has screened at and voyaged through OpenTV, MoMA PS1, Toronto International Film Festival x Instagram Festival, UCLA Biennial and Black International Cinema Berlin. They are currently a youth mentor within the Homegrown Youth Collaborative based in San Diego and a member of 'In c/o: Black women (in care of black women)', a Chicago initiative that regenerates vacant lots into sites and economies of care.

She is pursuing an M.F.A. in visual arts at University of California San Diego, where she is developing an experimental documentary that looks at black people's ongoing and historical relationship to water.



### **Maria Chavez**

#### **Artist Statement**

EMPAC Shorts for King's Sound For Humanity Festival, 2021

Residency and production support provided by the Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY

Recorded January 10, 12, 15 & 16, 2020 at EMPAC, Troy, NY by Todd Vos and Clara Brea  
Engineering, mixing, mastering: Clara Brea & Maria Chavez  
Performance & Video Production by: Maria Chavez

In this group of short performance videos, Maria privately revisits the turntable after a 10 month hiatus due to recovering from brain surgery in February of 2019. Recorded over a series of five afternoons in January 2020 each performance acts as place markers in time, freezing moments of chance for an audience to experience later.

Filmed during her first iteration of her EMPAC Artist Residency at the Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, these short videos, except for Guitar Vocabulary & Sara Sleeps, were previously performed sound sculptures that she calls her "hits".

Guitar Vocabulary and Sara Sleeps were improvised live at EMPAC. While Maria has attempted to reperform these two pieces since then she has yet to achieve the same chance placement that was captured in this rare performance footage.

The opening video, *Improvised Dance with White Syc*, introduces a recorded sonic idea on turntable that has never been released with video of Maria unfurling 90 feet of white syc, a white, translucent fabric used for lighting and screen installations. The large amount of material made the object physically difficult to interact with. Due to its weight and length Maria's movements were dictated by the material itself, almost mimicking a traditional dance of some kind, or could be considered an improvised choreographed attempt at creating an avant garde fabric dance with large amounts of fabric. The folded impressions found on the fabric after the unfurling was then recorded and is used as vignette breaks per performance piece. This syc will be used in her final sound and performance installation at EMPAC in 2022.

**Performance video sequence:**

Improvised Dance with White Syc, 2020

SARA SLEEPS

Civitella Live- Backwards Piano "Hit"

Guitar//Vocabulary

Guitar Song with Palm Reading "That's a Good Sign" with Macro Lens, RAKE Double Needle

**Biography**

Born in Lima, Peru and based in NYC, Maria Chávez is best known as an abstract turntablist, sound artist, and DJ. Coincidence, chance & failures are themes that unite her book objects, sound sculptures, installations, & other works with her improvised solo turntable performance practice. Her latest album, *Maria Chavez PLAYS Stefan Goldmann's Ghost hemiola* was nominated for a Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik in January of 2020.

Currently, Maria is on the cover of the textbook on the *History of Experimental & Electronic music* by Routledge Publishing, is a David Tudor and Robert Rauschenberg Arts Fellow and a Research Fellow for Goldsmith's Sound Practice Research Department (2015-17). Her large scale sound & multi-media installations, along with other works, have been shown at the Getty Museum, the JUDD Foundation, Documenta 14 in Kassel, Germany and HeK (Haus der elektronischen Künste Basel), amongst many other institutions around the world. She is currently an artist in residence with EMPAC (The Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center) until 2022 and her latest sound installation, *Staggered Shifts*, 2021 is now on view at BRIC Arts for their "Latin Abstract" painting exhibition from January-May 2021.

Maria is also a Toulmin Fellow, will be remote artist in residence with The Hague's Rewire Festival in the Netherlands this spring 2021. She will be releasing new recordings with collaborators Sandy Ewen and Devin Kenny later this year via OrbTapes, SN Variations & Ballastnvp. Her latest album with Jordi Wheeler via Cafe Oto's Takeroku label is now available as is her cassette release with collaborator Lucas Gorham via Ratskin Records which was released in the fall of 2020.

She is currently on a medical sabbatical due to receiving brain surgery in February 2019 and will return to performing for the public in 2022-23. She appreciates everyone's patience and compassion during this difficult time. [www.mariachavez.org](http://www.mariachavez.org)



## **Melz** **Artist Statement**

I'm always ruminating on the idea of sound and how to connect to it in the purest way possible. This set is exploratory—sometimes focused on a few specific chords or an arpeggio and other times it's just hanging on by what sound inspires me or a sentiment of where I might want to venture to sonically. Lyrically this set is entirely improvised so from time to time the vocal could be a tone or a mumble and other times it could be something that turns into a lyric or melody that will be elaborated upon later. I had the idea to edit out things that weren't super smooth but decided that I wanted to honor

the process of making something from scratch (which is also why I went DAWless for this set with the Boss RC-505 looper as the brain bringing everything together). Sometimes it works out and other times a drum misfires or a sound makes me lose interest but you either work to make it better or you move on. Sound for humanity for me means taking it all in (the sweet and the sour) and making something new—warts and all.

## **Biography**

Melz is the solo project of Melissa Dougherty—a guitarist, singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist based in Los Angeles, CA. Dougherty double majored in English & Religious Studies with a minor in Art History at Whittier College and also studied guitar on scholarship at the Berklee College of Music. She has played & toured nationally and internationally with various artists (including Grace VanderWaal, Florence and the Machine, Imagine Dragons, Ozomatli, Kacey Musgraves, James Corden, The Killers, Jack White, Pearl Jam, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Eastern Conference Champions). In addition to touring and playing sessions she also teaches guitar and various ensemble classes at Flea's Silverlake Conservatory of Music in LA.

She's had the honor of playing many amazing venues throughout the years—Madison Square Garden, Red Rocks, The Forum, LoveLoud Fest, Rock Werchter Festival, Hurricane Festival to name a few. She's been on a Grammy-nominated soundtrack (*Twilight Eclipse* soundtrack with Eastern Conference Champions) and is very grateful for all of these experiences.



## **Ari Melenciano** **Artist Statement**

Sono de BedWabiStuySabi is not a composition, but a process. A submission to sonic synthesis. Ariciano captures her engagement with Yaya, the machine, from the rougher beginnings to the more harmonious ends. Starting with a patchless modular synthesizer, Ariciano explores Yaya's sound's in real time; sculpting, discovering, and learning as time goes. It's a process modulating natural and electric forms of wabi sabi to build a sonic landscape as she sits on a BedStuy, Brooklyn rooftop while the sunsets. Ariciano records the synthesized sounds through a microphone to also

capture how the synthesized sound engages with the environment around it, as the birds either sing along, protest, or question what they're hearing and the truck sirens come closer.

## **Biography**

Ari Melenciano is a Brooklyn-based designer, creative technologist, and researcher who is passionate about exploring the relationships between various forms of design and sentient experiences. She is a creative technologist at Google's Creative Lab, teaching and research fellow at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Graduate Program, and founder of Afrotectopia, a social institution fostering interdisciplinary innovation at the intersections of art, design, technology, Black culture, and activism. Her award-winning work has been supported and exhibited by a variety of institutions including Sundance, New Inc, the *New York Times*, and The Studio Museum of Harlem. She is often guest lecturing at universities around the world.



## **Stro Elliot**

### **Artist Statement**

Wanted to do a couple things I don't normally do with this set.

1. Incorporate some 70s era Fusion throughout the set in creative if not also subtle ways.
2. Experiment with ideas or tracks I don't usually play.

### **Biography**

As a child of military parents, Stro Elliot traveled the world marinating in a record collection that spanned from jazz greats like Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock, to funk/soul luminaries like Stevie Wonder, Funkadelic, and Prince.

Studying trumpet, piano, drums, and guitar in his teens, Stro became a skilled multi-instrumentalist, even as he began to explore the world of hip-hop, drawn to the likes of A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, The Pharcyde, and Ice Cube.

In recent years, Stro has become a go-to musical collaborator both in the studio and on stage for Grammy-winning artists including The Roots, DJ Jazzy Jeff, and more, and is one of the founding members of The Playlist Retreat, a next-generation musical collective of award-winning producers, DJs, and artists. As a current member of The Roots, he now resides in New York where they also film *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* as the house band.