

# empire

Syracuse artist's take  
on stained glass **Pages 8-9**



Everson Museum of Art

## An immersive labyrinth of sounds

**'Charley Friedman — Soundtracks for the Present Future':** Everson Museum of Art PAGES 4-6

A promotional poster for the Blue Man Group performance. The left side features three blue-skinned men playing drums against a yellow background with the text "STILL BLUE. THE REST IS NEW." The right side has a black background with a colorful paint splatter and the text "BLUE MAN GROUP ON TOUR". It also includes the performance dates and location: "The M&amp;TBank Broadway Season BROADWAY IN SYRACUSE OPENS THURSDAY! FEBRUARY 24 - 27 LANDMARK THEATRE BROADWAYINSYRACUSE.COM". Logos for Y94 and NEWS CHANNEL 9 are at the bottom.

## EVERSON MUSEUM OF ART



Artist Charley Friedman, right, with exhibit co-creator Luke Farritor, who helped with technical parts of the project. The many guitars, mandolins and basses hanging from the ceiling are connected to a computer that plays them. *Julie K. Herman*

## From many voices, one instrument

### Charley Friedman installation explores how we experience music — individually and in community

**Gabriel Veiga** *Contributing writer*

Over 70 guitars, mandolins and basses are suspended from the ceiling, interconnected with wires that lace around the floor.

The instruments are connected to a computer loaded with a playlist.

One guitar starts to play, then you hear another one from far away and then a bass joins in nearby. All the instruments play one at a time to serve their part in the sound collage.

This is the “Charley Friedman: Soundtrack for the Present Future” exhibit, an immersive auditory experience at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse through April 10. A live

recital is planned for Feb. 24 to bring another layer of music to the space featuring local artists.

Friedman is a self-proclaimed interdisciplinary artist living in Nebraska who specializes in sculpture, performance photography and video.

His past projects are anything but ordinary. In 2015, he unveiled Science Project, an 11-foot-tall, 12-foot-diameter kinetic sculpture composed of 85 colored beach balls tethered to a constantly rotating steel column. The piece is meant to “evoke the wonderment of childhood while contemplating the cultural contract of trust in Western science.”

Most recently, he produced Squirrel Gang, an installation made up of 110 life-size bronze squirrels.

“Together the squirrels form a proxy society,” Friedman explained. “With each installation, squirrels are reconfigured to act out different allegories of human interaction, politics and motives.”

His best-known work, One-Hour Smile, was projected on the side of the Everson Museum on the opening night of the exhibition last month.

**SEE FRIEDMAN, T5**





Each instrument is configured to play a single cord when it is prompted by a computer loaded with compositions written for the project. *Jamie Young*

## FRIEDMAN

### Continues from T4

The video is a compilation of footage taken every 10 years, beginning in 1995. Friedman stares into the camera, smiling as hard as he can for one hour uninterrupted, documenting the inevitable breakdown of his gaze. He plans to add to it every decade until his death.

“This piece was created in response to the posturing and socializing I observed in social settings and the inauthenticity of the masks we wear to engage within them,” he said. “It’s a piece about empathy, self-awareness and how, as social animals, we learn how to read one another.”

### THE PROCESS OF CREATING ‘MUSICAL AUTOMATONS’

The idea for the guitar installation came to Friedman 10 years ago, but it took another five years to launch. He pitched the project to investors as “transforming acoustic guitars into musical automatons to create an immersive sound environment.”

“I came to the conclusion that I didn’t have the technical skills needed to produce this piece,” said Friedman.

He contacted a mechanical engineer at the University of Nebraska, professor Shane Farritor, with whom he worked on a former project, in hopes of finding someone versed in software design.

The professor proposed a graduate student from the university.

Then he said, “You know what? I want to give you my best computer programmer – that’s my 15-year-old son, Luke,” explained Friedman.

At first, Farritor and Friedman just started experimenting with the technology, using cheap guitars they bought



Friedman’s best-known work, *One-Hour Smile*, was projected on the side of the Everson Museum during the installation’s opening night last month. *Everson Museum of Art*

from eBay. They tuned each guitar differently, so each would have its own sound.

“One guitar was an A-chord,” explained Farritor, who’s now a sophomore at the University of Nebraska, studying computer science. “One guitar was a D-chord and so on.”

Then, they played those guitars in rhythm.

“And it would kind of sound like a chord progression in a song,” Farritor went on.

**SEE FRIEDMAN, T6**

### Live recital

**The event:** “Charley Friedman: Soundtracks for the Present Future” live music recital, 6:30 p.m. Feb. 24. Free with museum admission.

**The exhibit:** “Charley Friedman: Soundtracks for the Present Future” on view through April 10.

**Where:** Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St., Syracuse.

**Hours:** Monday and Tuesday, closed; Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Admission:** General admission, \$8; seniors 65-plus and students, \$6; EBT cardholder, \$1; Everson members, children 12 and under and military members with ID, free. Admission is free every third Thursday from 5 to 8 p.m.

**More information:** [everson.org](http://everson.org) or 315-474 6064.

**Sneak peek:** Go to [tinyurl.com/CharleyFriedman](http://tinyurl.com/CharleyFriedman) to watch Charley Friedman explain his process.



## FRIEDMAN

## Continues from T5

When they mounted their first guitars to the wall, the model worked.

For the next year, Friedman sourced higher-end guitars, and then the duo brainstormed how to scale their vision. Engineer Jack Carlson joined the team to help expand their four-guitar prototype to 70 instruments.

“[Now] each guitar has a little circuit board on it that controls its individual guitar,” Farritor explained. “And then this is how all the music information is distributed across these hubs which are plugged into the guitars.”

Connecting the devices to the computer made the exhibit possible.

“Then the [computers] could control the piece however they wanted. And that’s really awesome,” said Farritor.

## A PLAYLIST THAT TRANSCENDS POLITICS

Their final task was finding music for the unconventional orchestra to play.

Friedman, who enjoys music but isn’t a musician, decided to find composers interested in building a playlist for the exhibit.

Friedman knew he wanted something that resembled Brian Eno’s music.

“I wanted something that was atmospheric and something that’s not dissonant,” Friedman explained. “We live in a time which is so dissonant, you know, where people are kind of taking black or white, or this or that. And I actually wanted to pick a piece that was more about unification and about the act of unifying.”

Different composers brought their own styles and ideas. Composer Dereck Higgins focused on punk and jazz. Nicholas Lemme offered sacred choral music and cafe Americana.

Friedman wants new composers to come in and add to his playlist every time the exhibit moves from museum to museum. For the Everson exhibit, Friedman tapped New York’s own genius composer, David Fullmer.

“When you hear the piece, it’s kind of this cacophony of ... beautiful sound,” Friedman said of the non-linear experience.

“It’s completely immersive,” he continued said. “I wanted to make a piece that covered how it affects us in the body... our emotions, our psychology.”

The basses, mandolins and guitars form an eclectic ensemble. Friedman wasn’t particular when he asked for donations via Kickstarter, but he asked that musicians sign their names to their instrument.

“I need a diversity of instruments... your guitar (will become) an integral part of the artwork,” he wrote, promising a new life to “lonely acoustic guitars that you sadly never use anymore.”

Friedman says he hopes that viewers will listen to the harmony of the diverse instruments and see the larger picture.

“Music plays a profound role in our cultural identity,” he wrote. “When we love a song, it has the power to stimulate the full spectrum of feelings and memories. This power is also capable of building empathy and transcending political discord.

“I want to create a piece that dissects, affirms and perhaps makes us question our own personal myths of what it means to be an American.”



Charley Friedman invited musicians to sign their “lonely acoustic guitars” they no longer use and contribute them to the installation. *Gabriel Veiga*

**“Music plays a profound role in our cultural identity. When we love a song, it has the power to stimulate the full spectrum of feelings and memories. This power is also capable of building empathy and transcending political discord.”**

*Artist Charley Friedman*