

Merzbow & the Futurist Vision of Noise

Merzbow is the experimental project of Masami Akita, a Japanese noise artist with an enormous body of work, Akita has released 566 works according to Discogs¹. Being one of the earliest artists on the scene, Akita has helped shape what noise music is and can be. While writing, I'm listening to a live set available on Youtube², and hearing the process unfold is a trip in itself. Released tracks are just snippets of sessions such as these, results of an untold amount of chaos being cumulatively fed back into itself. In this way, noise music is a generative process, and what we hear is something even the artist can never be entirely in control of. Primarily working with noise through a collection of audio pedals, mixing boards, and feedback loops, Akita is able to create a visceral experience for listeners to get lost in. Rather than any form of traditional musical structure, we are given a raw palette of sound to listen to. Taking away any sense of continuity, we are left with a wall of sound, which even provides a sense of catharsis for those that are able to let the noise wash over them completely. While Merzbow is a modern pioneer, Italian Futurists were onto atonal sounds being used for music from much earlier. However I don't think they could have ever imagined the vision they had being realized to the point of noise music we have today. Given that the technology for sound recording and audio manipulation was so barebones in their time, the possibilities for generating noise were more physical than electronic. Now that we have the tools for mangling sound as live signals, we are able to create noise from machines themselves, rather than trying to emulate them through faux constructs of our industrial world. The world of noise music is a harsh one, but it's an inevitable result of experimenting with the technology that influences our lives.