

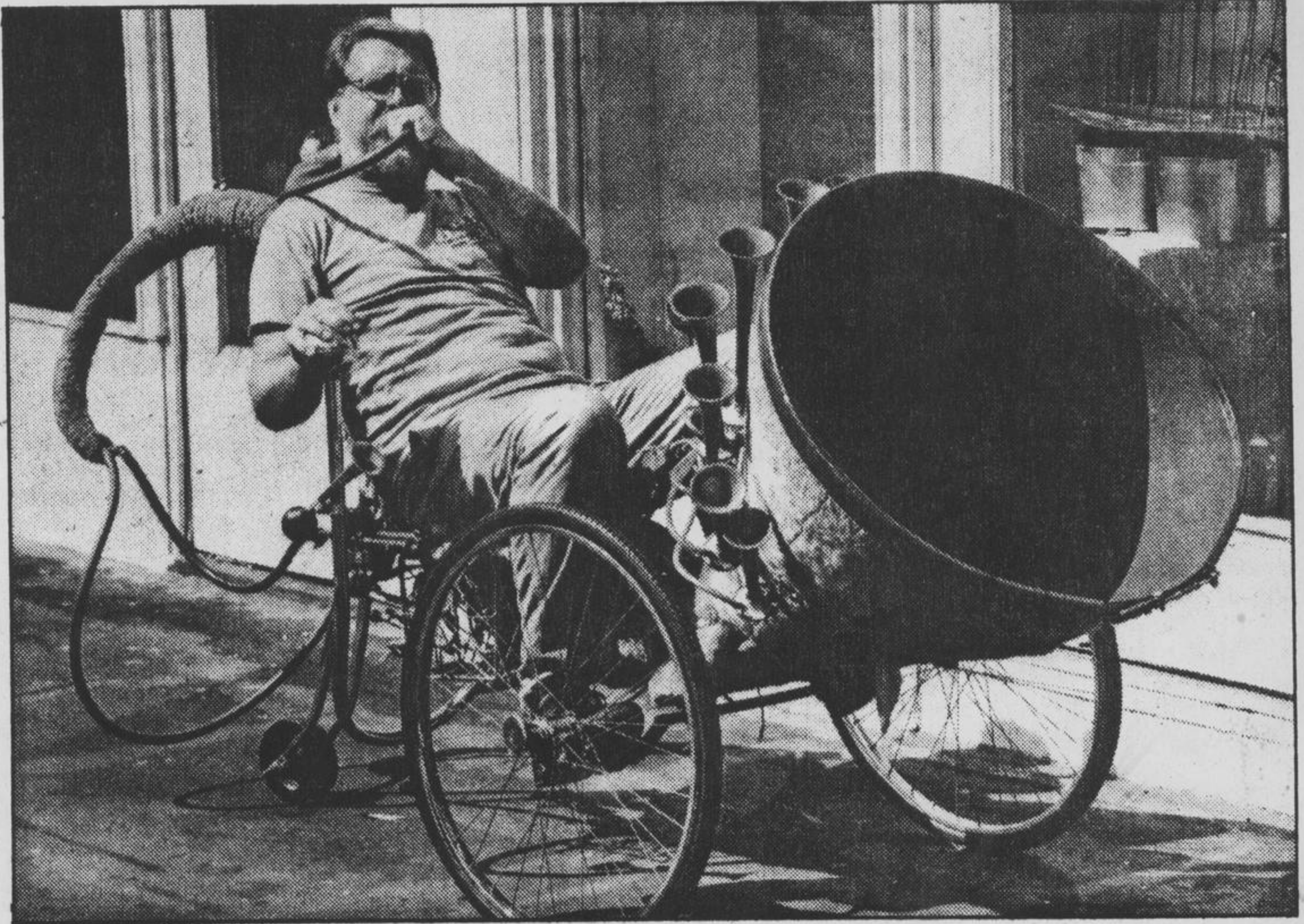
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Jonathan Glasier plays a tune while riding the flashy Arthur Frick-inspired beepmobile.

SONIC ARTS' PIECES BEG TO BE TOUCHED

By HILLIARD HARPER,
San Diego County Arts Writer

SAN DIEGO—Jonathan Glasier pedaled Arthur Frick's beepmobile out onto F Street, and instantly attracted the attention of passers-by who gawked at the soft-spoken music theorist astride the wild contraption.

The beepmobile is an industrial-strength red tricycle, outfitted with a choir of battery-powered Maserati horns and a huge, fuzzy cornucopia-like bell, that resonates when the driver blows into one of two handy garden hoses. They are fitted with mouth-pieces, one for a French horn, the other for a tuba.

"It's really great for parades," said Glasier, breezing by. He then road-tested the vehicle's stentorian French horn.

Glasier presides over a children's wonderland of Rube Goldberg-like musical instruments like the beepmobile on exhibit at his Sonic Arts Gallery.

Actually, Glasier, a longtime music experimenter, opened the gallery last month. He hopes that people will come in and not only look, but also touch, pluck, rub, blow, stroke and otherwise play the unconventional instruments he has assembled in the gallery at 612 F St., downtown.

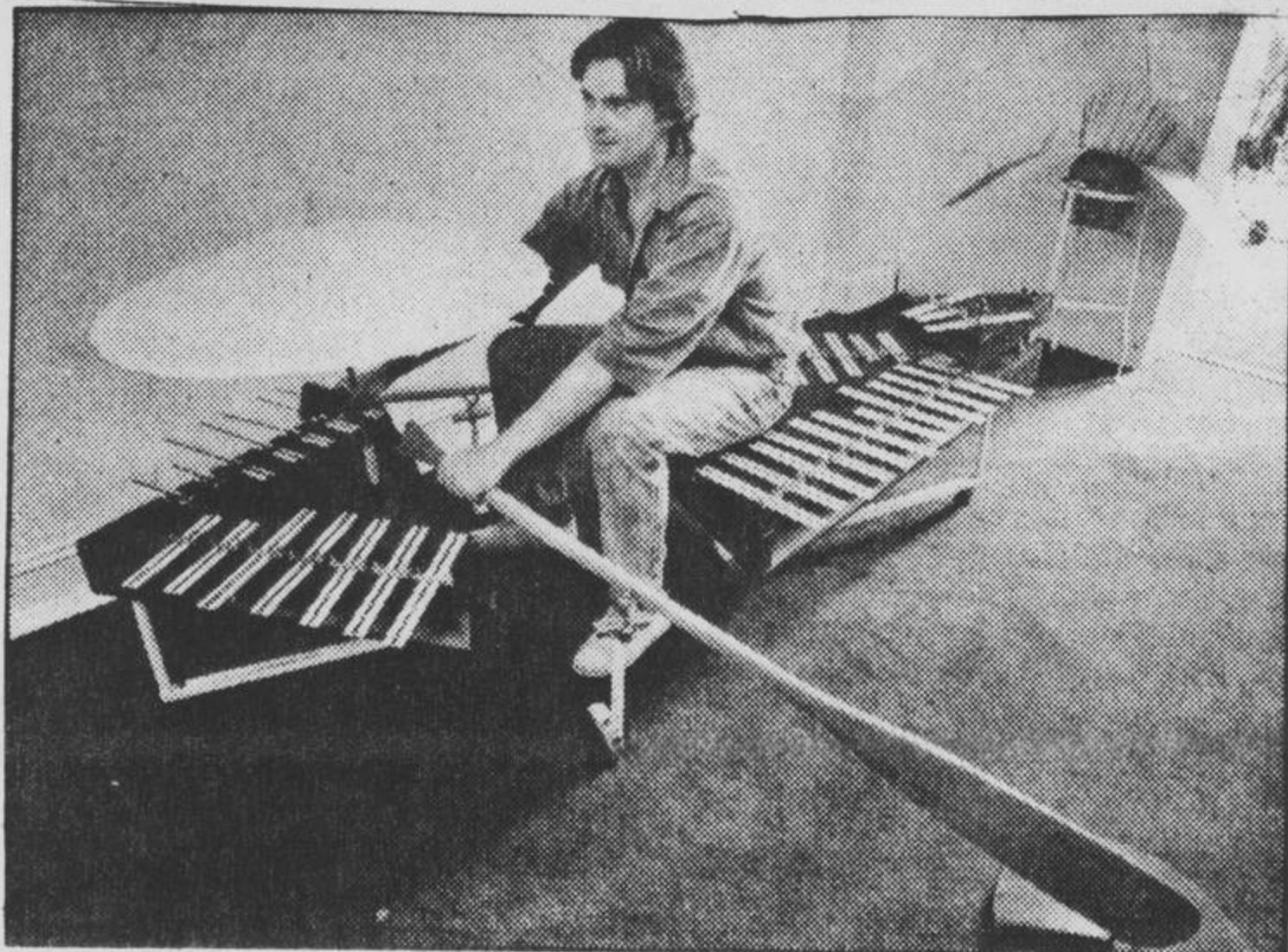
Glasier also hopes visitors will be so impressed with the musical "art objects" that they can't resist paying \$30 to \$4,000 to take one home with them.

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Jonathan Glasier strums the 7½-foot-high electric megalyra in his Sonic Arts Gallery, which features unconventional instruments.

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BOB GRIESER / Los Angeles Times

A Chinese ruler is played by Jeff Stayton at Sonic Arts Gallery.

EXHIBITS BEG FOR TOUCHES

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The instruments range from Tibetan "singing bowls" and South American "rain sticks" to Glasier's own kalimbugs, mini-versions of the African kalimba. There are also such exotic musical devices as the earwarg, wing and Godzilla.

"These are instruments to be played [by visitors], as long as it's done with respect," he said.

Indeed, he conceived Sonic Arts as a reaction to art galleries filled with "do not touch" signs.

"These are new concepts," Glasier said, pulling a bow across a rod welded to one of Richard Waters' water bowls. "We're discovering the sounds before . . . the theory."

The bowl, actually two metal bowls welded together to make a sphere and partially filled with water, made a humming sound that changed to a wah-wah effect as Glasier tilted it so the water shifted. "It has to do with resonance," he said.

The gallery grew out of Glasier's iconoclastic views of music, in which everyone is a musician, and in which the traditional 12-note octave may be expanded infinitely.

"Part of what I want to do with the gallery is encourage anyone to be a musician," he said. "What I see is not an elitist sort of thing. Here we have musicians and non-musicians. In other cultures, everyone plays. Where they have ceremony as part of every day life, everyone is included in music participation."

Glasier grew up in a musical family—his father was a violist with the San Diego Symphony for 27 years—and received a degree in music from UC San Diego in 1969. The greatest influence on him was composer, instrument maker and microtonal theorist Harry Partch. Partch had lived with the Glasiers when Jonathan was a child.

Glasier sees music as a conversation. Glasier demonstrated by walking to the wing—an instrument he created from a thin sheet of metal, balanced on a balloon in a bucket of water—and rubs the metal with a super ball on a stick. The wing roars like a dozen Chinese gongs.

"One stroke on the wing and you feel you have created a musical statement," he said. "When you have new instruments, who's to tell you what it should sound like?"

Glasier toured California after college with other musicians playing instruments like the wing and

Partch's gourd tree and cone gongs. For 10 years, he has published "Interval," an international magazine on microtonal music.

Microtonal music, as Glasier explains it, is something like a musical version of the search for the smallest atomic particle.

The conventional musical octave, he pointed out, has 12 tones. Microtonal music involves "expanding" the octave, actually breaking it into more elements.

Glasier pulled out a conventional-looking guitar which he has refretted so that it has 19 frets per octave rather than 12.

"The difference is there are flats and sharps," Glasier said. He played the instrument and it sounded like a regular guitar. "Why have a flat and a sharp when you are only playing one note? The reason is there were two notes there before there was one note." He was referring to the fractional difference between flats and sharps that disappeared from widespread use with the development of the piano.

Added scales "explore different emotional qualities," Glasier said. "Some give you more jerk and some are more placid."

Glasier said most musicians are scared to death of microtonal experiments. "They've been taught there are 12 tones. To be told there is a whole rainbow out there, it scares them."

The gallery is an opportunity to exhibit non-traditional instruments, some invented by microtonalists such as Partch, Ivor Darreg and Thomas Nunn; others developed in cultures where the 12-tone musical scale does not exist.

Glasier, who says he and his wife have income from real estate, doesn't have to rely on the gallery to pay its way. But he hopes to see it develop into a center for microtonal research as well as a major exhibition place for these weird instruments that, up until now, have mostly been collecting dust in garages.

His next project is to start an improvisational chorus. But for now, visitors can enjoy the peculiar instruments he has assembled such as Nunn's earwarg, an "electro-acoustical percussion board" of nails and combs, or Darreg's mighty 7½-foot-high electric megalynra, which Glasier rightfully calls "tuned thunder."

Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.