



Playing House

Architecture that sounds as remarkable as it looks

BY SAM POLCER

IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE to take a walk in New Orleans and not pass at least one house vibrating with the sound of a musician practicing or performing. But soon, at 1027 Piety St. in the Bywater district, it won't be a tuba or sax making the music—it'll be the house itself. Internationally known Brooklyn street artist Swoon, working with local arts organization New Orleans Airlift, has designed an interactive sound sculpture called *Dithyrambalina* in the form of a circular three-story house here.

Until construction begins later this year, the site is serving as a staging ground for artists developing technologies for the project. A ramshackle collection of bizarre contraptions, some housed in sheds built from the remains of the original 1790s Creole cottage (which collapsed last year), fills the property. A keyboard plays through a tub of water. A spiral staircase emits different tones depending on what step is pressed. A robotic gamelan—like a

player piano but with xylophones and tiny cymbals—performs varying arrangements at the touch of a button. One installation amplifies the user's heartbeat and projects it through spinning loudspeakers (the artist behind this creation hopes it'll go in the fantastical house's bell tower). Rube Goldberg, meet John Cage.

For Swoon, who presented New Orleans Airlift director Delaney Martin with a model of what the house should look like, the ambitious project is "about loving this neighborhood, loving this block, loving the musical history of New Orleans and wanting to create something that could interact with that," she says. For her part, Martin, in addition to curating the project, has come up with an installation that interacts with the city as well as any other. "It's just a subwoofer on the back of a tin shack," she shouts over its distorted rumble. "A subwoofer rattling license plates and your windows as it drives by is a very New Orleans sound."