

# Metromover sound show is silenced

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## Meows, bongos trouble officials

Festival schedule / 6C

By DAN HOLLY  
Herald Staff Writer

The sound-emitting, attention-grabbing art exhibits that officially opened in Dade's public transportation system Sunday were meant to be provocative.

But the most controversial exhibit is the one that isn't there.

The idea was to put tape recorders on Metromover cars, producing sounds ranging from a cat's meow to bongo drums every time the doors open. It's part of the New Music America festival and was to run for a week.

But engineers determined that the exhibit could cause doors on the Metromover — the electric, driverless cars that shuttle passengers in downtown Miami — to open between stations, said Jeffrey Kaplan, deputy director of the Metro-Dade Transit Agency.

Kaplan became concerned after a test run on the Metromover last Monday. He noticed that one of the playful sounds from the exhibit overrode an announcement over the public address system.

Passengers also seemed alarmed — not amused — by the noises, Kaplan said.

When engineers studied it further, they became concerned that

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# The Miami Herald

## Noise show on Metromover scares officials, who cancel it

EXHIBIT / from 1A

the recordings would interfere with the circuits that open the doors, Kaplan said. He canceled the train exhibit Saturday, a day before it was to officially begin.

But the creator of the exhibit, called *Come on Baby Ride With Me, Just Like You Did One Thousand Times Before*, is skeptical.

"I don't think it's a safety problem," said Gordon Monahan, a 32-year-old artist from Toronto. "It's an aesthetic problem."

His assistant, Laura Kikauka, was more blunt. Kaplan "expected pseudo-Christmas music," she said.

Monahan said transit officials have known for months how the exhibit would work. He said he didn't hear doubts about its safety until late last week — after the county attorney issued an opinion that Monahan had a contract to display his work that must be honored even if it didn't please transit officials' tastes. The county could break the contract for safety reasons.

Monahan acknowledged that his art is not for everyone. But he add-



TONY OLMOS / Miami Herald

Gordon Monahan, with assistant Laura Kikauka, in Miami Beach hotel room. He calls dispute 'an aesthetic problem.'

ed, "You can't censor someone just because you're not familiar with their music."

The artist said Sunday that Kikauka had figured out a foolproof way to solve potential safety problems. He said he will present it to the Metro-

Dade Transit Agency this morning. Meanwhile, five other festival exhibits — ranging from chimes set off by a telephone call to a weather-controlled sound machine — are on exhibit on train platforms or at Government Center until Sunday.

# Transit 'art' is silenced

## Taped sounds called unsafe

Commuters react / 1C

By DAN HOLLY  
Herald Staff Writer

Dade transit officials Monday rejected new plans to set up a sound exhibit on Metromover cars, leading the artist who created it to claim "blatant censorship."

The one-week exhibit was supposed to start Sunday, featuring bongo drums, Indian chants and other sounds every time the Metromover doors open.

Canadian artist Gordon Monahan redesigned his exhibit over the weekend after transit officials said his first plans were unsafe — they said it could cause the doors to open unexpectedly. On Monday, he presented them with a plan he called foolproof.

Not even close, said Albert Hartkorn, supervisor of system safety for the transit agency.

"What he's given us is 'catastrophic,'" Hartkorn said. "What we're saying is that, with changes, he can make it 'acceptable.'"

Risks that are categorized as merely unacceptable could be undertaken if the transit agency director gives authorization. But transit director Ben Guilford said Monday

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## Artists say transit officials censored Metromover art

SOUNDS / from 1B

he would have no part of it.

"Any risk, regardless of its category, is unacceptable to me," Guilford said. Guilford said he is a supporter of the arts, but that safety came first.

The new designs have a new hitch — they could prevent the doors from opening at all, Hartkorn said. They may also override signals that the cars send to central control about brake failure, flat tires and other important information, he said.

Monahan believes the agency is more concerned with aesthetics

than safety, noting they did not object to his exhibit until last Monday, when Jeffrey Kaplan, the agency's deputy director, heard it during a test run.

The exhibit is one of six to be displayed in the transit system for a week as part of the New Music America festival. The agency let the others go on as scheduled.

Kaplan acknowledges he was not thrilled with some of the sounds, but only from a safety point of view. The Eskimo mouth harp sounds like an alarm; a radio disc jockey jabbering in Italian like someone yelling "no, no, no," Kaplan said.

Monahan said the sounds were

not disturbing. A blind man who came on board the Metromover during the test run last week was not disturbed and, in fact, began swaying to the music, he said.

The transit agency agrees the evaluation team did not find the sounds disturbing. At any rate, Guilford said, the sounds themselves were "not a major factor" in his decision.

Whether the agency's decision is justified, it ruffled the feathers of some in the arts community even before that decision was made final on Monday evening.

New Music America co-director Joseph Celli urged participants in a

conference Monday afternoon to call Metro-Dade commissioners at home to protest — and he gave out their telephone numbers.

Raul Rodriguez, chairman of the trustees of the Arts in Public Places Department, one of the exhibit's organizers, called the transit agency's decision "a shame" and said the safety considerations should have been raised sooner.

Transit officials said they never saw Monahan's plans until Nov. 28.

Guilford said Monday evening he would offer a compromise — putting the tape recorders on Metromover platforms instead of in cars — but Monahan declined.

# Art Trust would revive sound project on Metrorail

Dade's Art in Public Places Trust Wednesday voted unanimously to try to get Gordon Monahan's controversial snippets of sound back on the Metrorail/Peoplemover system.

"The public has paid for it and is entitled to see it," said Dan Paul, six-year veteran of the Trust and immediate past chairman.

The vote followed extensive discussion about what the Trust might have done differently leading up to the Dec. 2-11 New Music America Festival.

Monahan's work — to substitute door-opening chimes with sounds of birds tweeting, doors creaking, etc. — was among six projects for the festival funded through Art in Public Places. County Manager Joaquin Aviño ordered it removed Dec. 3 after safety engineers pronounced it a hazard.

"I'm concerned about the precedent," said Paul. "Other county departments will decide all they have to do is huff and puff, and Art in Public Places will fold up. Can we sue?"

No, said assistant county attorney Deborah Bovarnick. You would have one department suing another.

"Then we have a responsibility to make it safe and show it to the public," said Paul.

Helen Salazar, a trust member who worked for the Bell System 25 years, remained skeptical that safety could have been the engineers' genuine objection.

"Remember," she said. "All those years, Bell's contention was that no one could connect a coupler [to install a house phone]. Safety was a factor. Now, anyone can connect a coupler."



**GAIL MEADOWS**

However, Raul Rodriguez, the trust's chairman, repeatedly counseled his colleagues against casting aspersions on the engineers.

"It would be unfair to say they were out to get us," he said.

From that discussion, the trust marched through the rest of its agenda and right into its next expected controversy — art for the bridges to the Port of Miami.

"We're in Lunetta Land," said Paul. "We have to deal with Carmen."

Port director Carmen Lunetta is regarded one of the three strongest county department heads when it comes to dealing with Art in Public Places. By county ordinance, all new county construction projects are to devote 1.5 per cent of their cost to art to enhance public space. Lunetta, along with airport director Dick Judy and parks and recreation chief Bill Bird, are fiercely protective when anyone encroaches on their turf.

"I told him," said Paul, "when Napoleon came back, he built the Champs Elysees and the Arc de Triomphe."

"I said, 'Carmen, this can be your Arc de Triomphe.'"

But no one expects it to be that easy.

Daniel Buren, the French artist commissioned to celebrate the entrance to the port, has proposed that columns of water shoot up under the bridge, making the structure appear as if it were resting on water.

"It's not a design that will please the original engineer," sighed Rodriguez. "That plan called for a svelte, sleek, modern, thin, unobtrusive [structure] that has claims to a certain aesthetic."

"The question is, who has the last word on the bridge's design?"

Ominously, that's yet another committee appointed by the city and the county. At Wednesday's meeting, Luis Ajamil, vice president of Post Buckley Schuh and Jernigan, the engineering firm for the bridge, had not returned phone calls from Art in Public Places asking about the schedule of upcoming meetings.