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6 Local music

In "Out," Will Spitz gets a charge out of Thurston Moore, Christine Southworth, and the Museum of Science's Van de Graaff generator, and Chris Rucker has the latest on the Receiving End of Sirens, Slapshot, Bane, and local bands who're playing Coachella. Plus this week's Top 10 and "Club Shot."

Phoenix Music & Clubs

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Going electric

Last Saturday night at MassArt's Tower Auditorium, Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore knelt in front of two small Peavey amps, fiddled with the settings of a gaggle of effects pedals arrayed before him, and manipulated the feedback from his electric and acoustic guitars. In his solo "noise" incarnation, he was toying with physics: the amps emitted multiple tonal layers of feedback that criss-crossed and oscillated, producing snatches of odd harmony. The tone and the timbre could change with Moore's slightest movement, becoming mesmerizing and strangely comforting, if a little tedious.

Harnessing the acoustic possibilities of electrically amplified sound has become a standard practice in rock and roll — even Moore's avant-garde parlor tricks are no longer as startling as they might have been 20 years ago. But the night before Moore's gig, composer Christine Southworth staged a performance that was truly electrifying: during the world premiere of her hour-long composition *Zap!* at the Museum of Science, she stood in a metal cage amid a storm of electricity coursing from the museum's 40-foot-tall Van de Graaff generator. Ever since Bob Dylan, "going electric" has had many connotations, but this was something different: though *Zap!* utilized the talents of a flutist, two keyboardists, a cellist, a guitarist, a bassist, a drummer, a vocalist, a double-helix-shaped robotic xylophone, sound engineers, and computer programmers, the centerpiece of Southworth's performance was electricity itself, as millions of volts buzzed, fizzled, and sparked in deafening cracks that punctuated her music.

Southworth has electronic music in her blood: her father, Bill, was one of the inventors of MIDI, the language that allows computers to speak to instruments. And the microchip hasn't

fallen far from the processor: Southworth, an MIT grad, is currently studying computer music and multimedia composition at Brown. Last year, she and Leila Hasan, a dreadlocked robotics engineer at MIT, approached the Museum of Science about hosting a performance by the pair's newly formed Ensemble Robot. "While we were there," Southworth explains via e-mail, "I started talking with Andy Cavatorta, who works in IT at the museum, about

possible placements of the robots, and we came up with the Theater of Electricity. And *Zap!* was born!"

On Friday, several

hundred observers gathered in said theater, a large, dimly lit room with theater seats at one end and two levels of balconies wrapping around a congregation of artifacts that looked as if they'd come out of a 1950s science-fiction movie — including the generator itself and a pair of eight-foot-tall Tesla coils flanked by a flame-belching column, all doused in an eerie blue glow. The humans — the musicians and a conductor — were crammed onto a small part of the first balcony, overlooking Southworth (who also provided vocals) in her birdcage. Hasan oversaw the computerized elements from the floor. Two large video monitors provided a grainy feed of the musicians, but the star of the show was the generator, which, built in 1931 and originally housed at MIT, is the world's largest air-insulated Van de Graaff. Southworth believes this is the first time a Van de Graaff has ever been employed as a musical instrument. And the evening seemed to have an all-ages appeal: the crowd included a number of children with their parents, as well as college students and high-schoolers with mohawks. Thurston Moore might want to watch his back.

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OUT by Will Spitz