



ICONOCLAST

Janet Feder

ON PREPARED BARITONE GUITAR

BY BRYAN BELLER

AFTER A FORMATIVE JOURNEY THROUGH FOLK and rock—as well as years of classical study—Denver’s Janet Feder eventually broke bad and began preparing her baritone guitars with small objects such as steel rulers, horsehair, and rocks. She also tunes one or two strings in unexpected half-steps, higher or lower. With sonic innovation and traditional melody as twin cornerstones of her artistry, Feder’s recent, self-produced *THISCLOSE* is an intimate treat for fans of truly alternative guitar.

Why did you choose the baritone?

Because the first time I heard a baritone classical, I cried. After a lifetime of playing guitar, *this* was the sound I’d been hearing in my head. Somewhere, between my own melodic/textural universe, and the big low end of the baritone, I’m more inclined to forego playing *all* the notes in favor of playing the tastiest few.

What’s your favorite sound on *THISCLOSE*?

For the electric baritone solo on “Crows,” I was playing through a vintage Roland RE-301 tape machine, and [recording engineer] Mike Yach took off the tape loop, wadded it up, and then put it back on the spindles, which added lots of distortion and reverb. It doesn’t even sound like a guitar.

You play prepared guitars, but you don’t use effects pedals. Why?

A pedal changes the sound of all strings at once, and my ear loves the interplay between altered and not-altered strings. The sounds I crave are those that surprise me *because* they’re unpredictable—often in the most nuanced way. For example, attaching a split ring changes the tonal spectrum of a string, making it sound both high and low at the same time.

How has prepared guitar changed your approach to composition?

Every one of my best ideas came from a *bad* idea—something I thought up and rejected because it was stupid. I’d spend all this time trying to talk myself out of it, and eventually I’d give it a go just to make the head trip stop. And there it was—something good. I spend a lot less time now talking myself out of my bad ideas. ■