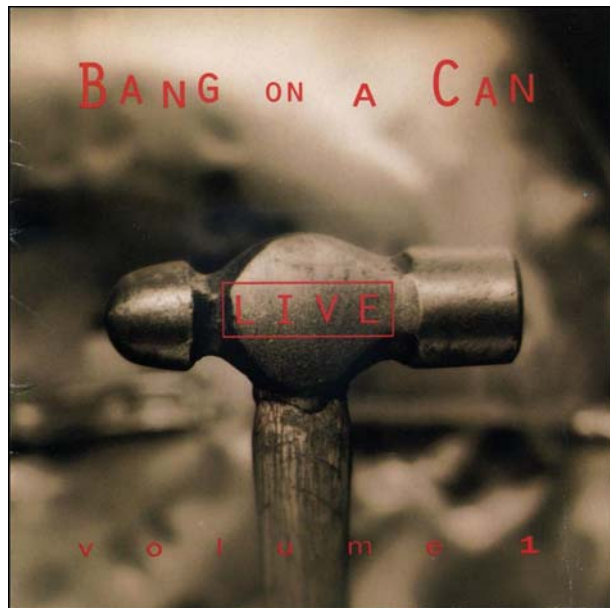


NWCR628

Bang on a Can Live

Volume 1



Tom Johnson

1. *Failing: A Very Difficult Piece for String Bass*..... (8:57)
Dedicated to Jon Deak (Bang on a Can 1988) Robert Black, bass

William Doerrfeld

2. *Evening Chant* (7:03)
(Bang on a Can 1989) William Doerrfeld, sampler

Scott Lindroth

3. *Relations to Rigor* (8:52)
Kathleen Nester, flute; Andrew Sterman, bass clarinet; Kate Light, violin; Karl Parens, cello; Jim Baker, marimba; Chris Vassiliades, piano; Scott Lindroth, conductor

Michael Gordon

4. *Strange Quiet* (13:45)
Part I
Part II
(Bang on a Can 1987) Michael Gordon Philharmonic:
Ted Kuhn, violin; John Lad, viola; Michael Pugliese,
percussion; Evan Ziporyn, bass clarinet; Bob
Loughlin, electric guitar; Michael Gordon, keyboard

Julia Wolfe

5. *The Vermeer Room* (11:39)
(Bang on a Can 1990) Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne:
Guy Pelletier, flute; Normand Forget, oboe; Gilles
Plante, clarinet; Michel Bettez, bassoon; Francis
Ouelet, horn; Lise Bouchard, trumpet; Alain Trudel,
trombone; Jacques Drouin, piano; Julien Gregoire and
Vincent Dhavernas, percussion; Claude Hamel and
Alain Giguere, violins; Brian Bacon, viola; Claude
Lamothe, cello; Rene Gosselin, bass; with Elizabeth
Panzer, harp; Lorraine Vaillancourt, conductor

Evan Ziporyn

6. *LUV Time* (13:48)
I. Between the Jaws
II. Ramrods (for Steve Lacy)
III. Instep (Bang on a Can 1989)
Evan Ziporyn, bass clarinet; Boo Elmer, trombone;
David Mott, baritone sax; John Van Buskirk, piano;
Jean Moncrieff, kempi

Allison Cameron

7. *Two Bits* (13:31)
(Bang on a Can 1991) Danny Tunick, John Ferrari,
Karen Phenpimon, Rob McEwan, percussion; Laura
Goldberg and Muneko Otani, violins; Michiko
Oshima, viola; Anna Cholakian, cello; Robert Black,
bass; Dan Kennedy, conductor

Total playing time: 78:00

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Notes

Musically, New York was in a slump in 1987, and the first Bang on a Can festival caught the city sleeping. No one realized that the decade had been pregnant with a new musical ear, and no one expected a new style to emerge full-blown at an audacious, oddly-named little festival never heard of before. (At least one audience member actually brought his own can). No one expected these things, that is, except Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang, the composers who stared (and who continue to curate) Bang on a Can.

Post-minimalism, the New Tonality, the New Dissonance, the New Formalism: all these murky labels together circumscribe the concerns of the Bang on a Can composers, but no one term does their diversity justice. By 1987, minimalist repetition had become unfashionable, but Bang on a Can music began with minimalism's reduction of materials and grew outward. Dissonance was once again OK, but twelve-tone music's scattershot diffuseness wasn't; even the thorniest Bang on a Can music tended to pick a few meaty chords and stick with them. Most Bang on a Can music sounded arguably tonal, but the tonalities were built up by emphasis on a

few unchanging pitches rather than by harmonic syntax. Rhythm, not harmony, was the structural basis.

Best of all, Bang on a Can brought form back into music as a central concern, and in a way that nonmusician audiences could respond to (and have, every year, enthusiastically). In so doing, the festival rebuilt a bridge between classical audiences and the downtown Manhattan scene. In best Downtown tradition, some of the Bang on a Can composers (such as Michael Gordon) had also played rock clubs, while others (like Evan Ziporyn) were working jazz musicians. Despite diverse backgrounds, though, nearly all presented a music that classical listeners could relate to. The pieces on this disc exhibit the variety, but also the trends, in postminimal or new-tonal form. Those by Doerrfeld, Gordon, and Cameron set up repeating patterns to work against; those by Lindroth and Wolfe are more rhapsodic, repeating nothing literally, but they still create form from a few carefully-chosen materials. Diverse in personality, the pieces intuitively belong together.

It's habitual with Bang on a Can to put younger composers in context by performing them next to the older composers who

influenced them. **Tom Johnson's** influence as a *Village Voice* critic during the '70s is well known, but his music—precisely ambiguous in its fusion of minimalism and conceptualism—remains a cult phenomenon. Like Johnson's delightful operas, *Failing* for contrabassist explains itself as it goes too eloquently to require commentary. It's fitting that the piece's personality, split between words and melody, should have been created by a critic, and its inherent self-contradiction—only a failed performance can succeed—shows a perverse philosophical streak as well.

The accumulation of patterns in *Evening Chant* by **William Doerrfeld** seems minimalist, but not its whimsical shape nor the raucous complexity of its sounds. The piece is reminiscent of music produced by electronic circuitry, but Doerrfeld actually performs it live on an Emulator sampler; every key produces a different noise, and the keyboard part is intricately difficult. Doerrfeld combines sophisticated programming with rhythmic shouts and phonemes to create an energy as joyous and grating at once as the Balinese monkey chant.

In gesture, **Scott Lindroth's** *Relations to Rigor* isn't minimalist at all, but its limitations on motive and register, and its slowly evolving harmonies, achieve the perceptual clarity minimalism aimed at. Lindroth combined tape (generated at CalArts) and instruments in an attempt to introduce a feeling of freedom into originally rigorous systems. Like most of Lindroth's music, the piece is obviously logical at some level, but its logic is hidden in the delicate note-echoes between the two media.

Post-minimalism's rhythmic basis is audible in **Michael Gordon's** music, and especially in *Strange Quiet*. Gordon's rock roots show through in his steely instrumentation ("It was strange to be writing a quiet piece," the composer says, hence the title), but his love of odd-beat ostinatos is evident throughout, first in the opening seven beat patterns, later in the aggressive alternation of seven and nine beat patterns. The music's surface is simple, but the patterns elude all but the most intent ear, and the shimmering harmonies are secondary to the rhythmic development. Typical of Downtown,

Gordon created his own expert ensemble—the Michael Gordon Philharmonic—to negotiate his hairpin rhythmic turns.

The Vermeer Room by **Julia Wolfe**, evanescent and impressionistic, represents the new music's sensuous, sonority-based flip side. Wolfe took her title and inspiration from a Vermeer painting, "A Girl Asleep." Given the canvas's mysterious hidden figures and illuminated doorway, she imagined a cacophony of sounds in the girl's dream despite her outwardly peaceful sleep. The harmonies include consonant triads, pungently bittersweet dissonances, and several stages in between, growing tense but always returning to center. The texture accumulates toward an Ivesian chaos, but, as in the Lindroth piece, the number of actual sonorities is limited.

Evan Ziporyn's *LUV Time*, after a few hard-edged, unstable chords, announces its jazz roots in the rhythmic freedom and sliding harmonies of the winds. The piece is a clear lesson in how different, emotionally and formally, post-minimalism is from the style it left behind. You can hear minimalism's legacy in the piano's unvarying chord changes, but the growling and crooning of the winds ushers in a more flexible, playful idiom; those piano chords recede to become a steady yardstick against which the melodies are heard. Perhaps a closer influence than minimalism is Balinese music, for besides playing jazz clarinet, Ziporyn ran a gamelan orchestra in California.

An invigorating Canadian presence is one of Bang on a Can's additions to the New York scene. **Allison Cameron**, a Victoria native, lives in Toronto. Her music's primary focus is timbre, slow drawn out textures hovering around the thresholds of perception. *Two Bits* is characteristic; here again, percussion provides a constant background for the perception of pitch movement. Accelerating drum gestures against a steady beat grab the attention, but the real changes take place underneath, in the strings' creeping glissandos. Subtle and soothing, yet eerie and unpredictable, the piece illustrates the new sensibility that Bang on a Can has sprung on an unsuspecting world.

—Kyle Gann

Production Notes

Produced by Bang on a Can

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Bang on a Can LIVE was recorded by WNYC with Bang on a Can

For WNYC

Producer Allison Chernow

Director of Radio Operations: Steve Cellum (1989-1991).

Technical Director: Christopher Czeh (1987) Edward Haber (1989-1991).

Engineers: Spyder Blue Rider, Michael DeMark, Stephen Shultis, Carol Martino, Jane Pipik.

For Bang on a Can

Sound Design: Steve Cellum (1987-1988) Bob Bielecki (1989-1991).

Engineers: Ilana Pelzig, Connie Kiełtyka, Miles Smith, Natalie Budelis, Dan Dryden, Brian Karl, David Meschter

Special on *LUV Time*: Joel Gordon, Toby Mountain

Mastered by David Lang, Joseph R. Dalton and Ellen Fitton, engineer, at Sony Classical Productions, Inc., NYC.

Publishers:

Johnson: Two-Eighteen Press (BMI)

Doerrfeld: composer (ASCAP)

Lindroth: composer (ASCAP)

Gordon: composer (ASCAP)

Wolfe: composer (ASCAP)

Ziporyn: composer (ASCAP)

Cameron: composer (SOCAN)

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