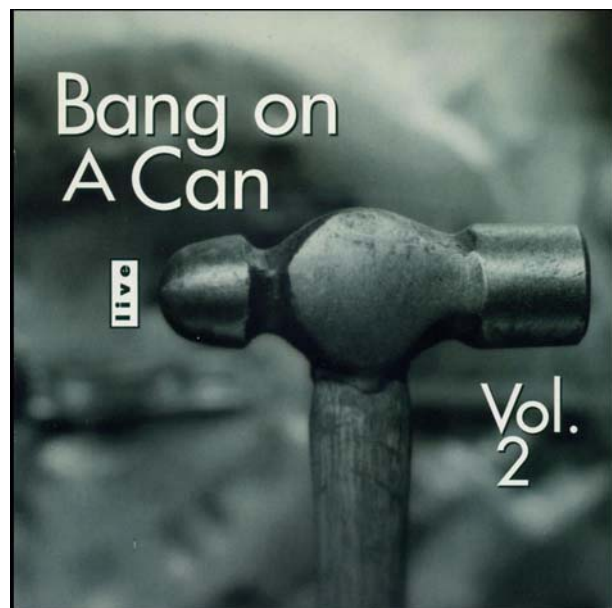


NWCR646

Bang on a Can

Live – Vol. 2



- Shelley Hirsch/David Weinstein
1. *Haiku Lingo* (excerpt) (1990) (8:15)
(Bang on a Can 1990) Shelley Hirsch, voice;
David Weinstein, electronics
- Lois V. Vierk
2. *Red Shift IV* (1991) (12:25)
(Bang on a Can 1991) A Cloud Nine Consort:

Gary Trosclair, trumpet; Mark Stewart, electric guitar; Alan Moverman, piano and synthesizer; Tigger Benford, percussion

- Jeffrey Brooks
3. *Composition* for Two Pianos (1992) (8:55)
(Bang on a Can 1992) Piano Duo – Cees van Zeeland & Gerard Bouwhuis

- Elizabeth Brown
4. *Migration* – in memory of Julie Farrell (1992) (11:44)
(Bang on a Can 1992) Elizabeth Brown, shakuhachi; Mayuki Fukuhara, violin; Sarah Clarke, viola; Theodore Mook, cello

- David Lang
5. *The Anvil Chorus* (1991) (7:00)
(Bang on a Can 1991) Steve Schick, percussion

- Jeffrey Mumford
6. *a pond within the drifting dusk* (1989) (9:22)
(Bang on a Can 1989) Laura Gilbert, alto flute; Joshua Gordon, cello; Victoria Drake, harp

- Phil Kline
7. *Bachman's Warbler* (1992) (16:34)
(Bang on a Can 1992) Phil Kline, harmonica and boomboxes

Total playing time: 74:53

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Notes

Bang on a Can is among the most inclusive and hospitable of all new music festivals. Its ambiance is informal. When the venues allow it, audiences can come and go during annual all-day marathon concerts, sit up close and listen, or casually stand in the back with a beer or an apple cider. Even when the venues have been more formal, the experience still somehow feels more like hanging out with music than being trapped by it. Held every spring in New York City, it is a festival for a generation of composers and audiences who grew up in a world of many musics—a Cagean universe where all is possible, where there is access to the entire gamut of ways of making music and thinking about music—and no one of them dominates. It is a festival run by a generation that likes to put musics together, collectors rather than disposers. It is a festival that sells cool T-shirts. But it is no place for annotators.

Part of the informality of Bang on a Can, and part of its audience-friendly ethos, is to let the music be, unencumbered by program notes. There are no biographies of composers; no lists of their prestigious grants, commissions and academic affiliations; no earnest justifications for sounds and structures; no compositional labels. Scruffy downtown composers who make music with boomboxes are, at least in print, equal to Elliott Carter. The composers themselves can, if they like, introduce the music on stage, and in most cases those

introductions are cursory, a bit nervous and wonderfully illuminating—an introduction to the person, not the concept, behind the music. When John Cage stepped on stage to kick off the 1992 edition of the festival, which began with his work, he seemed to sum up the sense and spirit of the festival simply by saying, “Let me be a can opener.”

So one way to proceed with this, a second helping of bang, canned from Bang on a Can, is simply to pop the top. You don't need to have described, before you hear them, what Shelley Hirsch and David Weinstein are up to, and why, to understand. And if you don't follow the so-called downtown new music scene—well, that only makes the excerpt from *Haiku Lingo* more of a surprise, its humor more disarming. There, I've probably told you too much already. You don't have to read on. Just push the play button.

Indeed, underlining much of the success of Bang on a Can is the fact that you don't need to know. One of the great pleasures in attending the festival is that it believes that music can speak for itself, and that even a little mystery is okay. It is a philosophy that also helps make the often radical differences in approach and sound from piece to piece regularly encountered at the festivals, particularly in its marathons, untroubling. And it is that philosophy which characterizes the selections herein, recorded between 1989 and 1992.

Bang on a Can began in 1987 as an out-of-way, good-natured, homey, haphazard gathering by three young composers, Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe, and has turned into a major New York event with broad national and international representation. By now some of its composers who were marginal in 1987 have begun to be accepted by the more established musical community. But the festival has not lost touch with its roots. David Lang may, for instance, field commissions from major institutions, but his rhythmically exuberant *The Anvil Chorus*, heard here, is still the work of a sassy downtowner.

In fact, once one begins to penetrate the music here, it becomes very difficult to explain what is easy to the ear. The listener of this CD may well find that Jeffrey Mumford's, delicate, impressionistic *a pond within the drifting dusk* both refreshes the ear after *The Anvil Chorus* and sets the tone for the hushed opening of Phil Kline's luminous *Bachman's Warbler**. Both the latter pieces are by composers with a highly developed sense of sonority and how to use it. But Mumford's richly poetic music finds its source in compositional tradition and standard instruments played in the standard way, while Kline's work is highly unconventional.

And what are the secrets of Lois Vierk's *Red Shift IV*, of John Brooks's *Composition* for two pianos, or Elizabeth Brown's *Migration*? All three represent different ways that young

composers build on the inherited tradition of minimalism. Here, cultures gladly intertwine. *Red Shift IV* grows ecstatic the way a raga does, and its bent notes show the influence of Vierk's study of Japanese music. *Migration* weaves a Japanese shakuhachi into a classical chamber music esthetic. The piano duo, by Minnesota composer Brooks, links the rigor of Bach's counterpoint with a distinctly 90's sound.

Ultimately, it would require an exceedingly complex theory of postmodern hearing to explain the contents of this can. But the genius and the pleasure of attending the Bang on a Can Festival is that nobody seems to need one. The ear doesn't care.

—Mark Swed

**Bachman's Warbler*, one of the hits of the 1992 festival, is too ingenious not to describe how it is made, but I banish it to small type and a footnote in hopes of encouraging the listener to listen first, and let its description then be an occasion of amazement. Kline delighted the audience by moving along a row of twelve boomboxes, recording simple harmonica chords onto each one and then playing them back on tape loops. You can hear him punch on the "record" and "play" buttons. Such layering of slightly distorted sounds has the effect of making visceral chaos theory, the small distortions proving to have huge repercussions in their building rapturous patterns of unpredictable complexity.

Production Notes

Produced by Bang on a Can

Executive producer: Joseph R. Dalton

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

For WNYC:

Producer: Allison Chernow. Director of radio operations: Steven Cellum (1989-1992). Technical director: Edward Haber (1989-1992). Engineers: Spyder Blue Rider, Michael DeMark, Stephen Shultis, Carol Martino, Jane Pipik, Eileen Delahunty, Christine Bronder.

For Bang on a Can:

Sound design: Bob Bielecki (1989-1992). Engineers: Ilana Pelzig, Connie Kieltyka, Miles Smith, Natalie Budelis, Dan Dryden, Brian Karl, David Meschter.

Special on *a pond within the drifting dusk*: Ben Rizzi and David Merrill. This recording is dedicated to the memory of Karin Fuller. *The Anvil Chorus* was commissioned for Steve Schick by the Fromm Music Foundation. Special on *Red Shift IV*: Mark Stewart and Bruce Goggin. This piece was commissioned by the Experimental Intermedia Foundation with support from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust.

Publishers: Hirsch/Weinstein: composer (GEMA); Vierk: composer (ASCAP); Brooks: Davidge Publishing (ASCAP); Brown: Quetzal Music (BMI); Lang: Movello & Co. (ASCAP); Mumford: composer (ASCAP); Kline: composer (BMI)

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