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MUSIC REVIEW | BANG ON A CAN ALL STARS

Work by the People and for the People



Jennifer S. Altman for The New York Times

David Cossin, one of the Bang on a Can All Stars, on percussion, at Merkin Concert Hall on Wednesday.

By **ALLAN KOZINN**
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Bang on a Can, the composer-run new-music organization, has always had a populist streak, as its name implies. Its People's Commissioning Fund taps into that spirit: contemporary-music fans are encouraged to contribute a few dollars each toward a handful of new works.

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Mostly, the fund seeks scores from young composers who draw on a broad menu of musical influences, and every year the Bang on a Can All Stars perform the new works, with John Schaefer, the host of the "New Sounds" radio series, interviewing the composers before their works are played. (The shows are recorded for "New Sounds," on WNYC-FM (93.9); this one also streamed live on Q2, the station's experimental Internet outlet.)

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This year's program, at Merkin Concert Hall on Wednesday evening, included four premieres that shared — though with different accents — an off-kilter pop sensibility. In "The Afflicted Girl," by Oscar Bettison, that sensibility was fleeting: the harsh opening chords seemed rooted in indie rock. But as they were repeated — with long silences or delicate, pianissimo sounds (bells, a lightly bowed cello) between them, at first, then with more vigorous instrumental flourishes joining the sequence — the piece took on a more complex structure.

Eventually the silences were dropped, and Mr. Bettison continued to add elements that gradually stacked up, yielding an aggressive essay in joyful cacophony. And suddenly the harsh, fortissimo timbres dropped out, leaving only soft-edged sounds that morphed into gentle bell tones at the work's end.

Christine Southworth's "Concerning the Doodle" accompanies a film (about the adventures and fantasies of a dog) by the Clever Girls Collaborative. It is straightforward, texturally and harmonically: the piece begins as an assertive blast of hard rock, driven by David Cossin's drumming, the guitarist Mark Stewart's power chords and Robert Black's solid bass. But Ms. Southworth soon moves the players through a parade of quirkier, bright-hued pop styles in an appealingly unpredictable structure driven by the film.

Nik Bärtsch's "Modul 26 for Sextet," a study in steady expansion, begins with whispered, toneless sounds, which become a drone and then slowly blossom into an attractive texture with one foot in atmospheric Minimalist repetitiveness, the other in jazz.

David Longstreth, the leader of the indie band Dirty Projectors, contributed a trilogy of short, light-spirited works. "Instructional Video" is built on a cheerful chord progression that evokes the spirit of 1960s French film music. "[Matt Damon](#)" moves between moody, slow-moving music and a splashy piano and marimba figure that borrows briefly from the "Blue Danube" Waltz. And "Breakfast at J&M" closed the set with a burst of bustling, cartoonish energy.

The Bang on a Can All Stars, in superb form, filled out the program with an excerpt from [Brian Eno](#)'s Minimalist drone classic, "Music for Airports," in an arrangement by the group's clarinetist, Evan Ziporyn, and [Michael Nyman](#)'s "Manhatta," a 2003 score for Paul Strand's 1921 silent film, which was shown during the performance.

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