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13 Hours of Sounds and Psychedelia

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Chad Batka for The New York Times

Bang on a Can Marathon The Asphalt Orchestra marching band performing at the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center on Sunday.

Listeners at the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center had to jump out of the way as the Asphalt Orchestra, a brainchild of Bang on a Can, snaked its way through the large crowd at the annual Bang on a Can Marathon on Sunday. The orchestra, an ebullient, avant-garde marching band that blends performance art with inventive new works and funky arrangements, offered a version of Frank Zappa's "Zomby Woof" by Peter Hess (the group's tenor saxophonist); an arrangement of Bjork's "Hyper-Ballad" by Alan Ferber; and Goran Bregovic's exuberant "Champagne."

The Asphalt ensemble's freewheeling aesthetic sums up Bang on a Can's genre-bending 21st-century ethos, represented on Sunday by an eclectic smorgasbord of performances that 5,000 people took in, in whole or in part.

The 13-hour event, a production of the Arts World Financial Center and the River to River Festival, touched on various genres and included musicians from outside the contemporary classical music scene, although that niche was well represented by performers like the Jack Quartet, young stars who have impressed with their energetic advocacy of new works.

Here they joined forces with the excellent Young People's Chorus of New York City for "Exalted," a piece that Michael Gordon (an artistic director of Bang on a Can) wrote after his father's death last fall.

The work is based on the first four words of the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, sung with increasing intensity over insistent slashing figures in the strings: voices and quartet caught up in an anguished frenzy.

Poul Ruders's "Songs and Rhapsodies," performed by the Athelas Wind Quintet from Copenhagen and the accordionist Frode Andersen, fared less well; some details of this appealing chamber work were swallowed into the vast atrium, despite vibrant playing.

Fausto Romitelli's wild and colorful "Index of Metals" (whose conclusion I heard), with its psychedelic instrumentals and soaring vocal line performed by the soprano Tony Arnold and the Talea Ensemble, certainly didn't have to fight to make an impact in the huge space.

After this riotous music came the mellow "At the River," performed by the pianist Timothy Andres, who composed it as part of a series influenced by Charles Ives. The alluring work is a fantasy on the hymn "Shall We Gather at the River," with the tune woven through a canvas of repetitive figurations. Minimalism at its most minimal was represented by Philip Glass's ceaseless "Music in Similar Motion," performed by the Bang on a Can All Stars before a potent rendition of Mr. Glass's melancholy "Closing." Mr. Glass also offered "Metamorphosis No. 4," a work for solo piano.

A highlight of the segments I heard was the post-Minimalist "Cruel Sister," by Julia Wolfe (with Mr. Gordon and David Lang, the third artistic director of Bang on a Can), inspired by an old English ballad about two sisters vying for a man's love, until the dark-haired sister pushes her fair-haired sibling into the sea. This arresting piece, performed with flair by the Ensemble Signal, conducted by Brad Lubman, illustrates the dark story with insistent patterns in the lower strings, frantic chords and cacophonous outbursts, with frenzied pizzicatos evoking a harp.

The evening segment also featured excerpts from Toby Twining's "Eurydice," the incidental music he wrote for Sarah Ruhl's play of the same title, performed here by Mr. Twining and his small ensemble of singers and a cellist. The set, which incorporated a wide range of vocal techniques and sounds, included the energetic counterpoint of "Playing in the Waves," the colorful "Yes, Yes, Yes" and the mournful "E-U-R-Y-D-I-C-E."

The last performance I heard was that of the ebullient jazz group Sun Ra Arkestra, led by the dynamic 87-year-old alto saxophonist Marshall Allen, who joined the ensemble in 1958. Dressed with their trademark sartorial flair, the ensemble players performed jazz and funk-influenced selections onstage and off, parading through the audience in a blur of spangles and colorful glitter.

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