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Music Review

## Keeping the Vision New for 25 Years

Bang on a Can Plays Evan Ziporyn and Others at Tully Hall

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By Zachary Woolfe

Before “Big Beautiful Dark and Scary,” the latest album from the collective Bang on a Can, came out in February, the group gave away digital downloads to anyone who posted a Bang on a Can memory on its Web site.

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Jennifer Taylor for The New York Times

**Bang on a Can** This iconoclastic new-music collective is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Above, the chamber group Bang on a Can All-Stars performing “Field Recordings” on Saturday at Alice Tully Hall; the piece consists of segments by nine composers.

I didn’t do it then, so I’ll share my memory now: waking a little after daybreak at the collective’s signature new-music marathon in 2008 to the slowly shifting drone of overtone singing. It was Stockhausen’s gorgeous, infuriating 80-minute “Stimmung,” and by minute 50, starved for sleep, I was as close as I’ve ever come at a concert to full-on hallucination.

More than 5,000 people posted their memories of Bang on a Can’s composing, performing, commissioning and recording on the site, an outpouring that attests to the collective’s popularity and its influence, which has been less a specific sound than a voraciously

eclectic worldview, both rigorous and freewheeling.

Founded in the East Village in 1987 by the composers Michael Gordon, David Lang and Julia Wolfe, Bang on a Can first appeared at Alice Tully Hall in a watershed concert in 1994, when controversy swirled around the sacrilege of inviting “downtown” into Lincoln Center.

So it was fitting that the group returned to Tully Hall on Saturday evening as part of its 25th-anniversary celebrations. The concert focused on the new, but the highlight for me was “Tire Fire,” a 1994 work by Evan Ziporyn, a longtime Bang on a Can collaborator. Played by Mr. Ziporyn’s ensemble called Gamelan

Galak Tika — a fusion of Balinese gamelan, electric guitar, electric bass and keyboard — the work swings thrillingly between cacophony and lyricism: a portrait of cultural exchange always in flux.

The Asphalt Orchestra, Bang on a Can's avant-garde marching (and dancing) band, gave raucous performances of a bright set of new arrangements of music by the Japanese drummer and composer Tatsuya Yoshida, who joined the group on drums for the dazzling final number, "Zwimbarrac Khafzavrapp."

The sprawling celebration ended with the collective's chamber ensemble, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, and the American premiere of "Field Recordings," with contributions from nine composers — including Mr. Gordon, Mr. Lang, Ms. Wolfe and Mr. Ziporyn — who were asked to combine found audio with live music.

In "Reeling," one of the segments, Ms. Wolfe delicately layered instruments atop a recording of a French Canadian folk singer; Mr. Lang's "unused swan" combined samples of knife sharpening with the icy wash of chains dragged against metal. The composer and video artist Christian Marclay's "Fade to Slide" was a characteristically witty mash-up of film clips with sound effects amplified and exaggerated by the All-Stars; in "An Open Cage," Florent Ghys gradually transformed an excerpt from John Cage's "Diary" into percussive whispers and swishes.

Though nodding to the past, the mellow, thoughtful "Field Recordings" was a telling anniversary choice for a collective that has always been focused squarely on the present and future.

*This year's Bang on a Can Marathon will be held on June 17 at the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center, West Street, south of Vesey Street, Lower Manhattan; (718) 852-7755, [bangonacan.org](http://bangonacan.org).*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/arts/music/bang-on-a-can-plays-evan-ziporyn-and-others-at-tully-hall.html?\\_r=2&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1336151888-ISpPvDT53YIeOcv270CIww](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/arts/music/bang-on-a-can-plays-evan-ziporyn-and-others-at-tully-hall.html?_r=2&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1336151888-ISpPvDT53YIeOcv270CIww)