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Composers Add Tastes to Fusion

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Meredith Monk as a guest with the Bang on a Can All-Stars

Bang on a Can has always been the most unabashedly populist of new-music organizations. Its name suggests that anyone can make music on anything, and its boundary-crossing programs have been built on the notion that contemporary music can embrace elements of rock, jazz and world music. In recent seasons its grass-roots approach has extended to commissioning too, by inviting its audiences to contribute to the People's Commissioning Fund. The proceeds are put toward commissioning new works, which are performed at an annual People's Commissioning Fund concert by the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

This year's installment, at Merkin Concert Hall on Thursday evening, included premieres by Stefan Weisman, Lukas Ligeti and Joshua Penman on the first half of the program, and arrangements of older pieces by Meredith Monk — with Ms. Monk presiding — after the intermission. Because the concert was being recorded for "New Sounds Live" on WNYC, that show's host, Jon Schaefer, chatted briefly with each composer before the works were played.

Mr. Ligeti, in his interview, described the Bang on a Can All-Stars as "a chamber group that's also a rock band," and all three composers molded their works in that spirit.

Mr. Weisman's "Restless Legs," for example, is built around a harmonically all but static ostinato in the piano, bass, cello and percussion, against which Mark Stewart's electric guitar line had a trippy, embryonic Pink Floyd quality at first, and eventually seemed to glance at Carlos Santana's Latin-jazz synthesis, and toward the end at the atmospheric style of the Norwegian jazz guitarist Terje Rypdal. There was a whole lotta fusion going on, and not just here.

In "Glamour Girl" Mr. Ligeti ranged further afield, drawing on his fascination with African drumming but weaving in straightforward rock drumming as well. With Evan Ziporyn playing multiphonics-laden clarinet lines within a texture of amplified keyboards and strings, this work spoke several languages at once. If Mr. Ligeti hadn't said that it was fully notated, it would have passed as a hot jam session.

Mr. Penman's interest is in meditative, trance music — or so he said. His "Awakening" had so much going on that slipping into a trance would have been out of the question. At one point most of the ensemble accompanied a bass solo with shakers and rattles; elsewhere the focal points were a sputtering clarinet solo, a lugubrious cello line and an extended rhythm passage that sounded like a hybrid of a clattering railroad and a conga line.

Ms. Monk, who is rarely heard outside her own ensemble, collaborated with the Bang on a Can players on the endearingly quirky vocal counterpoint of "Panda Chant I," and seemed energized by Julia Wolfe's and David Lang's punchy arrangements of several of her other pieces.

The concert will be broadcast on "New Sounds Live," on WNYC (93.9), in several installments, starting on March 22 at 11 p.m.