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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL NAGLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The singer and violinist Owen Pallett, second from right, with the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

Festival's 21st Birthday Celebration Blurs Boundaries, Dusk Till Dawn

Musical calendar watchers love the seeming portent of anniversaries that end in a zero or a five. But in America, turning 21 is meaningful, too. It's an age that comes with a certain implied license to go a bit crazy, to take risks, maybe even to lose control for a while. Perhaps that explains what was by all accounts a first for the Bang on a Can Marathon, which began in the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center on Saturday night: a mosh pit.

**MUSIC
REVIEW**

**STEVE
SMITH**

The unlikely occurrence took place during a frenetic 4:15 a.m. performance on Sunday by Dan Deacon, a Baltimore rock musician known as an exuberant, crowd-pleasing one-man band. Maniacally bouncing young bodies crashed into one another with gleeful abandon. A few brave souls body-surfed atop outstretched hands.

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Bang on a Can has long included performers from outside contemporary classical circles in its annual marathons, both to blur musical boundaries and to lure new audiences. If it has never seen a response like this one, well, no one else is quite like Mr. Deacon.

Normally the center of attention (and often planted amid audience members), here he was a ghost in the machine, controlling the booming, buzzing electronic patterns of his "Ultimate Reality Part 3" from a hidden position. Onstage two rock drummers, Kevin Omeara and Jeremy Hyman, bashed tribal rhythms in tandem; overhead on a video screen, scenes from Arnold Schwarzenegger films split and morphed into psychedelic swirls.

Mr. Deacon's geeky hedonism — all 15 minutes' worth — was a high point of the 12-hour event, which Bang on a Can produced in collaboration with the mostly pop-oriented River to River Festival and arts>World Financial Center. Two other performers from alternative-rock circles also attracted their own retinues. The most polarizing, to judge by comments afterward, was the guitarist Marnie Stern, who blissfully strummed raucous chords and tapped spidery solos over a piercing looped drone.

Some observers proclaimed Ms. Stern's performance unbearable. I found her intensity oddly seductive if you could get

The Bang on a Can Marathon lets loose. (Body surfing O.K.)

past the resemblance of her sound to that of a swarm of bees amplified by a tinny P.A. system in a crowded gymnasium.

Of greater general appeal was Owen Pallett, a Canadian singer and violinist whose work under the name Final Fantasy mixes swords-and-sorcery imagery with a vulnerable gay sensibil-

ity. Mr. Pallett played three of his songs during a powerful 10 p.m. set by the Bang on a Can All-Stars. He then joined the group in "Twelve Polearms," a fanciful commissioned work that wavered between sweetness and suspense.

Those performers aside, the marathon mostly presented new iterations of familiar themes. The vibrant chamber ensemble Alarm Will Sound kicked off the proceedings at 6 p.m. with a movement from John Adams's "Son of Chamber Symphony," and much later offered a staggeringly creative arrangement of the Beatles' abstract sound collage "Revolution 9," arranged by Matt Marks. Signal, a new chamber orchestra, made an auspicious New York debut at midnight with a powerful account of Steve Reich's "Daniel Variations."

Musicians from around the world attested to the global reach of the Bang on a Can aesthetic. Crash Ensemble, from Ireland, played colorful works by Donnacha Dennehy, its founder, and Terry Riley, as well as an overlong exploration of altered intonation and hammering rhythms by Arnold Dreyblatt.

Ensemble Nikel, a quartet from Tel Aviv, brought pieces by Chaya Czernowin, Sivan Cohen Elias and Ruben Seroussi, which, though filled with fascinating spurts and bursts, had little shape or momentum.

Bang on a Can's founders — Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe and David Lang — were each represented by a striking piece. The solo vocalists Pamela Z, Caleb Burhans and Bora Yoon fashioned attractive and deeply personal creations using electronic effects.

As dawn approached, the Canadian ensemble Contact presented a faithful arrangement of Brian Eno's meditative electronic piece, "Discreet Music." The marathon concluded with a 5:30 a.m. performance of Stockhausen's "Stimmung," sung with intense concentration by the sextet Toby Twinning Music as the sun rose. High overhead, birds perched on wires near the ceiling chirped a lively counterpoint. Whether in protest or in appreciation was anyone's guess.



The crowd attending the Bang on a Can Marathon, a 12-hour event that began on Saturday evening at the Winter Garden.