



BUSINESS

At \$37.5m, penthouse tops most everything



OPINION

Warren's silence was Fidelity's gain



NATION

Ayotte thw retire old A

CLASSICAL NOTES

Bang on a Can connects musical, visual works at Mass MoCA

By David Weininger | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 24, 2014



KAITLIN MORENO

From left: Bang on a Can musicians Mark Stewart, Jay Sager, Adrienne Pope, Chuck Furlong, and David Cossin rehearse artist Ann Hamilton's "Paper Chorus."

When the composers David Lang, Julia Wolfe, and Michael Gordon founded the musical collective Bang on a Can 27 years ago, the reference point for their aspirations lay not in the music world, but in the art world. They saw people lining up around the block for the Whitney Biennial and realized that, unlike in the familiar rituals of concert life, that audience “expected the work to be challenging, difficult, thought-provoking,” Lang said recently by phone. “They didn’t expect it to be pleasant or reassuring or all masterpieces. They expect that they’re going to engage with something that was just made, and they may not like it, but liking it may not be the most important way to evaluate it.”

It was no accident that when Bang on a Can held its first marathon concert, in 1987, it took place not in a concert hall but in a SoHo art gallery. And when the group was looking to establish a summer school for young professional musicians, it settled on Mass MoCA, in North Adams. As with that early marathon, Lang said, “we thought that if we can build a connection between new music audiences and new art audiences, that would be a really great thing.”

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

This year, Banglewood — as the school-and-festival has come to be known, a sly reference to its more august Berkshires neighbor — is making those connections explicit. Bang on a Can Plays Art, which begins Saturday and runs through Aug. 2, offers a series of programs that highlight, in manifold ways, musical links to parts of the museum’s collection.

“We had the idea this year that we could highlight a little better the relationship between the music and the art,” Lang said. “We would be able to underline certain things to try to build a deeper relationship between what we’re doing and where we’re doing it.

“In a way,” he added, “what we’ve done is we’ve designed a sort of concert tour, all week long, into all the different venues at Mass MoCA.”

Bang on a Can Plays Art

Mass MoCA, North Adams 413-662-2111.

<http://massmoca.org/bang>

Date of concert: July 26-Aug. 2

Ticket price: Festival pass: \$37.50-\$75

Sometimes the relationships are straightforward, as with a concert of Steve Reich's works among wall drawings by Sol LeWitt, who was a longtime friend of the composer. Elsewhere the connection is less concrete, more metaphorical. A concert of music by Glenn Kotche — best known as the endlessly inventive drummer for Wilco — will take place beneath Natalie Jeremijenko's installation "Tree Logic," in which trees grow upside down.

"The thing about Glenn is the idea of taking the drummer, which is the backbone of a band, and then saying, that's no longer the thing that supports the melody," Lang explained. "That's the underneath of the ensemble, but now with Kotche's work, that's the foreground."

Audiences will have the opportunity to explore a new wing of the museum devoted to the imposing works of Anselm Kiefer, after which comes a performance of Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas's string quartet "In iij. Noct.," which is played in complete darkness. "They're both about this kind of thing of stark, monolithic kind of terror, and the memory of it," said Lang. "Haas's music isn't terrifying in itself; it's the way it's presented. And that seemed like a connection to the Kiefer."

By some measure the most unusual of these projects is "Paper Chorus," by the textile artist Ann Hamilton, a friend of Lang's. During a residency with Dieu Donn , a paper studio, she designed what was, in effect, a paper suit. "And then she realized that what's really great about them is that they make noise," said Lang. "So she had this idea that maybe something musical could be made out of them."

Lang steered her to two members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, the collective's house band: guitarist Mark Stewart and percussionist David Cossin, both of whom have long experience building their own instruments. They "got together and designed this

program where every single member of our school will have one of these outfits,” Lang explained, “and they’re making an entire evening of music, playing these outfits that Ann designed.”

Bang on a Can Plays Art is only one facet of a busy stretch of Banglewood activity, which also includes seminars meant to help this summer’s fellows acclimate not just to the artistic practices of new music, but also to the practical, business side as well. It’s this side of the festival, a continual process of cultivating the new-music community of the future, that Lang truly prizes. He calls it “the most moral thing I do.”

“Everyone understands why you go to an orchestra you’ve been to a million times, and they play the same music you know, and you feel really comfortable with it,” he said. “We are in the world where we’re trying to convince people of how powerful it is to share an experience for the first time. To hear something new, to be there while it’s being made, to connect about risk, expectation, the future, experimentation. To connect about the possibility that instead of thinking that our field is set by people who’ve been dead for 200 years, we’re really in the process of deciding what music is good for.

“We’re all sharing that — the musicians, the composers, the performers, the audience,” Lang continued. “We’re all in the process of deciding what our field really is. And when you play music that’s new, that no one has heard before, we are all clear that we’re helping to shape what the field becomes. Just by listening. Just by paying attention to it and receiving meaning from it and taking it seriously.”

David Weininger can be reached at globeclassicalnotes@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter [@davidgweininger](https://twitter.com/davidgweininger).

0 COMMENTS