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Deconstructing Sousa, And Other New Ground

By Allan Kozinn
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Bang on a Can's [People's Commissioning Fund](#) uses small contributions from the organization's fans to pay for new works scored for the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Three of those works were unveiled at the annual performance, on Thursday evening at Merkin Concert Hall, which this year was also part of the Kaufman Center's Ecstatic Music Festival. It was streamed live on [Q2](#), WQXR's Internet-only station, and will have a later broadcast on WNYC (93.9 FM), as part of John Schaefer's popular "New Sounds" program. (Mr. Schaefer, the concert's host, conducted enlightening interviews with the composers and performers between the works.)



Brian Harkin for The New York Times

Bang on a Can: The group played several premieres, including one by Bryce Dessner, at Merkin Hall

[Nick Brooke](#)'s "Menace (Sousa Medley)," the first of the new scores, weaves fragments of deconstructed and reorchestrated Sousa themes into a fabric that includes drones, dense clusters and military snare-drum figures as well as bits of Ives and Nancarrow. More a mash-up than a medley, it samples and tweaks Sousa without really making fun of the music: the themes are simply repurposed as part of a woolly, amusing meditation.

[Karsh Kale](#), best known for film scores and dance remixes, contributed "Crawl Walk Run Fly," a gentle, sweetly melodic piece that Mr. Kale described as a cradle-to-grave overview of life. That may be: it begins with disarming simplicity; Satie comes quickly to mind. And even as its textures thicken (and drums, absent at first, add heavy punctuation), it retains an essentially dreamlike character.

[Bryce Dessner](#), a rock guitarist who is becoming a prolific composer and had another premiere at a Brooklyn Youth Chorus concert on Thursday, knows the Bang on a Can All-Stars from the inside, having played with the group when its regular guitarist, Mark Stewart, was otherwise engaged. In "O Shut Your Eyes Against the Wind" he uses Minimalist repetition to create a

hypnotic surface above a world of shifting and sometimes competing rhythms and lively interplay among the ensemble's expert players.

The group filled out the concert with three pieces from its catalog: Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's mysterious, rhythmically intense "Convex/Concave/Concord" and two driven, high-energy scores, Julia Wolfe's "Believing" and Steve Martland's "Horses of Instruction."