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Bang on a Can: Investing in a Music Ecosystem



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Bang on a Can: Investing in a Music Ecosystem

Founded in 1987, Bang on a Can is a contemporary classical music organization based in New York City. Composers Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe established Bang on a Can with the hope of creating an international community focused on innovative music in whatever form it may take. The organization commissions composers and presents daring programming to audiences around the world. This case study traces the history of Bang on a Can by focusing on the success of its annual Marathon. Through its activities, the organization has cultivated an audience that reflects its own openness, expansive musical tastes, and support for contemporary music composition and performance. A proposed “Long Play Festival” presents an opportunity for Bang on a Can to scale its vision further in a multi-day, multi-location concert series.



This case study was prepared by Gabrielle Cornish, Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music. **THE EASTMAN CASE STUDIES** are developed solely as the basis for class discussion of a discrete set of issues. Cases are not intended to serve as comprehensive documentation and analysis of organizational activity, endorsements or sources of primary data nor are they to serve as illustrations of effective or ineffective leadership or decision making.

A Community for Contemporary Music

New York City was an exciting place to be an artist in the 1980s. Superstars across creative media appeared at pop-up happenings in dimly lit loft spaces and the sleek halls of MoMA alike. Abstract artists collaborated with choreographers; playwrights shaped their works with sculptors. The vestiges of modernism had long since given way to the messy potential of the postmodern, and both underground scenes and storied institutions saw some of the most cutting-edge art grace their halls and walls.

Yet classical music—at least the world of young conservatory-trained musicians—had a problem. Contemporary music was not all that contemporary: Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Webern—all dead since the early 1970s—continued to be extolled as the vanguard of new music. Modernism was conflated with modern, and despite strides made by experimental composers like John Cage, Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen in the 1950s and '60s, “new” music largely remained a thing of the past. “To say that you were interested in Steve Reich or Philip Glass when we went to school in the '70s—those were fighting words,” reflected composer David Lang.

The interdisciplinary worlds that dance, theatre, and both the plastic and visual arts had long inhabited had bypassed the musical scene. Music ensembles either performed the centuries-old hits of Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart, not only but often on classical music's most prominent stages, or they played modernist works before meager crowds at academic institutions. Meanwhile, New York City's ballooning popular music scene remained all-but-separate from the classical music world. Within both popular and classical music, audiences had congealed into various subgroups that rarely overlapped. The result was a series of closed environments—what Lang calls “cul de sacs”—out of which composers rarely ventured. The same, thus, held true for the audiences they cultivated.

In early 1987, composers Lang, Michael Gordon, and Julia Wolfe, decided to provide an alternative to that reality. And in May of that year, they did, hosting the “first annual” Bang on a Can Marathon in a SoHo art gallery.¹ The Marathon brought together composers with and without academic credentials, from those who

reveled in serialism to those who took Cage's dictum of “organized noise” to heart, from rock guitarists to musicians trained in traditions from beyond North America and Europe. Yet even the inclusion of the word “annual” for the first Marathon was somewhat tongue in cheek. Although Lang, Gordon, and Wolfe's enthusiastic gathering of friends and colleagues was a success, the trio only decided after the fact to hold a second Marathon the following year. “Success,” however, is rooted in context. Bang on a Can was less concerned with the finances of new music—at least in the early years—than it was with building a community. “We started to talk about the things that needed to be changed [in music], so we needed to make an audience.” The organizers of Bang on a Can felt they needed to build the world they wanted to live in. In doing so, they not only created a festival: they founded a musical ecosystem.²

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A Desire for Openness

All three founders of Bang on a Can came to composition from different backgrounds. Lang had the most traditionally classical background, though he had been involved in popular music from an early age. Gordon played in a new wave band in New York City, while Wolfe came to experimental music and composition from folk music traditions. Yet all three struggled to make musical homes for themselves once they did begin their academic training in composition. Music school reinforced the idea that new music had to be particularly erudite, obtuse, or unintelligible. It

was “miserable,” Gordon reflected. “It’s not only that there was no audience—there were no performers, too!” Within the halls of the American conservatory, interests in truly contemporary music were often seen as trivial and relegated to hobbyist status.

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Yet once they had settled in New York City in the years after graduation, the trio still had trouble finding performers and audiences for the styles of music they wanted to compose. Instead, the pesky divisions between “high” and “low” musical art, between academic and popular, persisted.

New York City’s geography echoed the watershed in classical music—“uptown” music of Babbitt, Boulez, and others reserved for Princeton and Columbia University, and the “downtown” scene designated for Fluxus, Cage, Glass, and Reich. Audiences for this music were limited in size no matter where one went, and, crucially, the attitudes of audiences who did attend contemporary music concerts were often myopic in their tastes. As Lang lamented, “people would go to those [contemporary music] concerts and then just go out afterwards and trash all the performances. . . We wanted people to listen to us—to the whole concert—with enthusiasm.”

This wasn’t the case, Lang continued, with other artistic mediums in the city. Other scenes tended to be more open to the interaction of styles, to encourage debate without stifling experimentation, and to draw in people across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. “We just knew that the people going to contemporary music concerts weren’t the kinds of people we wanted coming to our concerts,” he said. “And the people who weren’t coming to our concerts were the ones we wanted to come.”

Bang on a Can was thus in search of a new audience community—one that matched their enthusiasm for openness and their omnivorous music tastes. These ideas had guided them since the earliest stages of their careers, with Wolfe even remarking that their curiosity and adventurousness was what had led them to composition. “Our first moments were as listeners,” she remembered. “As audience members.” They wanted to share that listening experience—the bursts of inspiration, curiosity, and clarity that come with musical exploration—with audiences across boundaries. They wanted to bring together disparate music scenes and sonic worlds into a wonderful mosaic of sounds and melodies, to build the artistic world they had desired for many years, together. With the Marathon, they finally were able to turn their worldview into reality.

Controlled Chaos

The first Bang on a Can Marathon brought together a wide variety of performers, composers, and audience members. Part concert, part social occasion, the event felt less like a performance than it did an unpretentious gathering. “We had all the composers talk,” Wolfe recalled.

Part concert, part social occasion, the first Bang on a Can Marathon felt less like a performance than it did an unpretentious gathering.

“It was very folksy, like living program notes. . . We sold beer, it really felt like we were hanging out. The audience felt like their opinion mattered. It was their concert, their hang.”

Seeking to connect with the audiences they’d seen at galleries, plays, and dance performances, Bang on a Can purchased mailing lists of audiences of various contemporary arts institutions as a means of extending beyond music circles. The poster for the first Marathon, which juxtaposed a musical score

with a hammer hitting a can, reiterated the group's interdisciplinary affinities (**Appendix 1**). And they were largely successful in their endeavor: Cage, Reich, Babbitt, and Pauline Oliveros (among others) showed up—perhaps the first time all four had been featured on a single concert program or had amicably been in a room together—along with four hundred spectators. Calling it a “twelve-hour orgy of contemporary music,” *The New York Times* also praised the event. Oliveros even wrote to Wolfe afterwards, saying that it was “important to have such opportunities to hear a lot of diverse forms of new music.”

Yet despite all the planning that went into bringing the first Marathon together and its successes after the fact, it would be a mistake to consider it a triumph of strategic planning in hindsight. Like the audiences the group sought to cultivate, the planning process was circulatory, nebulous, and wholly collaborative. “The First ‘Annual’ [Marathon] was kind of a joke, because we didn’t know that we were going to do it again,” Wolfe recalled with a chuckle. “It wasn’t until two o’clock in the morning when we were sweeping up with friends that we were like, ‘hey, let’s do this again!’ It really was coming out of just this insane enthusiasm: ‘we’re going to make a concert!’ Not ‘we’re going to start an organization.’”

The founders of Bang on a Can wanted to build an audience that was more than just an audience: the trio wanted to build a community. Key to this was the audience’s active participation, which the group cultivated by breaking the fourth wall and mingling with listeners. “We always make a big deal of hanging out and talking to people,” Lang said. “[We made] sure that the composers were there to talk about their music, which meant they would go into the audience and people would talk with them.” The relationship between ensemble and audience, moreover, was symbiotic. “There was one guy in our audience,” Lang explained, smiling. “He kept coming to performances, and I would talk to him and I’d go, ‘what are you doing?’ and it turns out he was dating a percussionist... I talked

to him at every single concert, and it was really fun to talk with him. That guy became our board president!”

“People returned again and again and became regulars,” Wolfe said appreciatively. It was a community endeavor, one that relied on the shared experience of making and listening to music as a unifying act.

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The Community Invests

Over the next decade, Bang on a Can continued to spearhead new initiatives beyond the annual Marathon. Bang on a Can All-Stars, a select group of musicians, bring the spirit of the Marathon around the world by performing at international festivals every year. The Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival, housed at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, brings together musicians from all over the world who are at the beginning of their careers to perform, collaborate, rehearse, and exchange ideas. The festival culminates in the “LOUD Weekend,” which allows the festival’s participants to perform what they’ve learned and created in front of a large audience. Along with Bang on a Can’s Executive Director Kenny Savelson, the trio of composers even founded a record label, Cantaloupe Music, dedicated to producing contemporary classical music. As Lang put it simply, “we do a lot of things.”

Yet the institutional barriers that had motivated the group from the very beginning were not lifted. Funding remained an issue, despite the group’s growing prestige. With money, however, came independence— independence that the group needed to attain in order to spread its vision of openness. Major granting organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts or renowned symphony orchestras like the New York Philharmonic tended to fund either already established composers or young superstars. “If the

LA Phil calls you up and says, ‘we want to commission a piece,’” hypothesized Gordon, “they can do that. If a new music ensemble or quartet calls you up and says ‘we want to commission a piece from you, we’re going to apply for a grant,’ as a composer, that means that the piece is not going to happen for three years, maybe, if it ever happens at all.” Funding structures as they existed didn’t work for new music, and the group forged its own path to remedy the situation. Or as Lang summarized, “We do a lot of things at Bang on a Can in reaction to things that don’t work out.”

Thus if the new music world was to sustain itself, it would need to find a way to fund itself. And so, like they had done with the very first Marathon, Bang on a Can turned to its audience of active listeners for donations. In 1997, the organization announced the People’s Commissioning Fund, a crowdsourced fundraiser to commission works from composers who might otherwise be overlooked by major granting organizations. It was promoted as a collaborative effort from the very beginning (**Appendix 2**). As Executive Director Kenny Savelson reflected, “we were kind of admitting from the very beginning by asking the audience to participate that we couldn’t do this

by ourselves. That’s not why we make music anyway. We don’t write pieces so that we can go listen to them at home.” The group’s focus on community building ensured the People’s Commissioning Fund’s success. “If,” Savelson continued, “over years you’ve invited people into the

conversation and created this community, everyone rallies, and in this particular situation, you’ve built up a trust that everyone shares. . . That allows us this flexibility now.” (See **Appendix 3** for the ten-year report of the Bang on a Can Festival.)

Keeping New Music New

Nearly 35 years after its founding, Bang on a Can remains true to its mission of “making new music

new.” The People’s Commissioning Fund continues to thrive—a rare feat in a musical economy that is reluctant to invest in new ventures. And while not quite a household name just yet, the group has cemented its place as one of the most prominent purveyors of contemporary music and artistic innovation in the United States. The Marathon continues, with it even moving online as a series of six-hour livestreams due to COVID-19. Indeed, this virtual Marathon, while borne out of catastrophe, may prove to be more valuable than just a ‘stopgap’ during the pandemic and has already allowed the group to reach a wider demographic, to commission new composers, and to draw upon a broader set of performers than ever before. While the online Marathons have been offered free of charge, the group encouraged its audience to purchase “tickets” in the form of donations to support new commissions and pay musicians during a time when such opportunities are scarce. The audience still participated, watching on Bang on a Can’s website and other online platforms instead of from a gallery floor, even in a time of social distancing.

Perhaps most tangibly, Bang on a Can has served as an incubator for some of the most promising performers and composers in new music today. Alumni of the group’s Summer Music Festival have gone on to found their own ensembles, festivals, and record labels. Yet Wolfe sees no redundancies within the new music community: “There came a point where we did think, ‘do we even have to do this anymore?’ So we had to think about value and ask if [we] were still taking people to new places. When new people come along and make [new] festivals, we’re actually sometimes a part of those festivals. There’s a lot of crossbreeding, so it isn’t so much ‘us versus them.’ We build on each other.”

Through it all, the sense of community endures. “I like seeing where the alumni of the Summer Festival go,” Lang said. “We accept these students and try to have a wide range of people and a wide range of experiences and abilities. . . Then all these people went out and started their own ensembles or record

Nearly 35 years after its founding, Bang on a Can remains true to its mission of “making new music new.”

labels or festivals and wrote great music and did great things... Every time [an alum] comes out with a new gig or a new record, I get a sort of fatherly happiness from it. They're doing what we were hoping to do, building the world that they want to live in."

There is still, however, more that Bang on a Can wants to accomplish. After all, as Savelson reflected, "if you subscribe to an ideology of openness, then there's always work to do." The curation of the Marathon has

"If you subscribe to an ideology of openness, then there's always work to do."

- Kenny Savelson,
Executive Director,
Bang on a Can

evolved over the years, and genre boundaries blurred in interesting ways. "About ten years ago," explained Gordon, "we started mentoring three young performers and composers, and they started what has since become a wing of Bang on a Can: a social justice

music diplomacy organization called Found Sound Nation. They're part of the Bang on a Can organization, but artistically they have autonomy. What they're doing is really fantastic. We've been facing something that all of classical music has been facing—a lack of diversity—and we've been working on that."

For inspiration, Lang, Wolfe, and Gordon have more recently, turned to other music festivals—festivals for which the Marathon helped lay the foundation, like Big Ears (Knoxville, Tennessee), which brought together disparate audiences and performers for multi-day concerts. In 2020, the group planned to take the principles of the now-established annual Marathon and expand it throughout New York City in a multi-day, multi-location concert series called "Long Play." Spreading throughout downtown Brooklyn, Long Play would fill the borough with over fifty concerts over the course of three days that merged with the surrounding community. "We're trying to create a neighborhood of art," said Wolfe.

With the Long Play Festival, Bang on a Can strives even more boldly, as Lang hoped, "to build the world that [they] want to live in." And they continue to do so as part of a broader musical ecosystem—an ecosystem which they've helped to create and cultivate for more than three decades. As happened with the People's Commissioning Fund, the Long Play Festival could become a time-tested event like the Marathon. With hopes of aggressively expanding its special borderless community of artists, musicians, and listeners, Bang on a Can prepares to take this next step to shape the musical experience of now.

Endnotes

1 For more on Bang on a Can's first Marathon—as well as the ways programming choices influenced community building—see William Robin, "Imagining Community at Bang on a Can's First Marathon," *New Music Box*, 22 June 2016. <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/imagining-community-at-bang-on-a-cans-first-marathon/>.

2 Robin further discusses the economic and creative ecosystems that Bang on a Can helped to create and sustain from the 1980s to the present in his monograph, *Industry: Bang on a Can and New Music in the Marketplace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

APPENDIX 1

Poster for the Inaugural Bang on a Can Marathon

BANG ON A CAN FESTIVAL
 12 HOURS OF NEW MUSIC
 SUNDAY MAY 10, 1987 2 P.M. - 2 A.M.

2 PM

- PHIL WILKINSON
- SCOTT LINDROTH
- LOUIS ANDRESEN
- JAMES RENAKIS
- LEE HYLK
- JOHN KING
- MARTIN BRENNICK
- HELD TONES
- RELATIONS TO RIGOR
- DE STAAT (two piano)
- HERSONI
- THERAPY
- IN DOUBLE LIGHT
- IMMEDIATE MUSIC
- STRING QUARTET No. 2

3 PM

- STEVE MARYLAND
- LAURA CLAYTON
- JAMES SELLARS
- JULIA WOLFE
- JOHN ZORN
- IGOR STRAVINSKY
- GEORGE CRUMB
- PAULINE OLIVEROS
- NEW WORK
- SIMCHAYA
- GET HOT OR GET OUT
- WILLAMSBURG BRIDGE
- ROAD RUNNER
- AGON (two piano)
- HERSONI
- BLACK ANGELS
- TURNING MEDITATION

4 PM

- DAVID LANG
- MAURICE HESS
- AMON KEENS
- LOS VIERK
- JACOB DRUCKMAN
- MICHAEL GORDON
- JEFFREY BROOKS
- ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?
- NEW WORK
- PASADUELA
- VARIATIONS
- MANHATTAN CASCADE
- VALENTINE
- STRANGE QUET
- CHACONNE

5 PM

- MILTON BABBITT
- STEVE REICH
- JON DEAK
- VISION AND PRAYER
- FOUR ORGANS
- READING FROM
- STEPPENWOLF
- STADIUM
- WAITING BY THE PHONE
- RYOWAN

6 PM

- CIDERIK WAGENNAAR
- EVAN ZPORYN
- JOHN CAGE
- will be in attendance

with

- Piero Dun (Hart Holland)
- Robert Dicks, bass
- Alexander String Quartet
- S.E.M. Ensemble, Flute Solo
- Maria Fikner, soprano
- Guy Kikavich, accordion

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APPENDIX 2

Postcard for the Inaugural People's Commissioning Fund

imagine a revolutionary new program to commission new work by emerging composers. Imagine sitting in an audience with hundreds of other people who have commissioned a new piece of music together. Imagine joining a community of commissioners. Imagine

Bang on a Can

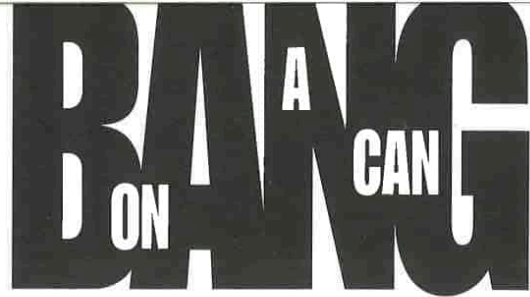
The People's Commissioning Fund

Yes! I have deep and passionate feelings about the future of new music! No! I am not a materialist! I don't need another tote bag, or umbrella, or toaster! I want opportunities to get closer to the music I support, the composers who write it and the performers who play it! I want to be a founding member of The People's Commissioning Fund!

If I gave you my money, I would have to be treated in a revolutionary new way. Here's what I could give you and what I would expect in return:	\$50	\$100	\$250	\$500	\$1000	Of course,
I would receive THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONING FUND newsletter, with information and updates about the music I helped to commission. I would also get an invitation to an open rehearsal, a ticket to the annual People's Party at which the season's commissions are announced, and my name would be listed in all the programs for the season.	I would get everything listed so far, plus a guarantee that if I call up to 48 hours before one of Bang on a Can's Spring concerts, Bang on a Can will make sure I get seats.	I would receive all the benefits of a \$100 membership AND get something that's never been done before, MY NAME WOULD APPEAR ON EVERY COPY OF THE SCORES I HELPED TO COMMISSION. Plus—I would get a ticket to rub shoulders with composers and performers at a benefit party the night before the legendary Bang on a Can Marathon.	I would receive all the benefits of a \$500 membership AND get something that's never been done before, receive a copy of the latest Bang on a Can CD, signed by everyone involved.	For \$1000 I would get everything described up to this point, plus a signed copy of one of the pieces that I helped to commission.	If I gave you more money, I would expect more stuff. For \$2,000 I would expect to be invited to a special dinner with some of THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONING FUND composers for the season. And if I gave you \$5,000, I would hope for nothing less than my name plastered all over creation as a Charter Member of THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONING FUND Committee.	

APPENDIX 3

Ten-Year Report of the Bang on a Can Festival



FINAL REPORT 1996 - 1997 Season

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The first annual Bang on a Can Festival began as a one-day, 12-hour, underground festival ten years ago. In 1996-1997 we presented and performed thirty-four concerts with works by fifty-six composers from Italy to Israel and from Lincoln Center to Lincoln, Nebraska. Our 10th Festival was our biggest and most successful undertaking ever, and in the true spirit of Bang on a Can we used it as an opportunity to launch new projects, create new work, and bring new music to new audiences.

THE 10TH BIRTHDAY FESTIVAL Bang on a Can celebrated its 10th birthday with 20 concerts of international new music around New York and across the U.S.A.

World Orchestra Day Bang on a Can's 10th Festival featured a brand new event. World Orchestra Day -- a free concert -- packed the World Financial Center's Wintergarden space with more than 1000 people. This four-hour mini-marathon found the place where new music and world ensembles meet. We made the concert a free event in order to bring contemporary music to a new audience. Our audience was surrounded by the sound of New York Bagpipe Ensemble, Hassan Hakmoun brought his own interpretations to the music of the Gnawa people of Morocco, and Wu Man and Sola Liu transformed traditional Chinese pipa and voice into 21st century rhythm and blues. Raphael Mostel created a mesmerizing, ambient audience participation event for Tibetan singing bowls and ocarinas (we handed out 500 ocarinas to audience members.) The visually dazzling 25-member Gamelan Galak Tika (complete with traditional costumes, offerings of fruit and a dancer,) blended gamelan music with electric guitars and western rock-and-roll. The grand finale: avant-garde flamenco -- the latest Latin rhythms from the musicians and dancers of Amanecer. One of the most exciting things about World Orchestra Day was that people who had no prior experience with Bang on a Can and in fact rarely attend concerts had their ears filled with new sounds from around the world.

New Works New York On March 17 and April 14, our resident ensemble, the Bang on a Can All-Stars brought their inimitable mix of virtuosity, hard-driving music and fun to the Walter Reade stage at Lincoln Center

APPENDIX 3 cont'd

Ten-Year Report of the Bang on a Can Festival

Australia, England, The Czech Republic and New York. These All-Stars concerts have become an important feature of New York's musical landscape - a wild roller-coaster ride for everyone in the audience and *the* place to hear what's new in new music. Highlights included: Josh Fried's *Headset Sextet*, the six All-Stars gyrating a high-energy response to taped sound, the first performance of a newly-commissioned work for All-Stars and boom boxes by Phil Kline, and a live DJ remix of the Philip Glass classic, *Two Pages*.

SPIT Orchestra Back-to-back in two concerts at the Kitchen, SPIT displayed the incredible energy and technical skill that the ensemble has become known for in the two short years of its existence. The Kitchen's intimate hall is an ideal place to hear SPIT burst free of musical convention. This year the group performed its own amazing and beautiful interpretations of new works by Zeena Parkins, Annie Gosfield and Randy Woolf and of John Adams classic, *Shaker Loops*. SPIT is fulfilling its mission, giving young composers the rare opportunity to work with large forces. Led by conductor Brad Lubman, SPIT Orchestra gave adventurous audiences the chance to hear a whole new world of orchestral music.

Interstate Bang on a Can Bang on a Can is committed to a new audience for new music everywhere, not just in New York. During our 10th Birthday Festival we presented eleven concerts across America. This included the Bang on a Can All-Stars at Yale University and the Baltimore Museum of Art, and six mini-marathons featuring the All-Stars and the String Trio of New York at: the Kennedy Center, the University Musical Society in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Lied Center in Nebraska, the Edison Theater in St. Louis, the Hult Center in Eugene, Oregon, and the UA Presents series in Tucson, Arizona. These concerts successfully reached a national audience that had never before heard new music Bang-on-a-Can-style. Through workshops, residencies, audience question-and-answer and sheer virtuosic playing, the Bang on a Can All-Stars opened challenging music up for audiences across America.

Bang on a Can also creates coalitions of presenters to take new international music to the widest possible audience. As part of our festival, we presented a breakthrough tour -- four events driven by the post-industrial fervor of the British ensemble, Icebreaker, taking over the Majestic Theater in Boston, the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia, Real Art Ways in Hartford and the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. After this cross-country whirlwind, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Icebreaker and the String Trio of New York assembled at the Bang on a Can Marathon in New York.

10th Birthday Bash Nearly 200 people crowded into the Connelly Theater (formerly the R.A.P.P. Arts Center) to help us celebrate our first decade with our first ever benefit/party/birthday bash. Short performances

APPENDIX 3 cont'd

Ten-Year Report of the Bang on a Can Festival

happened throughout the evening (Yoshiko Chuma and Robert Black, Glenn Branca on tabletop guitar, the NuYorican Poets' Cafe founder, Bob Holman, Susan Marshall's dancers and the Bang on a Can All-Stars,) and it was also a dance party, with records spun by DJ Toshio. East Village restaurants donated great food (from chopped liver to birthday cakes!) Bang on a Can intends to make this an annual event, a space for composers, musicians and fans to mingle beyond the concert hall.

The 10th Birthday Bang on a Can Marathon The biggest event of our season held true to form in 1997. More than 1400 people crowded into Alice Tully Hall, listening to works by twenty-six composers, coming and going all day to sample the full range of what's happening in new music *right now*. This year's Marathon featured an incredible range of instruments, from Margaret Leng Tan's toy pianos, to David Watson's bagpipes, Guy Klucsevsek's accordion, Simon Shaheen's oud, Latitia Sonami's electrified hands, Ben Neill's mutant trumpet, DJ Spooky's turntables, Simon Seven's didjeridu, Pulse Percussion ensemble's mystical Chinese percussion and Icebreaker's amplified guitars, trombones and pan pipes. Audiences stretched their ears around new instruments, new discoveries and new worlds of sound.

As always, the Marathon is a wonderful opportunity for young composers across the country to have a high-profile performance of their work. This year, our artistic directors listened to more than 400 tapes anonymously, searching out the new and adventurous work that our audience has come to expect: featuring new composers such as Ed Ruchalski, Eva Wiener, John Myers, Laetitia Sonami and Qu Xiao Song. The Bang on a Can All-Stars performed works by Paul Dolden, Martijn Padding, Alvin Curran and Julia Wolfe. One of the nicest sights at every Marathon is audience members and composers clustered around the picnic tables we bring into the lobby, talking excitedly about the music they've just heard.

BANG ON A CAN YEAR-ROUND

International Touring An important part of Bang on a Can is taking the music of young American composers to international audiences. This year, the Bang on a Can All-Stars took the world by storm, with seven concerts in Italy and Israel -- at Turin's prestigious Settembre Festival, in Rome, in Catania, Sicily and at Jerusalem's famed Israel Festival.

Recording After two boundary-smashing records with Sony Classical, the Bang on a Can All-Stars have just started new relationships with Point Music and Nonesuch. In the spring, Nonesuch released a special 10 CD box-set of the complete works of Steve Reich. Bang on a Can recorded three works on that set. Over the summer the Bang on a Can All-Stars recorded a new adaptation of Brian Eno's ambient classic, *Music for Airports*. This music has had a major impact on an entire generation of young

APPENDIX 3 cont'd

Ten-Year Report of the Bang on a Can Festival

composers; we're eagerly anticipating the record's release next season on Point Music.

Collaborations Bang on a Can initiated two major collaborations with choreographers, an exciting new territory of performance for us. The Bang on a Can All-Stars did a seven-performance run with Eliot Feld's young dance ensemble, Ballet Tech at the Joyce Theater. A new audience heard and *saw* the music of Bang on a Can (including some of our signature pieces, such as *Industry* and *Lick*) spring to life. The Bang on a Can All-Stars also began work with Yoshiko Chuma, an inventive downtown choreographer who specializes in creating movement for musicians. The All-Stars performed an excerpt of her new work, *Footprints of War*, created with composer Alvin Curran, on the Bang on a Can Marathon.

Special Project -- Steve Reich 60th Birthday Concert In a co-production with Lincoln Center's Great Performers' Series, Bang on a Can celebrated Steve Reich's 60th birthday with a retrospective of his work from the last thirty years. Members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars and SPIT Orchestra performed masterpieces: *Eight Lines*, *Nagoya Marimbas*, *Four Organs*, *New York Counterpoint* and *Pendulum Music*. The concert was packed with old Reich fans and new ones. Bang on a Can was excited to have the chance to pay tribute to a groundbreaking and influential composer.

MEMBERSHIP/COMMISSIONING

The People's Commissioning Fund In honor of our 10th Birthday, Bang on a Can launched our first membership program. The People's Commissioning Fund is a revolutionary new idea, in which individual members' support goes to commission new works by emerging composers. We started this program to help address the problem of funding to individual artists. We imagine a young composer standing up to thank the commissioners of his or her work at its premiere performance. The composer asks for the commissioners to stand and be recognized. Three quarters of the audience stands. We think The People's Commissioning Fund is going to change the way our audience hears new music.

Members of The People's Commissioning Fund are informed of the progress of the works they've commissioned through a newsletter, open rehearsals and an invitation to our annual People's Party. At some levels of giving, members' names will be listed on the scores of the works.

The program has had a very successful first year. We launched the program with two solicitations in the Fall and the Spring. Contributions poured in from more than 130 members, from \$9 - \$5000, from New York to California, from insurance salesmen, composers, gastroenterologists, students and the owners of a chime store in Brooklyn. The first

APPENDIX 3 cont'd

Ten-Year Report of the Bang on a Can Festival

composers; we're eagerly anticipating the record's release next season on Point Music.

Collaborations Bang on a Can initiated two major collaborations with choreographers, an exciting new territory of performance for us. The Bang on a Can All-Stars did a seven-performance run with Eliot Feld's young dance ensemble, Ballet Tech at the Joyce Theater. A new audience heard and *saw* the music of Bang on a Can (including some of our signature pieces, such as *Industry* and *Lick*) spring to life. The Bang on a Can All-Stars also began work with Yoshiko Chuma, an inventive downtown choreographer who specializes in creating movement for musicians. The All-Stars performed an excerpt of her new work, *Footprints of War*, created with composer Alvin Curran, on the Bang on a Can Marathon.

Special Project -- Steve Reich 60th Birthday Concert In a co-production with Lincoln Center's Great Performers' Series, Bang on a Can celebrated Steve Reich's 60th birthday with a retrospective of his work from the last thirty years. Members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars and SPIT Orchestra performed masterpieces: *Eight Lines*, *Nagoya Marimbas*, *Four Organs*, *New York Counterpoint* and *Pendulum Music*. The concert was packed with old Reich fans and new ones. Bang on a Can was excited to have the chance to pay tribute to a groundbreaking and influential composer.

MEMBERSHIP/COMMISSIONING

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commissions will be awarded in August, with pieces premiered during our next season.

Other Commissions Bang on a Can continued to forge ahead generating a new repertoire for the Bang on a Can All-Stars, awarding seven commissions in addition to those for The People's Commissioning Fund. Phil Kline, Norman Yamada, John Halle, Anthony Coleman, Alvin Singleton, Tan Dun and Glenn Branca all began work on pieces for the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

ADMINISTRATION

One of the most challenging aspects of Bang on a Can's astronomical growth over the last few years has been expanding our administration to continue to support all our artistic endeavors. This year, Bang on a Can initiated new marketing, booking and fundraising strategies and added a new staff member, Kenneth Savelson, as support for the All-Stars touring, rehearsing and commissioning activities.

Marketing/Outreach Along with our regular marketing, Bang on a Can sent a special 10th birthday poster to more than 25,000 people, announcing our expanded festival, and helping us establish our identity as a national presence in the new music world. We noticed a marked increase in our visibility and attendance for the entire festival. In addition, this year we sent out our first newsletter, *The People's Commissioner*. Targeted to the members of The People's Commissioning Fund, the newsletter also brought our entire mailing list into the heart of Bang on a Can's activities -- closer to the music. The next issue is planned for September.

Fundraising Bang on a Can initiated a number of new fundraising projects this year. The Rockefeller Foundation made its first substantial contributions to Bang on a Can as sponsors of our 10th Birthday Festival. Philip Morris (sponsoring our entire festival) and A.T. & T. (sponsoring Interstate Bang on a Can) provided our first major corporate sponsorships. The launch of the People's Commissioning Fund marked Bang on a Can's first individual membership campaign. Bang on a Can also received a major stabilization grant from the NEA, which will establish salaries for our artistic directors and a cash reserve.

CONCLUSION

Bang on a Can is proud of our ten years of accomplishments. From our small beginning, we have grown into a national and international presence in the new music scene, bringing the highest quality performances of cutting edge music to audiences around the world. Our 10th Birthday year was a wonderful celebration of how far we have come. Now we are looking forward with excitement to our second decade.



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