

g when we become barter."
ms. Zanuck, who produced "Rush"

Critic's Notebook

Hunting for the Musical Thread

By EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

There was a bit of a challenge about the seventh annual Bang on a Can Festival, which came to an end at the Kitchen on Sunday night after 10 concerts, 82 compositions and about 22 hours of music. The challenge was to find something coherent in the festival's deliberate eclecticism, some sense of a governing taste or theme, some characteristics of whatever style is now dominant in what was once called the downtown music scene. As in other seasons, the directors of the festival — David Lang, Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe — have done everything possible to minimize the sense of a governing voice or taste.

I found the selections weaker than they were last year but the variety no less fascinating. The concerts included, for example, a remarkable Chinese shadow play by the Yueh Lung Shadow Theater in which a mythic tale of a prince battling dragons was told with delicate miniature images projected on a screen. The ancient art form was accompanied by music by Bun-Ching Lam that had echoes of the traditional, in the timbres of the Chinese pipa, along with an almost edgy contemporary sensibility.

From another musical cosmos, the Daniel Lentz Group appeared on Friday night, its players offering three of Mr. Lentz's overly sweet Minimalist pop creations, each leaving a mellow aftertaste. The concert ended with "You Can't See the Forest . . . Music" (1971), in which the composer, gradually getting tipsy, changed the pitch of struck wine glasses by drinking their contents and speaking phonemes and diphthongs into a multi-track tape loop; the verbal atoms eventually combined into a series of clichés, punctuated by the chiming of the emptying goblets.



Raha

David Lang, left, Julia Wolfe and Michael Gordon were the directors of the seventh annual Bang on a Can Festival.

The contrasts were almost absurdly radical. On Sunday, there was a gripping performance of Elliott Carter's "Duo" played by the violinist Rolf Schulte and the pianist Martin Goldray, while Thursday's concert tribute to John Cage's memory was dominated by an almost stupefyingly puerile set of new works commissioned by Ascap. Saturday was a night of post-modern beatnikism in

which solo guitarist-composers in their wildly different musical offerings between recitations of new poetry from the club scene.

And on Wednesday, there was a video-theater piece by Ben Neil (a "sofomo"), which included video images of maggots and ants scurrying over coupling couples, accompa-

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The Sylvester Stallone film "Cliffhanger" opened strongly over the Memorial Day weekend. Two other new films, "Made in America" and "Super Mario Brothers," performed well but did not quite live up to the expectations of their studios, Warner Brothers and Walt Disney. The political comedy "Dave" continued to lure audiences, but the thriller "Sliver," which opened well and was No. 1 last week, dropped to sixth place.

Source: Exhibitor Relations Company

Hunting a Common Thread In a Festival of Diversity

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by the composer's own obsessive and occasionally potent score for "mutant trumpet" and percussion. The hour-long piece evolved from being an elegy into a harangue about AIDS and politics with texts written by the late video artist David Wojnarowicz; it was meant to reinforce rage and despair rather than to explore them. Sunday's concluding nine-hour marathon (I stayed for nearly six) consolidated the festival's contrasts, including Ives's String Quartets, an early Minimalist work by Philip Glass ("Two Pages"), Webernesque miniatures by Morton Feldman ("Piece" and "Vertical Thoughts 2") and works by the festival organizers.

This was, in other words, a musical variety show, sometimes exhilarating in its range, often tedious in its detail, with a taste for the American iconoclastic tradition mixed with an almost instinctive sense of American pop style and instrumentation. It loved the simple, the elemental, the repeated. It loved unsettling the listener with the juxtaposition of incongruities. It loved non-Western styles as well as blunt urban energy. It also loved giving a sense of complexity through the accumulation of detail. The festival represented a particular kind of style that is also appearing in many compositions, a style that has been called totalism. Totalism is a word that downtown composers like Mr. Neil and Mikel Rouse have adopted to describe their own reaction to Minimalism. In Totalism there is some attempt to have it all: be minimal in repetitions of small musical units, yet maximal in writing works in which large structures are created and dissonance is celebrated. Totalism does not leave much to chance or improvisation but retains the immediacy of scoreless performance. It includes elements of pop but with an eye on the classical tradition. It is meant to sound raw but aspire to ritual character.

I am not convinced by the word. It seems too artificially grand in its self-regard and too suggestive of the post-war musical styles in which every aspect of musical material was placed under the total control of Serialism. But the new style did come into play at the festival and in some of its compositions. Nick Didkovsky played a whimsical electric-guitar piece, "I Kick My Hand," full of stuttering, jerking repetitions heard over a steadily repeating bass line. In Mr. Gordon's "Industry," the cellist Maya Beiser played recurring double-stopped dissonances deliberately distorted through an amplifier while a television monitor displayed Elliot Caplan's images of nonmusical industrial activity. Ms. Wolfe's "Early That Summer," as played by the

Lark String Quartet, was a furious and ominous work of churning repetitions, punctuated by dissonant thrusts and bursts of energy. Linda Bouchard's "Lung Ta," played by the Lydian String Quartet, was gentler, using galloping repetitions of notes with treble flourishes and sudden changes in meter to evoke Tibetan wind horses, animals that carry prayers to heaven.

Such pieces, as different as they were in style, had a totalist character; they were fairly elementary in structure but aspired to complexity; their aggression was mixed with a playful sincerity. There is an aura of experimentation about all this. The style is a sign of a still unfulfilled quest to find a language that can create large narratives while retaining the ritualistic character of Minimalism and the iconoclastic character of the avant-garde.

Next year, the festival moves to Lincoln Center, a move I fear will be wrong for both parties. The style without a convincing name thrives on informal settings without institutional weight; it is scrappy, irreverent and unsettling. Lincoln Center risks making it seem more established, more absolute, more conclusive — in other words, more "totalist" — than it really is.



HOWS

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ORPHEUM THEATRE VII - 80th St. & 3rd Ave. 878-3400
 • Cliffhanger (Dolby THX) 12:30, 3:00, 5:30, 8:00, 10:30
 • Cliffhanger 11:30, 2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30
 • Made in America 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00
 • Poese 11:40, 2:10, 4:40, 7:10, 9:40
 • Sliver 12:10, 2:50, 5:20, 8:10, 10:40
 • Silver 1:30, 4:00, 6:30, 9:00
 • Dave 1:00, 3:30, 6:00, 8:30, 11:00

VILLAGE THEATRE VII - 3rd Ave. at 11th St. 882-0400
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 • Cliffhanger 11:30, 2:00, 4:30, 7:00, 9:30
 • Made in America 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:30, 10:00
 • Menace II Society 1:45, 4:15, 7:15, 9:45
 • Silver 1:00, 3:30, 6:10, 8:45, 11:15
 • Sliver 11:45, 2:15, 4:45, 7:45, 10:15
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TOWER EAST - 71st St. & 3rd Ave. 879-1313
 • Dave 12:00, 2:30, 5:05, 7:40, 10:25

NEW YORK TWIN - 2nd Ave. & 68th St. 744-7338
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PARIS - 58th St. West of 5th Ave. 980-5656
 • The Lover 1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 9:30

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 • Indecent Proposal 12:00, 2:30, 5:00, 7:25, 9:50

8TH STREET VI - 8th St. & 84th St. 877-3600
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 • Super Mario Bros. 1:15, 3:45, 6:15, 8:45, 11:00
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 • Silver 12:45, 3:20, 5:50, 8:20, 10:45
 • Sliver 1:45, 4:15, 7:00, 9:20
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COLUMBUS CIRCLE - 8th St. & 61st St. 247-5070
 • Dave 12:00, 2:30, 5:05, 7:40, 10:25

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 • Silver 12:30, 3:00, 5:30, 8:00, 10:30

24TH STREET SHOWPLACE - at 2nd Ave. 537
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 • Silver 1:00, 3:30, 6:00, 8:30, 11:00

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 • Menace II Society 1:10, 3:40, 6:25, 9:00
 • Made in America 12:00, 2:30, 5:00
 • Super Mario Bros. 12:30, 3:00, 5:30
 • Poese 1:45, 4:15, 7:00, 9:30
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