



THE PROMS LISTENING SERVICE

Radio 3's Tom Service proposes onward sonic explorations inspired by the music of tonight's Prom

OK, so they've been going for 30 years, but Bang on a Can and the associated All-Stars are still out there on the sharpest creative edges of new music. There is a contemporaneity that encompasses every aspect of the musical experience: where they play, how they play, what they play – and what it all means. The essence of Bang on a Can's music-making is the collaboration between the composers and musicians who write and play with them (above all the founding trio of Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon and David Lang), and the wider collective of their audiences: both because of the way barriers between 'them' on stage and 'us' in the audience are broken down through their performance style, and because, if it's possible to make any generalisation about the huge diversity of their repertoire, it's that it transfigures the vernacular of the world around us into new forms, from grooves to noise, from strange silences to walls of sound. But for all its seething modernity, there's something that resonates with older and more diverse musical cultures in Bang on a Can's beating heart; something you can also say about the musical collectives created by the other composers on their programme tonight, Philip Glass and Louis Andriessen (their equivalents: the Philip Glass Ensemble and Andriessen's group Orkest de Volharding). What they're all doing is writing music for their friends and musical colleagues to play, setting up their own groups to make the music they need to make rather than fitting their creativity around the pre-existing behemoths of classical music with its orchestras and opera houses, and making a music that responds to the dynamics of the band, in a constant creative feedback loop with all of their musicians.

And in restoring that sense of creative collective music-making, Bang on a Can – and Orkest de Volharding and the Philip Glass Ensemble – are creating a kind of contemporary-music-chamber-ensemble-meets-prog-rock-band-meets-Baroque-ensemble-meets-jazz-group. The combination of freedom and control in Bang on a Can's performances rhymes with the kind of creative continuo playing that musicians such as William Christie or Emmanuelle Haïm create with their Baroque music bands, **Les Arts Florissants** and **Le Concert d'Astrée**, but then it has also has the tightness and energy of **Duke Ellington's Big Band** or – to choose from countless examples – the group that **Miles Davis** put together for the *Birth of the Cool* sessions, or the synergy between studio production, playing and improvisation that rock bands like **Pink Floyd** or **Led Zeppelin** created. The point is this: Bang on a Can's radicalism is only radically different from the way that the biggest institutions of classical music are run and the way they usually present themselves. For so many other musical traditions, the creative collective is the norm, not the exception. All hail the All-Stars!



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