

CLASSICAL NOTES

Evan Ziporyn continues his musical experimentation

By David Weininger | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 28, 2013



CHRISTINE SOUTHWORTH

Trio EVIYAN is (from left) violinist and vocalist Iva Bittová, clarinetist and composer Evan Ziporyn, and guitarist Gyan Riley.

Two decades ago, clarinetist and composer Evan Ziporyn cofounded the Bang on a Can All-Stars. The sextet was the house band for a collective intent on pushing past the balkanized environment in which contemporary music seemed to be mired. Like Bang on a Can itself, the group — with its innovative instrumentation of cello, bass, clarinet, keyboards, guitar, and percussion — seemed to define eclecticism. It's a measure of how influential they were that a similar lineup seems almost orthodox today.

“I'm not claiming that we were the first or the only ones to do anything,” said Ziporyn recently, “but when we started, you didn't see contemporary classical groups that had an electric guitar next to a cello. You didn't see groups that were doing really serious reexaminations of popular music, working with jazz musicians to the extent we did, reaching out of the little ghetto that contemporary music was. There's tons of groups doing that kind of thing now, and that's great. . . . The whole world has really changed.”

It was partly because things had changed so much that Ziporyn decided to leave the All-Stars this past fall. It was part of a creative shakeup for him that involved taking on the directorship of the interdisciplinary Center for Art, Science, and Technology at MIT, where he's been on the music faculty since 1990.

Another part of his reorientation was the formation of a new trio called EVIYAN, with violinist and vocalist Iva Bittová and guitarist Gyan Riley. The trio's second-ever show, and local debut, happens on Saturday at MIT's Kresge Auditorium. For this performance they'll be joined by tabla player Sandeep Das and bassist Blake Newman. (“Having done one show as a trio, we're expanding to a quintet,” joked Ziporyn.)

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He'd worked with both Bittová and Riley in other contexts, though those two hadn't ever met. Bittová had done a number of projects with the All-Stars over the years. “Every time I played with her I thought, I have to do more of this,” Ziporyn said. “It just felt that way on an

EVIYAN With Sandeep Das and Blake Newman

Kresge Auditorium, MIT,
<http://www.bittova-at-mit-es2002.eventbrite.com>

almost molecular level — I need to make music with this person.” He’d had a similar feeling with Riley — the son of composer Terry Riley — who had played in a piece Ziporyn wrote for his gamelan ensemble at MIT. “There was a level of rapport in the playing and in the sensibility that was just very evident.

“So I just asked them to meet,” he continued: “Let’s get in a room together and see what happens. And it was just immediately clear that there was a lot of creativity and a lot of the kind of playing I wanted to do. We walked out of the room and we had a group.”

All three are well-traveled musical adventurers. Ziporyn’s composing encompasses Western traditions and Balinese music, while Bittová’s style melds the folk music of her native Czechoslovakia into a kind of elemental avant-garde. Riley’s playing draws on both classical guitar and Hindustani music.

All of which raises an interesting, and somewhat vexing, question: What exactly is it that they play together?

“The genre crossing — that’s the strength of the group,” Ziporyn replied when asked. But he admitted that “in a way it’s also our weakness, because how do you define it? How do you tell people about it?

“What I love about both their playing is that it references this really wide range of things — from classical music to jazz to pop to non-Western music,” he went on. “And not in a way that I think of as being glib but more as expressing who they are as musicians — what they listen to, where they come from. And that’s the way I approach it too.”

Date of concert: Saturday

Ticket price: \$10-\$20

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Pianists David Deveau (above) and

The three write all of the group's music, and the compositions balance notation and improvisation. Perhaps most important to Ziporyn is the way in which each piece, regardless of who wrote it, becomes the trio's own once the three musicians begin working on it.

Peter Serkin will perform at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival, beginning in June.

“Once we get into rehearsal, it's all of ours. We're not starting from, I'm the composer and therefore I make the final decisions. Once we're grappling with the material, we're all grappling with it. It's not the way I can work with everybody. But there's a level of respect, of trust, in the room that lets us do that.”

It remains to be seen how frequently the group will work. While Ziporyn hopes that the trio will play together a lot, the three members of EVIYAN live in different places — Ziporyn in the Boston area, Riley in New York, and Bittová in the Hudson Valley — and all have other projects. They've planned a short tour this summer — including a performance at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival — and are planning more gigs for the fall.

“Last fall, all I wanted to do . . . was see what would happen if I got them in a room, and I left with a band. What we've done is to carve out rehearsal periods and gigs, and every time we do it, there just seems to be more and more in there. So I'm hoping it goes somewhere.”

Rockport summer festival

EVIYAN's July 12 performance in Rockport is part of the 2013 Rockport Chamber Music Festival. The festival, announced this week, opens on June 7 with a gala concert featuring the chamber orchestra A Far Cry and pianists Peter Serkin and David Deveau. That's followed by two



performances by the Jupiter Quartet, in the second of which they're joined by pianist Joyce Yang for the Franck Piano Quintet.

Pianist Peter Serkin.

Other notable concerts include the Boston Early Music Festival presenting two chamber operas by Charpentier (June 17) and a program of Wagner works and Bruckner's string quintet, in recognition of the bicentennial of Wagner's birth (June 13). The Calder Quartet, which made a strong impression last year, is back for two performances (June 20 and 22), the first of which includes works by Bartok, Ravel, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. Perhaps the most intriguing event is a recital by pianists Russell Sherman and Wha-Kyung Byun and flutist Sooyun Kim — the three will play, among other things, an arrangement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony for two pianos and flute. (July 13).

Subscriptions to the festival go on sale March 27, single tickets April 16.

www.rockportmusic.org

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