“Part parade spectacle, part halftime show and part cutting-edge contemporary music concert.... exhilarating.... The playing was coolly brilliant and infectious. And what a scene! Concert audiences are so conditioned to standing back and giving musicians room that it took a while for people here to realize that they were being invited to come close and join in. When the performance ended, people would not stop applauding and waving.”

“Asphalt Orchestra certainly didn’t just ‘play’: They jumped and mugged wildly, chased each other around like Keystone Kops.... All pieces were clockmaker-intricate, but they felt like standing in the middle of a pillow fight.”
- Jayson Greene, Pitchfork, May 1, 2012

“An avant-garde marching band that blends performance art with inventive new works and funky arrangements.”

“A new-music group disguised as a ragtag marching band... the band rarely stands still... virtuosity, playfulness, compositional ingenuity and sheer visceral power mingle. By the end of the concert, they had hit nearly every corner of the space, with audience members following, scattering and regrouping as necessary: when you see a big guy with a sousaphone coming at you, you move pretty quickly.”

Best in Classical Music 2009
“The New York City-based Asphalt Orchestra turned commuters’ heads at lunch time with its hard-to-ignore rendition of Frank Zappa.... Not your mother’s marching band.”
- David Patrick Stearns, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Aug 8, 2009

“The Sousaphone hasn’t had it this good in ages.”
- Seth Colter Walls, Newsweek, Aug 26, 2010

“A dozen of the city’s sharpest contemporary musicians.... with unbridled enthusiasm and the technical wizardry of a jazz orchestra...” - Wall St Journal, July 31/August 5, 2010
Asphalt Orchestra is a radical street band that brings ambitious processional music to the masses.

Created by the founders of the “relentlessly inventive” new music presenter Bang on a Can (New York Magazine), Asphalt Orchestra unleashes innovative music from concert halls, rock clubs and jazz basements and takes it to the streets and beyond. The band brings together some of the most exciting rock, jazz and classical players in New York City who The New York Times called “12 top-notch brass and percussion players.”

Asphalt Orchestra leads multiple lives, from an outdoor guerrilla musical force choreographed by Susan Marshall and Mark DeChiazza, to “Unpack the Elephant,” the indoor experience, directed by Mark DeChiazza and Andrew Robinson, to “Asphalt Plays Pixies: Surfer Rosa,” an album and life performance experience choreographed by Jordana Toback.

Asphalt Orchestra’s debut performances stretched 10 packed nights at Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival in New York over the summers of 2009 and 2010. Since then they have performed throughout the US East Coast, Canada, and Mexico, at London’s Barbican Centre, the TED Women conference in Washington D.C., New York’s Alice Tully Hall and more. Their repertoire ranges from music by pop wizard Björk, to jazz legend Charles Mingus, rock progressive Frank Zappa, Brazilian iconoclast songwriter Tom Zé, Zimbabwean provocateur Thomas Mapfumo, Swedish metal band Meshuggah, and new pieces written for the band by David Byrne and Annie Clark (St. Vincent), Yoko Ono, Tatsuya Yoshida (Ruins), Goran Bregovic, Tyondai Braxton (Battles), and Stew and Heidi Rodewald (Broadway and Spike Lee’s Passing Strange).


Asphalt Orchestra Sees ‘Fun’ of Pixies

By STEVIE DUGGAN

Experiencing New York’s most creative covers band, the Asphalt Orchestra, is like shar-
ing a taxi with two seemingly polar traditional the headiness of the contemporary music学术"n and the terminally

Asphalt Orchestra plays the Plaza

322 W 43rd St, 5th Fl

The Asphalt Orchestra’s latest ambitious project is a track-by-track remake of “Surfer Rosa,” the first album by 100s, cut by the Pixies, which was released 25 years ago. The recording, with its abrupt dynami-
s, shifts, inclusion of crack-and-speyloic humor, wrote a check that was cashed by a generation of alternative-rock acts.

"It has a lot of elements of fun in it, we were cracking up listening to it," said Ken Thom-
son, saxophonist and managing director of the Asphalt Orches-

do"n, which will perform a 15-
minute Piano Set Sunday at the

"We were cracking up listening to it," said Ken Thomson.

Daren Pearson Sundelbeck. The program is headlined by the world premiere of "40th," a piece by the composer and clarinetist for the Asphalt Orchestra. The ensemble, with its wide array of instruments, is known for its vibrant, dynamic sound and its ability to blend genres.

Members of the Asphalt Orchestra perform during Lincoln Center Out of Doors in August 2016. The band performs "Surfer Rosa" on Sunday.
Asphalt Orchestra Owns The Pixies' "Surfer Rosa"

By Caryn Havlik
October 20, 2014

There are few things that the New Sounds All-Purpose Assistant loves more than the Pixies and brass bands / marching bands who party like brass bands...well, maybe pierogies. And this Asphalt Orchestra record, “Asphalt Orchestra plays the Pixies: Surfer Rosa” brings together these two loves, in an instant classic partnership like peanut butter & chocolate! Exceeding all expectations, the Asphalt players have turned out a collection of appealing and cheeky arrangements, incorporating the dynamics and start-stop of the Pixies’ signature loudQUIETloud, ingeniously capturing the musical tension of egotistical band-clashes (despite the balanced distribution of eight different Asphalt arrangers on the 13 tracks), and tapping the rawness and power of that original Steve Albini-produced Surfer Rosa record (without being partially recorded in a bathroom and minus crunchy guitars and drumset).

Known for arranging everything from the metallers Meshuggah to Balkan brass band master Goran Bregovic to Bjork to Charles Mingus, the twelve members of Asphalt are brass, wind & percussion players who are as mischievous and heavy as a punk-ass marching band on Bang on Can’s Cantaloupe imprint could be.

A bit of backstory - even though the NSAPA was devastated to have missed Asphalt Orchestra & Kronos at Lincoln Center Outdoors, when they debuted their Pixies arrangements at the Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival in July of 2013, video of the event surfaced:

The excitement grew here at the office as word spread of their taking on an entire Pixies record of arrangements and hearing that Cantaloupe would be releasing it. OK, *I* was out of my head with glee for a new music marching band of this caliber to take on formative songs of my adolescence from Surfer Rosa. It’s the Pixies record that has the David Bowie-covered blood-covered dress song “Cactus” and the surreal scuba song “Where is My Mind?” The one that also has “Bone Machine” and the disturbing “Break My Body,” (mutilation & incest.) Plus, the Kim Deal-co-written anthem “Gigantic” which has soundtracked many years of my life.

In fact, the Pixies themselves (no Kim) were so taken with these Asphalt Orchestra arrangements that they invited the band to join them on tour for two dates in early 2014, including a performance at the famed Capitol Theater in Port Chester, NY and one from NJPAC. Here's "Tony's Theme" from the latter date:
Then, back in May, Asphalt released the teaser song “Tony’s Theme” from the studio via their Kickstarter rewards. And there was great rejoicing as well as lamenting amongst the staff at New Sounds. Imagine the horror of having to wait an extra SIX months before the record would be released!

That wait is OVER. The record drops on November 18th, but New Sounds will be premiering the studio recordings of Asphalt's arrangements of “Bone Machine,” “Where Is My Mind?” and “Gigantic” as part of Tuesday night’s show - October 21, 2014.

Here's a preview of "Bone Machine" from Soundcloud:

Listeners will find that the adoration for the Pixies’ material comes through on the record, yet none of the arrangements strictly adheres to the originals. (Also, studio banter about field hockey players is notably absent.) Some of the tunes bring all of the new music “avant-garde” squonk & clash, noodling with purpose, and attack (plus cowbell – MORE COWBELL) that fans of the original band might be able to bear. To that, one can only reply, “GOOD!” What’s the point of a faithful cover? It’s got to have something to keep a listener coming back, something still making it pop through the filter of all of the predictable tributes and gentle yet reverential adaptations that have come before.

On Asphalt’s rendition of “Gigantic” (arranged by Nathan Koci), they play around with teasing contrapuntal quotes and snippets of phrases from the song, until the main chorus theme finally erupts at 3:40. Then, on “Tony’s Theme,” (arranged by Peter Hess) there’s the unison-screamed intro, “This song is about a superhero named Tony; it’s called Tony’s thing!”- which is the only studio banter that made Asphalt’s record. On “River Euphrates” (arr. Stephanie Richards) there is a slow and sneaky approach of brass and winds before the two-note oscillation pattern emerges, mimicking the original vocals, speeding wildly until the percussion kicks in. But this isn’t just music for band nerds or new music cognoscenti, for on every track, this Asphalt Orchestra interpretation captures and amplifies the manic energy - that churn and swirl- like a broken face!- of those Pixies shows from the 1990’s (yes, I saw them a couple of times before the first breakup.) My favorite has to be the arrangement of “Where is My Mind?”(arr. Ken Thomson), which is as jubilant and explosive as one could hope for, possibly surpassing the original with the level of intensity in Asphalt’s celebratory rendition. I think I’ll go listen to that again.

Musicians and audiences have wilted in the heat at outdoor concerts this summer. But on Sunday evening, a hardy audience sat on wet chairs and huddled under umbrellas for several hours to hear the Asphalt Orchestra and the Kronos Quartet perform as part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival.

The lineup in the Damrosch Park Bandshell began with Jacob Garchik’s the Heavens, an irresistible band subtitled the Atheist Gospel Trombone Choir. Mr. Garchik, who has written many arrangements and transcriptions for the Kronos Quartet, became fascinated with gospel after hearing the trombone choir “shout” bands of the United House of Prayer for All People. His nine-member ensemble performed selections including the jubilant “Optimism,” the foot-tapping “Digression on the History of Jews and Black Music” and “Dialogue With My Great-Grandfather,” in which a somber tune unfolds over dignified chords.
The Asphalt Orchestra, an avant-garde marching band, has been a regular at Lincoln Center Out of Doors in recent seasons. The quirky ensemble, the brainchild of Bang on a Can, plays funky arrangements and imaginative new works instead of standard brass-band fare.

Here, the orchestra offered a homage to the rock band Pixies, performing inventive, idiomatic arrangements of songs from “Surfer Rosa” in honor of that album’s 25th anniversary. The Kronos Quartet joined Asphalt, whose performances included some lively choreography, for a soulful version of Pixies’ “Where Is My Mind.”

The Kronos Quartet, which has revolutionized the chamber music genre with its myriad commissions, multigenre collaborations and innovative approach to programming and presentation, celebrates its 40th birthday this year. It concluded the evening with seven new works, including several premieres commissioned by Lincoln Center.

The quartet’s lineup opened with Bryce Dessner’s intense, driven “Aheym (Homeward)” and also included Jherek Bischoff’s lilting “Semiperfect Number.” Images of planets were projected onto a screen during Nicole Lizée’s “Death to Kosmische,” whose atmospheric and eerie sound world, enhanced by the Omnichord (an electronic instrument), paid tribute to the experimental electronic music performed in the late 1960s and early ’70s by German rock groups.

The lineup also included Yuri Boguinia’s passionate and dramatically contoured “On the Wings of Pegasus” and the Kronos’ arrangement of Clint Mansell’s “Death Is the Road to Awe,” from the film “The Fountain.”

The concert concluded on an entertaining note with Dan Deacon’s “Four Phases of Conflict.” Audience members were asked to download his app, which generates synchronized light and sound. Then they were instructed to make noises of varying duration and volume, resulting in a rich tapestry of acoustic, electronic and human sounds that unfolded against kaleidoscopic flashes from the umpteen devices in the dimly lighted plaza.

Asphalt Orchestra to record Pixies’ ‘Surfer Rosa’
February 14, 2014
By Mark Shanahan and Meredith Goldstein

Last month, Asphalt Orchestra, a 12-piece wind, brass, and percussion ensemble that aims to bring “ambitious processional music to the masses,” performed the Pixies’ 1988 LP “Surfer Rosa” at a club in New York. If, like us, you wish you had heard the group’s eclectic version — the chorus of saxophones, the scribble of piccolo, the thrashing, 3-piece percussion section — there’s good news. Asphalt Orchestra, which has opened for Pixies frontman Black Francis and his bandmates, is planning to record its take on the classic LP by the influential Boston band. And it has launched a Kickstarter campaign to cover the expense. The ensemble, which has estimated the cost of the project at $15,000, has raised $2,506 from 67 donors.

Not Your Ordinary Marching Band

A casual observer at Lincoln Center on Wednesday evening might have wondered what on earth was going on when a large, eclectic crowd made a frenzied dash across 65th Street, following a ragtag band of musicians who had reassembled across the road like deranged pied pipers.

The moblike scene occurred during a performance by the rambunctious Asphalt Orchestra, an avant-garde 12-piece marching band presented here by Lincoln Center Out of Doors.

This quirky ensemble, the brainchild of Bang on a Can, marches to an iconoclastic beat, eschewing typical brass-band fare for funky arrangements and inventive new works.

The event began in a comparatively sedate fashion, with the audience seated on the steps in front of Alice Tully Hall, as the ensemble entered from 65th Street and paraded up and down the triangular staircase in the corner of the plaza. The musicians stopped in front of the hall for their first work, “Carillon,” by Stewart and Heidi Roderwald. Listeners stayed seated despite the toe-tapping rhythms and ear-catching tunes.

At a few points the band shouted out the lyrics of the song title. There was an element of performance art throughout the approximately 30-minute show. The musicians played with virtuosic flair while twisting, turning and executing moves choreographed by Susan Marshall and Mark DeChiazza, no easy feat when dealing with complex metric shifts and carrying bulky percussion and brass instruments as large as a sousaphone.

The performance art aspect seemed particularly vivid during the premiere of Yoko Ono’s “Opus 81,” when the trumpeter Stephanie Richards, dressed in shorts and boots, stood alone in Lincoln Center Plaza’s reflecting pool playing a mournful solo. Her colleagues gathered at the edges of the pool, their insistent motifs underpinning Ms. Richards’s elegiac solo.

The action shifted to the grove of trees nearby for the premiere of “Two Ships,” by David Byrne and Annie Clark (who is known as St. Vincent), and Ms. Richards’s arrangement of the sultry “Wild About My Daddy,” by the Laneville-Johnson Union Brass Band. Some members of the large, appreciative crowd that followed the Asphalt players as they moved

Frank Zappa’s “Zomby Wood.” Patrons waiting for a Mostly Mozart concert to begin at Avery Fisher Hall leaned over the balcony to enjoy a vigorous rendition of the arrangement, with slapstick musical touches, rapidly shifting time signatures and wailing trumpet solos that echoed through the plaza.
Going to Lincoln Center to Find a Parade Ground

Asphalt Orchestra The tenor saxophonist Peter Hess, the trombonist Alan Ferber and their bandmates in the new David Rubenstein Atrium.

By ALLAN KOZINN
Published: January 8, 2010

Lincoln Center is determined to make the most of its newest space, the David Rubenstein Atrium — the former Harmony Atrium, on Broadway between 62nd and 63rd Streets — so it has packed it with attractions of all kinds, including free wireless Internet, a discount ticket booth, an information desk and a café.

It is also presenting Target Free Thursdays, a series of weekly free concerts, sponsored by Target. Most are pop, jazz and world music, with occasional glimpses of the experimental.

The Asphalt Orchestra, an idiosyncratic brass, woodwind and percussion ensemble that performed at the atrium on Thursday evening, embraces all those styles and more. Among the pieces in its set were arrangements (mostly its own) of songs by Bjork and the Swedish art-metal band Meshuggah; jazz by Charles Mingus; Afropop by Thomas Mapfumo; and a burst of avant-garde classicism by Conlon Nancarrow.

Asphalt is a new-music group disguised as a ragtag marching band. Its three percussionists play on elements of a miniature trap set, divided among them and slung around their necks, and the rest of the group — three saxophonists, pairs of trumpeters and trombonists, a sousaphonist and a piccolo player — play from miniature scores mounted as Rube Goldberg-like extensions of their clothing and instruments. Some wear
hints of what might once have been band uniforms, and most carry megaphones across their backs, for song announcements.

*The soprano saxophonist Alex Hamlin with the rest of the Asphalt Orchestra in the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center.*

The band rarely stands still, and the atrium, which stretches from Broadway to Amsterdam Avenue, is a perfect place for it. As the players filed in, playing Tyondai Braxton’s rhythmically sharp-edged “Pulse March,” they snaked through the audience, surrounded tables and moved toward the center of the atrium, sometimes in a line, sometimes in an amusingly chaotic wave.

By the end of the concert, they had hit nearly every corner of the space, with audience members following, scattering and regrouping as necessary: when you see a big guy with a sousaphone coming at you, you move pretty quickly.

The music sometimes seemed almost secondary to the party atmosphere, but people who came to listen found nuggets to admire. Frank Zappa’s quirkily harmonized “Zombie Woof” benefited from a hot, hard-driven performance, and the odd meters of Meshuggah’s “Electric Red” kept toe-tappers guessing. Nancarrow’s Study No. 20, in this group’s brassy timbres, could hardly have sounded more distant from the original, for player piano, but its point is rhythmic complexity, not coloration, and rhythm is this band’s strong suit.

But Asphalt was at its best in its finale, Goran Bregovic’s “Champagne,” a freewheeling, high-energy band score in which virtuosity, playfulness, compositional ingenuity and sheer visceral power mingle. It had both musicians and listeners dancing through the atrium.
Dirty Dozen. Culling members from acclaimed Eastern European-influenced bands such as Balkan Beat Box, Slavic Soul Party! and Red Baraat, Asphalt Orchestra are something of a modern brass-band supergroup. Toss in influences as disparate as Bjork and Charles Mingus, and you get what the New York Times dubbed “part parade spectacle, part half-time show and part cutting-edge contemporary music concert.” On Friday, June 1, the Asphalt Orchestra march through the FlynnSpace — perhaps literally — as part of the 2012 Burlington Discover Jazz Festival.
Keeping the Vision New for 25 Years

Can's composing, performing, commissioning and recording on the site, an outwardly that attests to the collective's popularity and its influence, which has been and lyricism: a portrait of cultural exchange always in flux.

The Asphalt Orchestra, Bang on a Can's avant-garde marching (and dancing) band, gave rau-

ccessous performances of a bright set of new arrangements of music by the Japanese drummer and composer Tatsuya Yoshida, who joined the group on drums for the dazzling final number, “Zwimbar-

rac Khafzavrap.”

Bang on a Can

This iconoclastic new-music collective is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Above, the chamber group Bang on a Can All-Stars performing “Field Recordings” on Saturday at Alice Tully Hall; the piece consists of segments by nine composers. Left, members of the collective's Asphalt Orchestra, its marching band: from left, Jessica Schmitz, Ken Thomson and Alex Harlin.
Bang on a Can's 25 years have been a story of unending metastasis: from a single marathon concert to a touring ensemble to a summer festival to a commissioning fund to a record label and beyond. "So what is Bang on a Can, exactly?" asked my concertgoing companion at the collective's 25th anniversary showcase on Saturday at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in Manhattan.

... The Asphalt Orchestra-- who call themselves an "avant-garde marching band," and there is no more accurate description-- charged out afterward. Spilling nerdy, joyful energy on all corners of the stage, they whirled through four pieces, the first an arrangement of Frank Zappa's "Zomby Woof" and the other three original works by Tatsuya Yoshida, composer and drummer for the post-rock band Ruins. I say "whirled," because they certainly didn't just "play": They jumped and mugged wildly, chased each other around like Keystone Kops. It was hugely infectious: It looked like gleeful insanity but was obviously as rigorously planned as a martial drill. All four pieces were clockmaker-intricate, but they felt like standing in the middle of a nine-person pillow fight.
Thanks to Bang on a Can, a noise-rock show sneaks in the back door of Alice Tully Hall tomorrow

April 27, 2012
By Seth Colter Walls

Contemporary classical listeners in New York tend to think they have heard all the progressive-composition sounds emanating from music scenes the world over, thanks to the Bang On A Can collective.

While the founding composers associated with the enterprise—Julia Wolfe, David Lang and Michael Gordon—are always the expected voices on a given program, various events put on under the Bang banner have often branched out beyond mere cliqueish, locally sourced programming. Aside from the New York veterans, you might expect to hear some folk music from Mongolia, or else some gamelan ensemble from Indonesia.

The stylistic diversity on offer at the yearly Bang On A Can marathon—which usually clocks in at between 12 and 24 hours of music performed in dozens of acts—is reliably one of the high points on the “new music” calendar. But this weekend a Bang event is doing something particularly audacious (and even more surprising than putting on Anthony Braxton’s piece for 100 tubas). On Saturday night, as part of a residency at Lincoln Center, the organization is sneaking a noise-rock concert into Alice Tully Hall—if one by another name.

Tatsuya Yoshida is the drummer of the long-running Japanese noise-rock duo Ruins. For three decades, his principal band has pounded its gospel of rhythmically complex, quasi-improvised thrash across the globe. (The duo collaborated memorably with British free-improvisational guitar hero Derek Bailey in the late 90s.) But it would take the Asphalt Orchestra—the Bang On A Can house “marching band”—to commission a suite of music by Yoshida to bring into Alice Tully Hall’s Starr Theater.
Thanks to a grant from the Japan Foundation, Yoshida will be there to add his drums to the 12-piece marching group this weekend—the first time the Asphalters have augmented their number to accommodate an outside musician. Titled “Zwimbarac Khafzavrappp”—Yoshida pieces tend to be a quizzical mouthful—the 12-minute piece may never be heard this way again, either.

According to group co-director and alto-saxophonist Ken Thomson, a recording won’t be on the cards along the margins of this world premiere. (The Asphalt-ers’ premiere disc for the Bang On A Can label was a memorable entry in 2009, with arrangements of Zappa, Mingus and other composers working in far-flung genres.) In an interview with Capital directly after the Asphalt Ensemble’s first rehearsal with Yoshida this week, Thomson said: “We asked him to send us a piece—which he has—which works with us alone, or with him playing drum set with us. Even yesterday he was experimenting with what he could do playing alongside us. What he’s doing is bringing out accents he’s hearing in the piece. … The piece we can definitely do on our own and we plan on doing it on our own. But this maybe the only time it’ll happen that he’s playing it with us.”

Arrangements of two other Ruins songs are also on the Saturday program at Lincoln Center. Asked how the two-instrument blast of the band could possibly be outfitted for an ensemble that has nine horns in addition to three percussionists, Thomson argued against a narrow reading of what goes into the music of Ruins.

“There’s more polyphony than you think,” he said. “Sometimes it’s a little bit buried. And at a lot of times there’s [some] dense harmonic material going on. Ruins are just a duo, so what they would do is use a harmonizer on the bass [for looping material]. What we’re talking about, in arranging, is taking that looped material and playing it on top … and soon you get close to the nine horns we have.” Adding that Yoshida’s music is “is pretty technically demanding” overall, Thomson said the first rehearsal was especially challenging for the group’s brass players, all of whom “are playing nonstop.”

“There’s moments of total noise in there, but there’s a lot of stuff that’s not just noise. There’s a lot of tunes, a lot of melody—and sometimes I think that can be obscured by the way Ruins play the stuff. With brass and winds, you hear some of that melody in a different way.”

Though the Yoshida mini-set is clearly the rare delicacy on Saturday’s menu, it’s hardly the only enticing thing being offered up. A new multi-composer suite called “Field Recordings”—in which, yes, each composer’s section incorporates recordings made out “in the field”—features contributions from art-world phenom Christian Marclay and Tyondai Braxton, formerly of the math-rock band Battles. On any other evening in New York, their joint participation in a Bang On A Can concert would count as the unusual sparkle. (Bang founders Wolfe, Lang and Gordon all contribute music to “Field Recordings,” as well.) But Yoshida’s debut as a suite composer and arranger of his own personal brand of noise sounds is hard to beat as this weekend’s must-hear attraction for the omnivorous listener.

Street musicians
THE ASPHALT ORCHESTRA MARCHES INTO CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
YOUR GUIDE TO HAVING FUN THIS WEEK — APRIL 5-11, 2012
Marching in

I like to envision Professor Harold Hill taking his marching band scam to New Orleans — where he would promptly be run over by the Rebirth Brass Band, who’d grind him to paste underfoot while they roared through “What Goes Around Comes Around.”


With an amalgam of wildly arranged rock, classical and jazz music, the 12-piece outfit of brass and percussion monsters add dazzling choreography — and you’ll never laugh at what you perceive as high school dweeb on the field during a football halftime again.

— Rick Koster

Asphalt Orchestra,
8 tonight, Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Ave, New London; $20, $18 seniors, faculty and staff, $10 students; (860) 439-2787, conncoll.edu.
Laura Pels. (212-719-1300.)

**ART**

**ALL-AMERICAN**

Jan. 16

The Metropolitan Museum opens the third and final phase of its American Wing renovation, unveiling twenty-five refurbished galleries. The centerpiece of the new installation is Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze’s 1851 painting “Washington Crossing the Delaware.” (212-535-7710.)

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**

**ON NATIVE GROUNDS**

Jan. 20–22

Music will also play a role in the reopening of the Met’s American Wing: the museum is offering a mini-festival that features performances by the Asphalt Orchestra (leading a march through the halls of the museum)

and Thomas Hampson (singing songs by Copland, Barber, Ives, and others). (metmuseum.org.)
Inaugurate the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s recently renovated American Wing in a quintessentially stateside way. A 21-member marching band, Asphalt Orchestra, offers a modern twist on the usual Sousa-laden fare, playing arrangements of works by Stew and Heidi Rodewald, and Frank Zappa (1000 Fifth Ave at 82nd St; 212-535-7710, metmuseum.org; 4, 6, 8pm; suggested donation $12-$25).
A rousing opening
Asphalt Orchestra highlights Ringling International Arts Festival kickoff

Asphalt Orchestra performs in the courtyard of the Ringling Museum of Art on Tuesday evening during the opening night celebration of the Ringling International Arts Festival.

By WADE TATANGELO
wtatangelo@bradenton.com

SARASOTA — The third annual Ringling International Arts Festival launched with a sumptuous bash animated by an action-packed performance Tuesday.

Festival organizers, the Ringling Museum of Art and the Baryshnikov Arts Center, are presenting eight stage productions during the event that runs through Sunday.

The Soviet-born dance and choreography hero won’t perform this year, but Mikhail Baryshnikov still played integral role in this year’s planning and made an appearance Tuesday.

“It’s like riding a bicycle, here we are again,” he said with a smile.

If you go
What: Ringling International Arts Festival
When: through Oct. 16
Where: Ringling Center for the Arts, 5555 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota
Tickets: $20-$150 Information: (941) 360-7399 or www.ringlingartsfestival.org

Asphalt Orchestra headlined the opening night “block party” held in the Ringling Museum Courtyard.

The 12-piece marching ensemble takes the sounds of the second line bands of New Orleans, as well as the Balkan brass bands, and adds its own avant-garde touch. Its members include some of the finest rock, jazz and classical players in New York City.

The orchestra’s eclectic set list included songs composed specifically for it by David Byrne and St. Vincent ("Two Ships"), as well as one by Yoko Ono ("Opus 81."). The band performed twice, entering from different locations each time and snaking through and often surpris-
International Arts Festival kick off at Ringling Museum

Last Update: 10/11/2011 11:59 pm

SARASOTA - Lights, cameras, and plenty of action...the Ringling International Arts Festival is officially underway.

Over 600 spectators gathered at Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art for the 3rd annual event Tuesday evening. Those visitors got to experience dance, theater, visual arts and music -- including the sounds and sights of the Asphalt Orchestra, a 12-piece marching band from New York City.

Organizers say the festival marks the official kickoff of the cultural season on the Suncoast. “This is what this festival is all about; it’s bringing people together to enjoy and celebrate the arts, and to experience the arts, and the different artistic impressions that we have here during the festival week,” said Ringling’s Scott Gardiner.

The festival runs through Sunday. Tickets are $20 per person, and can be purchased either online or at the festival.

Copyright 2011 Southern Broadcast Corp of Sarasota All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.
Across Congress Street, David Bruenjes said he was doing OK financially on Friday, taking a break from protesting with the Occupy Maine group in Monument Square to juggle three torches for spare change and dollar bills.

Bruenjes, who insists that he hasn’t gotten burned by the torches, works the First Friday Art Walks and entertains visitors who come to Portland by cruise ship. While the money keeps a tent over his head – he’s in the group of protesters who are sleeping in Lincoln Park – he said the entertaining is secondary to the protesting.

“If you are absolutely happy with the way that Washington is representing us, with companies running America, you don’t need to come” to the protest, he said.

Nearby, Jo Coyne, 67, was enjoying the musical entertainment that Occupy Maine had brought in – the Portland-based band Butcher Boy – even if she clearly wasn’t in the prime demographic for the neo-punk group.

Coyne said her partner, Linwood Ashton, has helped her appreciate a wide range of music, although they were really waiting for the Asphalt Orchestra to hit the street.

A few minutes later, Butcher Boy packed up as the Asphalt Orchestra approached.

Patrick O’Connor, one of Occupy Maine’s organizers, said members of the Asphalt Orchestra assured him they were in solidarity with the protest, but when the band headed out of Monument Square and back up Congress Street, it took a lot of the crowd with it.

Occupy Maine went on with its daily “general assembly” anyway, with updates on new groups offering support and an appeal from O’Connor for anyone with the ability to deal with Internet issues to help correct glitches that were hurting the live streaming of events in Monument Square.

The protesters tied into the First Friday Art Walk by visiting gallery owners and asking them to leave out fliers declaring, “We are the 99%,” the occupiers’ rallying cry that the country’s richest 1 percent are profiting at the expense of everyone else.

They found mostly sympathetic ears. Virginia Rose set the fliers out at the entrance to her gallery, Rose Contemporary.

Rose said she “absolutely” agrees that the groups that are rallying across the country are right to protest when most people are struggling day to day while Wall Street executives pull down millions in bonuses.

Up the street, Dennis Gleason at Gleason Fine Art also agreed to let protesters leave fliers. He said he is also “generally sympathetic” to the protesters.

“I understand their frustration,” he said, noting that the protest evoked some nostalgia.

“I came of age in the late 60s,” he said.

Staff Writer Edward Murphy can be contacted at 799-6465 or at emurphy@pressherald.com.
New York’s Asphalt Orchestra to take to streets at Chamberfest July 30-31

July 29, 2011. 12:15 pm • Section: Arts

(Asphalt Orchestra. Photo by Stephanie Berger)

They call themselves the Asphalt Orchestra, presumably because asphalt is where they spend a lot of their time.

The 12-piece New York City band performs music ranging from Frank Zappa and Bjork to contemporary classical music and jazz, and the group likes to pop up in city spaces with no advance notice, to bring music to people in the streets and break down the barrier that can sometimes be felt between performer and audience. The musicians not only
march, they dance, in elaborate choreography. I've watched some YouTube videos showing the group in action in New York City, and what they do looks like a lot of fun — the kind of thing that helps bring some soul and spirit to the locales where they perform.

If you're in the ByWard Market or Rideau Canal areas on the weekend of July 30 and 31, you might come across the band, which is making its Canadian debut as part of the 2011 Ottawa Chamber Music Festival.

The band doesn't like to widely announce their performances in advance, but for those who'd like to be part of the experience, the chamber festival says it will discreetly post the locations and times of the performances on the festival's Facebook page on the mornings of July 30 and 31. If you want to be there, try to keep the impending performance to yourself. Part of what makes it fun is the look of surprise on onlookers' faces. (At the bottom of this post I've included a YouTube video that shows the band in action and includes some comments from the musicians about what they do)
13 Hours of Sounds and Psychedelia
By Vivien Schweitzer
June 24, 2011

Bang on a Can Marathon The Asphalt Orchestra marching band performing at the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center on Sunday.

Listeners at the Winter Garden of the World Financial Center had to jump out of the way as the Asphalt Orchestra, a brainchild of Bang on a Can, snaked its way through the large crowd at the annual Bang on a Can Marathon on Sunday. The orchestra, an ebullient, avant-garde marching band that blends performance art with inventive new works and funky arrangements, offered a version of Frank Zappa’s “Zomby Woof” by Peter Hess (the group’s tenor saxophonist); an arrangement of Bjork’s “Hyper-Ballad” by Alan Ferber; and Goran Bregovic’s exuberant “Champagne.”

The Asphalt ensemble’s freewheeling aesthetic sums up Bang on a Can’s genre-bending 21st-century ethos, represented on Sunday by an eclectic smorgasbord of performances that 5,000 people took in, in whole or in part.
Bang on a Can Marathon initial 2011 lineup announced, Summer Festival at MASS MoCA too
April 20, 2011

Asphalt Orchestra outside Lincoln Center in 2010

By Benjamin Lozovsky

Sunday June 19
Bang on a Can Marathon
Presented by Bang on A Can and Arts World Financial Center

Bang on a Can returns with its incomparable 12-hour super-mix of genre-defying music featuring over 150 astounding musicians and composers from throughout the world. Highlights include Philip Glass performing live with the Bang on A Can All-Stars; music by Bryce Dessner of The National; sonic downtown legend Glenn Branca; the outerplanetary Sun Ra Arkestra; the Asphalt Orchestra playing music by David Byrne/Annie Clark, Yoko Ono, and Frank Zappa; the intrepid Signal in a blistering string orchestra work by Julia Wolfe plus New York premieres by Richard Ayers, Fausto Romitelli, Poul Ruders, Toby Twining and much more! 12pm-12am. World Financial Center Winter Garden, 220 Vesey Street.
Music Review | Bang on a Can Marathon

A Music Marathon

Bang on a Can comes to Philly with 10 hours of uninterrupted live music from all over the globe.

By Elliott Sharp

On Sept. 12, in the midst of the hyperspeed pace of modern life, Bang on a Can (BOAC) asks Philadelphia for the first time to join them for 10 hours of a broad range of live music, including pieces by Steve Reich, Björk, Charles Mingus, Thurston Moore, Frank Zappa, Matmos and a wide selection of composers of new music, at the Philly Fringe.
The brassy pied pipers of the Asphalt Orchestra wooing the crowd as part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival.

A Few Trombones Short, But Enthusiasm to Spare
A Few Trombones Short, But Enthusiasm to Spare

After the debut of the Asphalt Orchestra at Lincoln Center on Wednesday, one thing was clear: marching bands have come a long way since the days of "Seventy-Six Trombones." An iconoclastic 12-piece marching band, the Asphalt Orchestra was the brainchild of Bang on a Can, the collective of composers and performers devoted to boundary-blurring new music. Despite the threat of rain on a muggy night, the courtyard outside the renovated Alice Tully Hall was packed with people, including lots of families with small children, for the free event.

Part parade spectacle, part halftime show and part cutting-edge contemporary-music concert, the performance, presented by Lincoln Center Out of Doors, began in the sunken area before the entrance to Tully Hall. From there, the 12 top-notch brass and percussion players in the band, like a posse of pied pipers, led the throng across West 65th Street to the new grove of trees in front of the Lincoln Center Theater, then across Lincoln Center Plaza to the central fountain, which is under reconstruction, and finally to the area in front of the Metropolitan Opera.

The music was an exhilarating half-hour of gritty, wailing or perky pieces, everything from Balkan brass music to an earthy work by the jazz giant Charles Mingus. The playing was coolly brilliant and infectious. And what a scene!

As crowds sat on the steps outside Tully Hall, the band marched in from around the corner playing "Cartoon," a commissioned work by Heidi Rodewald and Stew, who wrote the musical "Passing Strange" and perform in the rock band the Negro Problem. As the band marched, the players executed nimble moves choreographed by Susan Marshall, no less, a recipient of a MacArthur Foundation fellowship.

At one point the band lined up facing the glass wall of a65, the new cafe in Tully Hall, and started aggressively playing an arrangement of "Electric Red" by the Swedish metal band Meshuggah. Some diners inside looked delighted and took pictures; others ignored the players; many seemed confused, understandably, wondering whether they were being entertained or mucked a bit for not joining the fun outside.

Concert audiences are so conditioned to standing back and giving musicians room that it took a while for people here to realize that they were being invited to come close and join in. The bravest listeners were some children who moved close to the music and danced. Eventually, as the players began the flirt and arresting Mingus piece, they formed a buttoning run through the crowd and led everyone across 65th Street.

A 12-piece marching band that loves a parade.

A few police officers controlled the traffic, but for the most part people made their own way to the main plaza.

The band finished the Mingus number beneath the trees near the theater, then switched to "Pulse March," a new commission by Tyondai Braxton of the band Battles. "Pulse March" achieves propulsive energy through subtle, cyclic rhythmic riffs. The final offering, "Champagne," another commission, was a rescue raw piece by the Sarajevo-born composer Goran Bregovic.

The terrific players seemed elated by the participatory response and cheers of the crowd. It was especially fun to watch the percussionists—Yuri Yamashita, Sunny Jain and Nick Jenkins—vielding their assemblages of strapped-on drums with cymbals attached. Jose Davila was impressive in his ability to shimmer and twist while playing a cumbancha.

When the performance ended, people would not stop applauding and waving. The Asphalt Orchestra probably could have led everyone down Broadway to Jazz at Lincoln Center and beyond.
Can a Marching Band Pull Off Bjork?

Now that’s heavy. On their debut CD, Asphalt Orchestra plays Mingus and Zappa. Even more surprising: they play them very well.

By Seth Colter Walls

There are an awful lot of weird crossover “classical” records vying for attention out there. Often the concept behind each one is something along the counterintuitive lines of “we made something not very heavy metal into something resembling heavy metal.” The idea is to call attention to yourself for having done something so supposedly wild. Almost always, though, the resulting product makes you wish the cynical artists behind it hadn’t bothered. So in those rare moments when you encounter musicians who actually put some thought into the process of making unlikely musical components work together, it’s more than a revelation: it’s a damned relief.

Last summer, the 12 members of Asphalt Orchestra—a marching band of highly skilled musicians from the jazz and classical worlds—started stomping and oompahing up a reputation not just for playing tunes by Frank Zappa and Charles Mingus in public, but also for daring to make their musical alchemy seem natural. If you look at the composers listed on the back of their first, self-titled CD, out now from Cantaloupe records, you might think it all seems a little precious. Can a chamber-size marching band really pull off Bjork’s “Hyper-ballad” and a new tune composed by
Broadway sensation Stew (Passing Strange)—not to mention something by a Swedish metal band named Meshuggah?

After so many years of hey-ma-look-at-my-crossover, such suspicion is warranted. But Asphalt’s new recording turns out to be as pleasingly unified as its source material is eclectic. The answer to the question “why does ‘Zomby Woof’ need a marching-band arrangement?” is answered in the sly moments when the group introduces some New Orleans-ish touches that probably have Zappa dancing in his grave. And the contrapuntal complexity of modern “math rock” also finds a pleasing analogue in the streetwise history of the marching band, when Tyondai Braxton (until recently a member of the indie band Battles) turns in a piece for the Asphalters called “Pulse March.”

When the Asphalt Orchestra plays this music in public, usually in the environs of Lincoln Center (which, along with the Bang on a Can collective, sponsors the group), it becomes natural for mobs of ecstatic listeners—many of them accidental ones—to dance with the musicians around the plaza. It’s not a stretch at all to say the complex music of Conlon Nancarrow has never had a better public advocate than these Asphalt players, since their best performances wind up being a dreamy, best-of-all-possible-worlds combination of the intellectual, the hip, and the catchy.

Only one track on the new record ventures somewhat beyond the group’s grasp. Most of Charles Mingus’s songs are taxing for musicians to play, though “The Shoes of the Fisherman’s Wife Are Some Jive-Ass Slippers” has to be one of his most complex. No one in the Asphalt Orchestra actually fails to play well, though the group overall sounds just a touch too thin to bring the middle section of the piece across. (If you don’t have double bass or piano in an arrangement of a Mingus piece, you’re probably missing some crucial sonic information.) But this is a relatively small complaint, given the overall depth of feeling that comes across in the group’s playing.

Earlier this month, the band hit New York’s streets again, as part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors summer festival. The ensemble’s updated repertoire included a new tune written specially for them by David Byrne and St. Vincent, as well as another commission from Yoko Ono. It’s unusual to be praying for a follow-up release so soon after a debut album, but that’s exactly the kind of enthusiasm the Asphalt Orchestra inspires. The sousaphone hasn’t had it this good in ages.

One recent morning, in the Stanley H. Kaplan penthouse on the Lincoln Center campus, a dozen of the city's sharpest contemporary musicians were doing their best to play like weary old men of the 1950s. The piece, taken from a 1956 field recording by the Laneville Johnson Union Brass Band, seems to limp and stumble on the scratchy original—which has been painstakingly transcribed and arranged. Watching the members of the Asphalt Orchestra work to capture its antique spirit is to marvel at the extremes of virtuosity. It sounds like a Mardi Gras for zombies.

"I was pretty nervous about it," said Ken Thomson, a saxophonist and co-director of this conceptually maverick marching band, which next week will kick off its second season as the house band for the Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival. "Are we just going to sound terrible and nobody's going to get it?"

The music, which was used by choreographer Paul Taylor for his 1956 "3 Epitaphs," will get its first live performance Thursday in the Damrosch Park Bandshell as part of the festival's celebration Mr. Taylor's 80th birthday. Oddly enough, it's the only piece in Asphalt's repertoire that has anything to do with brass-band tradition. Since making its debut last summer, the group has built its buzz on boisterous public displays and audacious arrangements of tunes by composers never heard during halftime shows—like Bjork, Frank Zappa, Conlon Nancarrow and the Swedish metal band Meshuggah.

The music for "Three Epitaphs," though, is proving to be a unique challenge.

"It's totally outrageous," Mr. Thomson continued, as trumpeters and percussionists gave their lips and shoulders a rest during a rehearsal break. "It's another way to push the band into this land of playing everything wrong and sharp. It's this new, different, gritty sound. When we do Bjork (the group covers her "Hyperballad"), things have to be tuned perfectly. It's really beautiful stuff. Now we have to figure out 'How can we get that further out of tune? How can we make that nastier?' It's almost going backwards."

Such aesthetic drama is what makes the Asphalt Orchestra so thrilling to encounter. The band, which was conceived and recruited by the contemporary music organization Bang on a Can, draws its players from every cultural pocket, and likewise its repertoire. A self-titled debut album, out Aug. 3 on Cantaloupe Records, surveys the mad eclecticism of the orchestra's half-hour marching performances. Next week's Lincoln Center dates will offer premieres of new pieces commissioned from Yoko Ono, David Byrne and
Annie Clark (aka St. Vincent), Tyondai Braxton (Battles) and "Passing Strange" collaborators Stew and Heidi Rodewald.

During the orchestra's rehearsal, Bill Bragin, the energetic director of Lincoln Center Out of Doors, had been standing in a corner of the room, observing with an impish gleam. The orchestra can get away with playing almost anything, he explained, because a marching band is kind of a universal American experience. Everyone loves a parade. "It really disarms people who couldn't deal with this music in another form," he said.

The band's kaleidoscopic range of influences allows it to adapt to all kinds of programming. "There's a phenomenon happening with brass bands from all over the world," Mr. Bragin said, looking forward to a possible encounter between Asphalt and New Orleans' Soul Rebels Brass Band on Aug. 8.

Mr. Bragin also offered praise for the orchestra's fearless engagement of audiences, which often can be taken by surprise as the musicians roar across the institution's sprawling campus.

"There's a lot of crowd interaction," said Jessica Schmitz, a piccolo player who co-directs the orchestra with Mr. Thomson. "That's one thing we play up when we go outside. Especially in New York. People are aggressive here. You have to get in their face and they'll get in your face. It's a lot of fun to mess with people … in a nice way."

Ms. Clark also was present at the practice session, tinkering with audio files on her laptop as the brass players worked on tightly layered melodies that shifted back and forth in upper registers—a medieval technique called hocketing. The musicians were steadily fleshing out parts that the singer-songwriter had put together with Mr. Byrne. In a way, she admitted, working with the orchestra was like returning to a teenage enthusiasm.

"I grew up in Texas, and my high school had a million-dollar football stadium," she said. "And the bigger the football team, the bigger the marching band. It's exhilarating."

http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052748703999304575399392099631292.htm
When the willowy flutist Jessica Schmitz was playing the piccolo in her junior high–school marching band, she did not especially connect the experience with the Swedish metal band Meshuggah. Nor did Björk or Frank Zappa come into it much. But Schmitz is now one of those intrepid entrepreneurial players who keep New York’s musical life in ferment, and Asphalt Orchestra, the new, deliberately crazy-sounding group she has co-founded, performs all of the above—and then some.

The twelve-member street band makes its debut August 5 through 9, somewhere at Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors—to find it, follow the strains of wild brass. Though the roving ensemble is rich in saxophones, trombones, and over-the-shoulder drums, it doesn’t so much evoke the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade as it does those old circus bands that wheezed and cavorted through the streets. But this is no amateur horn-blowing society. Asphalt Orchestra’s antics will be directed by choreographer Susan Marshall, its big-hatted getups are designed by Elizabeth Clancy, and its repertoire is one of stinging virtuosity and strangeness. You might think that Meshuggah’s epileptic guitar chords and throat-scouring vocals don’t lend themselves to transcription for brass band. But try it, and you may never want to hear Nordic death-metal any other way.

One piece on the set list is by the reclusive composer Conlon Nancarrow, who, in the 1940s, holed up in Mexico City with a player piano and declared his music too rhythmically intricate for any human hands. A cohort of hotshots has been assiduously proving him wrong by transcribing his studies in impossibility for instrumental ensemble. During rehearsals in early July, Asphalt Orchestra tackled “Study No. 20,” winding the cross-rhythms so tight that the group could eventually relax again and make the piece sound more fluid—more human—than any piano-playing machine.

The ensemble was born of a grant proposal. The relentlessly inventive organization Bang on a Can spotted their pitch while making a request to the Rockefeller Foundation, and slapped together a vague idea for an avant-garde street band. “Unfortunately, they got the grant, so they called me and said Help!”
said alto-saxophonist Ken Thomson. Thomson sent up an S.O.S. to Schmitz, a band mate in the fledgling new-music ensemble Signal, and together they recruited ten more musicians of varied backgrounds who, they intuited, would find a way to fuse.

“We were looking for people who have multiple strong backgrounds and aren’t afraid to move around—who are physically confident, can really play written music, can improvise, and will go nuts when they need to,” Thomson said. The roster includes jazz drummer and Indian dhol virtuoso Sunny Jain; the Japanese-born classical percussionist Yuri Yamashita (who sings bossa nova on the side); and Alex Hamlin, who plays pretty much any instrument you can blow into. It’s hard to imagine this ensemble forming almost anywhere else, but it’s easy to envision it popping up in other parts of town, blaring its way through Prospect Park, parading along the High Line, or adding to the jovial clangor of the freshly pedestrianized Times Square.

http://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/classical/features/58282/
At 30th Street Station, the New York City-based Asphalt Orchestra turned commuters' heads at lunchtime with its hard-to-ignore rendition of Frank Zappa's "Zomby Woof."

Not your mother's marching band
Get ready to hear Asphalt Orchestra when you least expect it.

By David Patrick Stearns
INQUIRER MUSIC CRITIC

Was it music? Was it intentional? Accidental?
Those were the questions from passengers lined up for Track 7 at lunchtime yesterday at 30th Street Station when New York City's Asphalt Orchestra launched a guerrilla-style debut in Philadelphia.
Cameras were fished out of bags. Eyes squinted toward the area between the Quik-Trak machines and the men's washroom as the intricacies of Frank Zappa's nervy and intense "Zomby Woof" bounced around the station's ultra-live acoustic.
"It's good, but, my God, it's overpowering," said one retirement-age woman from Connecticut (who asked not to be named) of the 12-piece new-music ensemble with distant roots in John Philip Sousa.
"My grandson plays trumpet, and if I ever catch him doing something like this, I'll wring his neck," said Dee from Langhorne
See ASPHALT on A6
Asphalt Orchestra
storms the station

Asphalt (from A|I — who didn't want her last name used — while boarding Amtrak's 12:42 p.m. train to Pittsburgh.

Philadelphia music professionals were tipped off to the performance via e-mail blasts. Scouts from the Mum­mers and the Kimmel Center showed up. Because the show was choreographed by the MacArthur fellow Susan Mar­shall, Dance USA director Lois Well dropped everything and dashed to the train station, pronouncing the event "celebratory."

Drexel University's music program director Mike Moss, zeroed in on the Balkan-fla­vor ed Goran Bregovic work Champagne, as something for one of his wind ensembles. Composer Kile Smith’s reaction was one word — "Fun!" — though he heard one passer­by mumble a different single­word evaluation: "Stupid."

"Accidental audiences" — the word often used for those encountering high art in un­likely public places — often have see­no­evil, hear­no­evil reactions. If it can't be under­stood immediately, it doesn't exist. Those emerging from the train station elevator simply navigated past the musicians as if nothing were unusual.

Best to get used to the Asphalt Orchestra. The musicians aim to pop up most any place but conventional con­cert halls.

At the group's first performance, on Wednesday, it springing from a subway en­trance as part of Lincoln Center's Out of Doors Festival, which presents the Asphalt­ians through Aug. 23 in repere­toire, including newly commissioned music as well as transcriptions of Růrky's Hyperbald and Charles Mingus' The Shoes of the Fisherman's Wife Are Some Jive Ass Slippers.

Friday's Philadelphia per­formance grew out of Lincoln Center's partnership with Am­trak; the idea was to show up at 30th Street Station at lunch­time for an hour or so. The orchestra's plans extend into 2010.

The idea grew out of Bang on a Can, the cutting-edge New York City collective of composers and musicians, founded by the composers David Lang, Michael Gordon, and the Philadelphia­born Julia Wolfe (whose mother drove in from Blue Bell to hear the band yesterday).

The group's notoriety stems from outlandish, improbable works for lineups such as 200 guitars or 100 tubas. A piece with the latter instrumentation prompted discussions of an avant-garde marching band. Rehearsal began in April.

The co­directors represent the project's yin and yang: Tall, blond Joseph Schmitz, 28, plays piccolo and has reason­ably fond memories of playing in high school bands in the suburbs of Chicago, while the intense saxophonist Ken Thomson, 33, was the American Legion band’s youngest member in Westchester County, N.Y., and recalls "terrible sound, ter­rible music, and people with whom I didn't feel kinship."

That's why Asphalt Orchestra seems to simultaneously embrace and flee from the great American marching band tradition.

The 12­piece group, whose instrumentation includes saxes, saxophone and two percussion­ists, has uniforms that aren't uniform. As designed by Elizabeth Hope Clancy (of the Broadway show Passing Strange), parts often show bare legs and shoulders often have military­style epaulets. Shoes range from sneakers to Doc Martens.

"You're taking what's the most populist musical form, the marching band ... and sort of ripping it apart with music by iconoclastic compose­rs that represent a sense of adventure ... and playfulness," said Bill Bragin, the Lincoln Center Out of Doors artistic director.

Possibilities are dizzying, such as Wolfe's new site­speci­fic piece for Bordeaux, France, that was to have band members in individual open­air bicycle taxis converging from various parts of the city, into a group of 190 student­age bell­ring­ers. The dates, however, didn't work out for the Asphalt­i­ans.

Thomson believes the future lies in art installations and indie movies, though at the Philadelphia show, one Mummers scout (who wished to remain anony­mous) exclaimed, "We can use you!"

Contact music critic David Pat­rick Stearns at dstearns@phillynews.com.
TAKING TO THE STREETS WITH THE ASPHALT ORCHESTRA

They're loud, sweaty and tend to prefer funk rhythms, long riffs in one key and Slavic sounds. I've seen street bands, but never one as good as the Asphalt Orchestra.

At a series of recent outdoor concerts at the construction-revaged (and Mozart-soaked) Lincoln Centre piazza, 12 wind and percussion musicians in boots and Converse sneakers played music to enormous and blissful crowds. They performed ferocious and thrilling half-hour sets, only to disappear as quickly as they came.

August 5th marked their first outing and the start of Lincoln Centre's Out of Doors festival. I arrived early at the north plaza for what I presumed would be the best view of the band. Yet just before the sun disappeared behind the skyline, the Asphalt Orchestra burst forth unexpectedly from the 66th street subway station like a bunch of buzzing, angry locusts. They moved wind-up-toy fast, banging out spooky polyrhythms and dissonant woodwind peals. I was stuck behind a throng, hearing but not seeing the cacophany blowing through the crowd. Finally I was able to push through with some gentle elbowing.

The ensemble is a commission of Bang on a Can, a New York musical organisation that provides the spark and capital to make new music accessible. Founded in 1987, Bang on a Can is only now venturing into the world of street bands, a domain that plainly harmonises with the organisation's mission.

Most of the members of the Asphalt Orchestra are graduates of a major music conservatory. This was not surprising; their enthusiastic five-piece programme was technically demanding. We heard skillful arrangements of Frank Zappa and Bjork (whose "Hyper-Ballad" was like a marching band version of the sunrise in Copland's "Appalachian Spring"); Charles Mingus also occasionally appears on their set list.

My favorite was serenely beautiful and almost completely inaccessible: "Study No. 20" by Conlon Nancarrow, choreographed as a slow gathering of instruments, each honking without tonality or rhythm. I was told the piece was specifically intended to be unperformable, and yet the group didn't lose one audience member. Many were swinging and clapping, smiling or simply open-jawed. We all wanted more.
August 5 – August 12, 2009

Critics’ picks

Brooklyn Rider

Asphalt Orchestra
Thu 6–Sun 9
Bang on a Can’s bold new street band hits the Lincoln Center pavement with a gaggle of new tunes.

Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival
Thu 6, Sun 9, Tue 11; see Coda
Real Quiet, Jeremy Denk and Brooklyn Rider provide incentives to ditch the city and head east.

Bard SummerScape
Fri 7, Sun 9; see Coda
You’ve got one last chance to see Les Huguenots staged.... Make it a weekend and stick around for Paulus.

Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra
Fri 7, Sat 8
Stefan Vlador makes his Mostly Mozart debut with Haydn—and don’t miss his after-hours recital on Saturday night.

Maverick Concerts
Sat 8, Sun 9; see Coda
Go into the woods for rustic sounds from Maria Bachmann, Wendy Sutter, Andrew Armstrong and Katinka Kleijn.
**FREE Asphalt Orchestra**

*Broadway Plaza (at Lincoln Center), Upper West Side. 7pm.* As part of the Lincoln Center Out of Doors season, the always-inventive composer cabal Bang on a Can takes it to the streets with its marching band, which comes equipped with a stack of fresh compositions by Yoko Ono and David Byrne—Annie Clark (St. Vincent). New York, sometimes you spoil us. (Try to snag a copy of the band’s eponymous debut CD, newly released on Cantaloupe.)
New York’s various punk-inflected marching bands and steampunk street crews have brought out the inner band geek in tons of local flute-tooters and glock-rockers. But the profoundly manic Asphalt Orchestra asks: “What if everyone was sitting first chair?” The maddeningly talented 12 piece group--barely a year old--brings together odd meters, virtuosic playing, and general tech-dorkery under the vibrant, visceral auspices of totally fun street performance. Created by the tireless tweakers in Bang On A Can, Asphalt Orchestra is wild, choppy, disorienting fun, making unlikely party jams out of prog-rock abandon. Their self-titled debut (out this month via Cantaloupe) attempts covers of Frank Zappa, Björk, frenetic Balkan jazzor Goran Bregovic, tech-metal kings Meshuggah, and NYC’s own Tyondai Braxton of Battles--eight rallying anthems all ready to soundtrack a game of 43 Man Squamish. Their version of Zappa’s “Zomby Woof” nails all his tricky nonsense and jazz-fusion insanity with the added bonus of some slapstick honking and wild trumpet solos.

Download: Asphalt Orchestra, “Zomby Woof”
Q&A with Asphalt Orchestra
Tell me about your decision to cover “Zomby Woof.”

Ken Thomson: Zappa was one of the first composers on our list when we decided to form Asphalt. I believe his music truly achieves what we’re trying to do here—combining the sounds of many genres and cultures into a personal synthesis that rings honest and vibrant.

Jessica Schmitz: One of our band members, Peter Hess, suggested we cover the song. The goal was to find a Zappa piece that wasn’t so out there that no one would know it, but not one that’s too prevalent in the Zappa canon. He chose perfectly!

What is your favorite part in this song?

Schmitz: Towards the end when the low brass come in with what I think of as the ‘big bad wolf’ section—that comedic reference cracks me up every time.

Thomson: The awesome thing is that the band really rocked the tune from the beginning. It was one of the first things we played together and it made it really clear that this project was going to work. And even though it’s complicated and all-over-the-place, with new time signatures every other bar, Zappa now I think feels like “home” to all of us. It’s just fun.

How do you march in odd time signatures?

Thomson: Well, the quick answer is that we don’t march. I see us more in the flash-mob style of street band.

Schmitz: Our choreography is based on both abstract and thematic artistic concepts. Susan Marshall and Mark DeChiazza choreograph the band, and they’re really fantastic in developing movement that complements the rhythmically complicated music we play.

Where and how do you guys rehearse? Is there a challenge in getting rehearsal space/time for a 12 piece band?

Thomson: We rehearse wherever and whenever we can. We’ve rehearsed everywhere from Prospect Park to temporarily empty penthouses at Lincoln Center.

Schmitz: Our first choice is always at Lincoln Center because of the beautiful facilities, but we rehearse wherever there is room. Our rehearsals are usually divided up into “music” and “choreography” sections. We’ll usually spend mornings focusing on just playing the music then in the afternoon focus on the movement.

Has anyone a suggested a piece that was too out-there to play?

Schmitz: The most exciting thing to me about Asphalt is that there isn’t really a “too out-there” My approach is the weirder the better! We’ve certainly tossed around a lot of musical ideas that haven’t happened as of yet, but that has more to do with the band being just a year old—only so many hours in the day.

Thomson: Jury’s still out on whether my Conlon Nancarrow arrangement was a failure.

What’s the most memorable show you’ve ever played in New York—in any band?

Schmitz: Gotta say it was probably playing flute with Ensemble de Sade—the new music group brought to us by Matt Marks and Melissa Hughes that’s based on themes of sadomasochism. Putting it right out there: Last year we did a concert that required me to dress up like a 19th century prostitute. That was certainly a memorable experience.

What’s your favorite place to eat in New York?

Thomson: I’ve been spending the past few years exploring my neighborhood, Sunset Park. I don’t have a favorite, but between Matamoros and Pacificana and Kai Feng Fu Dumpling House and Ba Xuyen Vietnamese sandwiches... Let’s say I don’t feel the need for a favorite!

Schmitz: My brother and sister-in-law’s kitchen! My sister-in-law is from Parma, Italy, and is an amazing cook. And the best thing is we live across the street from each other!

Asphalt Orchestra are playing the Lincoln Center Out Of Doors Festival from Wednesday through Sunday. They’re at Broadway Plaza on August 4; Hearst Plaza on August 5; Josie Robertson Plaza on August 6; Hearst Plaza on August 7 and Broadway Plaza on August 8. Go to Lincoln Center for more information.
David Byrne & Annie Clark are collaborating on music for a future Housing Works benefit. There's no date set for that, but Asphalt Orchestra will be debuting a version of one of the songs they've been working on...

A few months ago we had [Here Lies Love arranger] Tony Finno arrange the horns, and we performed one of the songs -- tentatively titled "Who" -- at the end of Annie's show at the Rose Room at Lincoln Center. Now, having been approached by the Bang On a Can spinoff Asphalt Orchestra, with the help of [Asphalt saxist/producer] Ken Thomson we've adapted another song called either "Two Ships" or "The Movie" for their group. This will be an instrumental version and we'll do a vocal version later. [David Byrne]

Asphalt will perform that song on Wednesday, August 4th, at the first of five free shows the avant-marching band is doing around the Lincoln Center as part of LC's Out of Doors Festival. Locations and times for the band are below.

In addition to that piece, they'll be debuting a commission by Yoko Ono; other songs in the group's repertoire include commissions by Tyondai Braxton of Battles and Stew & Heid Rodewald of Passing Strange and BAM Next Wave 2010. The 12-piece will release a seven-track CD of its material on August 3rd through Canatloupe Music. That includes a blisteringly dissonant song by...
JULY 29, 2010

Swedish metal band Meshuggah and an intricately-arranged version of Bjork's "Hyper-Ballad." There are a few more typical "ra-ra" maching band songs on the album too (Zappa in particular is already quite melodic and pompy), but the band focuses on getting unusual sounds out of the limited instrumentation. Live, they move in unique coordinated patterns, so the experience is individualized to the space and where you stand.

As an aside, this Saturday at Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival is going to be particularly amazing, with the "Detroit Breakdown" lineup of Mitch Ryder, ? and the Mysterians, The Gories, Death and more.

St. Vincent has her own free show this weekend, at the Central Park SummerStage Sunday (8/1) afternoon, with openers Tune-Yards and Basia Bulat.

A video of Asphalt Orchestra doing that Meshuggah song on WNYC, and their schedule, plus a video of Annie doing a nylon-string version of "Actor Out of Work," are below...

Full note from David Byrne (via Stereogum)

About a year ago, I ran into St. Vincent at the Housing Works benefit in which Dirty Projectors and Bjork performed together. How's that for dropping a lot of names in one sentence? Anyway, Annie and I had previously met at the Dark Was the Night benefit in which we both performed, and I'd said I was a fan of her music and disturbing videos. So when Rachel at my office, who volunteers at Housing Works Bookstore Cafe, passed on a suggestion that Annie and I do a similar collaboration, I immediately said yes, though I didn't think we could pull together a short set of new material as fast as Longstreth did (6 weeks, I think). They'd raised the bar pretty high, and as a result we agreed to come up with new material.

I believe it was Annie who suggested we hang the material around a brass ensemble, which creatively sounded great, and besides it could be acoustic and wouldn't require amplification in the intimate Housing Works space. Beyond that, we didn't know in what direction things would go or how we'd work together. We were still both on tour back then, so we began by passing snippets and inspirational MP3s back and forth. I had some work in progress that I re-arranged, and Annie passed me some horn tracks she'd made in GarageBand. I restructured those a little and wrote some melodies over them. We're still inching forwards on this -- no completion date is set, which is a nice situation to be in. However, we did prod ourselves to complete a couple of tunes by setting some deadlines. A few months ago we had Tony Finno arrange the horns, and we performed one of the songs -- tentatively titled "Who" -- at the end of Annie's show at the Rose Room at Lincoln Center. Now, having been approached by the Bang On a Can spinoff Asphalt Orchestra, with the help of Ken Thomson we've adapted another song called either "Two Ships" or "The Movie" for their group. This will be an instrumental version and we'll do a vocal version later.

Asphalt Orchestra performs this and other commissioned works on August 4 outdoors at Lincoln Center.
1. Frank Zappa: Zomby Woof (arr. Peter Hess) [4:06]
2. Goran Bregovic: Champagne* [4:49]
6. Stew and Heidi Rodewald: Carlton* [4:31]
7. Tyondai Braxton: Pulse March* [4:06]

**Asphalt Orchestra - 2010 Tour Dates**

Wed August 4 Broadway Plaza, Lincoln Center 7pm
Thu August 5 Hearst Plaza, Lincoln Center 7pm
Fri August 6 Josie Robertson Plaza, Lincoln Center
7pm Sat August 7 Hearst Plaza, Lincoln Center
6pm Sun August 8 Broadway Plaza, Lincoln Center 6pm

Asphalt Orchestra Will Rock Lincoln Center Tonight

If you're still looking for stuff to do on this gorgeous weekend, 12-piece marching band Asphalt Orchestra will be performing at the Lincoln Center Out of Doors Festival tonight. They'll be premiering commissions by Yoko Ono and David Byrne with Annie Clark. But these guys will play just about anything. Typical covers include Bjork's "Hyperballad" and stuff by Goran Bregovic. Trumpet player Stephanie Richards says remembering choreography and music while bumping into spectators on the street is an "exciting challenge," but she loves the innovative performance. "It's so much more fun to do this than just sitting on a stage." Check out a video of the band below, or head over to Lincoln Center tonight to catch the action in person.
Gig Alerts: Asphalt Orchestra

Wednesday, August 04, 2010

By Alana Harper

Asphalt Orchestra
"Frank Zappa: Zomby Woof"
Playing at: Broadway Plaza at Lincoln Center (1941 Broadway, U.W.S.)
Get: Tickets FREE | Directions

The Asphalt Orchestra debuted at the Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival exactly one year ago this week, and tonight they return to the place where it all began, only this time they have an album under their belt. The 12-piece ensemble released their first record yesterday, a self-titled effort that shows off the group’s marching band polish and street music style. Here the band takes on Frank Zappa with gusto, cranking out an ebullient version of the complex and eccentric tune “Zomby Woof.”

Download Asphalt Orchestra’s self-titled album at Other Music

Read More: asphalt orchestra, gig alerts, lincoln center, music

More in: Music Hub
Asphalt Orchestra

Lincoln Center Out of Doors (Various Locations)  (212) 875-5456 Through Sunday

The Asphalt Orchestra is in fact a 12-piece marching band, and it serves as the house band for Lincoln Out of Doors. On Friday, the group will introduce two recently commissioned compositions—one by David Byrne and Annie Clark, the other by Yoko Ono. The new material ought to suit the Orchestra’s delightfully eccentric repertoire: On their new eponymous album, released Tuesday, they cover Bjork, Meshuggah, Charles Mingus and Frank Zappa with unbridled enthusiasm and the technical wizardry of a jazz orchestra—one that features piccolo, sousaphone and quad tom-toms. The free events promise smart fun for all ages.

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704017904575409302134802986.html?mod=googlenews-wsj