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Life as Art: Anna Halprin interviewed by Jacquelynn Baas

Infor]MA[tion

[blook](#). Posted April 1, 2013 1:10 PM

On [Friday](#), Thingamajigs Performance Group will premiere their brand-new work]MA[at BAM/PFA. Inheritors of the experimental, DIY spirit of Harry Partch and Lou Harrison, [Thingamajigs](#) is a genre-crossing arts organization that promotes, presents and performs music created with made and found materials or alternate tuning systems. We spoke with co-founder Edward Schocker about the upcoming performance.

What can people expect to experience when they come to]MA[?

]MA[is our personal response to the [Silence](#) exhibition. We wanted to create a new work that reflects some of the writings and philosophies from artists and thinkers who deeply influence our music—namely Zeami Motokiyo and John Cage. For this piece we are creating what I am calling “Scenes of Silence,” but which are really walls of sound. Each wall of sound morphs into the next in separate sonic textures, to create various wave patterns—

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Silent Treatments

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Positively Alphabet Street:

perhaps similar to rake patterns of a Japanese rock garden. The reason I call them Scenes of Silence is because these walls of sound block out all other sounds from the space and any “background” noise that once was audible becomes silenced. To me, it’s similar to the sensation of going underwater, where our sonic awareness drastically changes. I hope that the listener will experience something similar with]MA[.

What are these “walls of sound” built from? What sort of timbres will we hear, and what sort of instruments/performance techniques will we see?

Many of our compositions and improvisations are built from performance strategies we’ve created from many years of playing together as a group. The “walls of sound” are no different: each wall was developed through the four of us discussing thoughts, talking about sonic textures and playing through ideas. For]MA[you’ll hear various textures and timbres (both subtle and non-subtle) that are made through a series of “chords” that will be created during the performance.

The Thingamajigs Performance Group specializes in playing unusual instruments and for this performance you’ll see us in a circle playing various things such as glass, bamboo, hacked electronics and re-tuned string instruments. We create all our music in a collaborative process, and although one of us will be a “director” for the piece, there isn’t one “composer” of the work but a group effort. We create music very much in the same way as a rock band or even a dance/theater company might. For this BAM/PFA piece TPG member Suki O’Kane is acting as director.

Tell me more about the influences of Zeami Motokiyo and John Cage and how they play out in this piece.

We’ve all studied Cage and many of us have also studied Noh theater, which Zeami helped refine into the art form it is today. Both Cage and Zeami used silence as a central aesthetic driver to their practice. Zeami said that what the actor does not do is of interest, and I would imagine Cage would same the same of the performing musician. With this in mind]MA[will focus on the space between the notes, distances between parts, and a musical vocabulary of invisible actions.

Can you talk a little about the involvements of Dandelion Dancetheater and of Keith Evans?

Members of Dandelion Dancetheater and CSU East Bay Inclusive Interdisciplinary Ensemble will cross the performance space exactly once in the fifty-minute duration of the piece. The structure of the movement (as well as the music) is based on jo-ha-kyū: roughly described as a long, slow beginning (the jo), a quickening that gathers energy to a point just shy of capacity (the ha), and, after a moment of suspension in which the energy is present but

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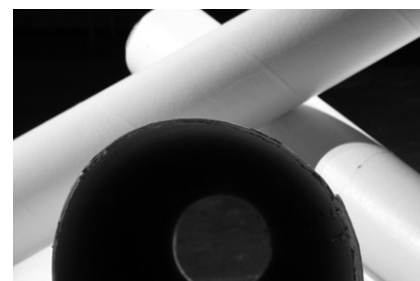
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not moving, the release (the kyū), which is more like a huge exhalation than a grand finale, meant to be a powerful restoration of balance.

The film score by Keith Evans calls for four films that elongate or contract the components of the piece, surrounded by an immersive collage of environmental projections. These films are secondarily used to pace the musicians and dancers.

Above: Image courtesy Mills College Art Museum.

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