

MUSIC REVIEW

## In trio's debut, exploratory musicians turn inward

By Jeremy Eichler | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 04, 2013



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**Eviyan — (front, from left) guitarist Gyan Riley, singer-violinist Iva Bittová, and clarinetist Evan Ziporyn — performs at MIT's Kresge Auditorium on Saturday night. At rear (from left): bassist Blake Newman and tablaist Sandeep Das joined the group for the show.**

**CAMBRIDGE —** The new ensemble Eviyan has as its core three independent-minded composer-performers: Evan Ziporyn (clarinet), Iva Bittová (vocals, violin), and Gyan

Riley (guitar). On Saturday night, the group threw itself an impressive coming-out party at Ziporyn's home base, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he teaches and directs the Center for Arts, Science and Technology.

The music Eviyan plays is harder to describe, in a way, than its genealogy. Bittová is a singer with one foot in the world of Eastern European folk music and the other in the contemporary avant-garde. Riley, whose father is the minimalist pioneer Terry Riley, is a nimble guitarist with an exploratory ear and a technique steeped in both Western and Indian classical traditions. And Ziporyn has built his career from the outset around ideals of cultural cross-pollination, in his own work as a composer for both Western instruments and Balinese gamelan, and in his active performing life as a clarinetist. In the latter category, Ziporyn has played for two decades with the Bang on a Can All-Stars, a quintessentially genre-bending New York ensemble of which he was a core member.

The All-Stars once aimed to take contemporary concert music out of its secluded cultural niche, and over the years proved quite successful in that task, at least within the band's own orbit. That art music could hit you with the edginess and menacing power of grittier genres seemed to have been part of the point. With Eviyan, the vibe is mellower, the tone of the musicianship reflecting perhaps some distilled insights of a hybrid music come of age.

The trio, in essence, is a flexible vehicle for its members' own compositions, which collectively draw from classical, folk, jazz, post-minimalist, and non-Western traditions. For Saturday's set in MIT's Kresge Auditorium, the results were soulful yet sophisticated in sensibility, and deeply skilled in their delivery.

Bittová's riveting singing is itself a kind of performance art, a sui generis language made up of floating pure tones, raspy cries, reedy notes, and guttural punctuations. Even when singing in English, frequently over her own violin playing, the words reach the ear more as stylized sound than as comprehensible phrases. Many times on Saturday, Ziporyn's keening clarinet lines took on a correspondingly vocal quality. The trio overall played with a rapport and coherence that belied its short resume.

The performance also benefited from the presence of two guests, the alert bassist Blake Newman and the tablaist San-deep Das, whose virtuosic playing injected discreet surges of rhythmic adrenaline. There can be an awkwardness when certain classical musicians pack their bags for grand tours of distant musical genres, whether bluegrass, klezmer, tango, or jazz. By contrast these players are traveling nowhere in this newest project, except possibly inward. The music speaks with an unforced eloquence. Eviyan will appear again at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival this summer. One looks forward to watching this group evolve.

Before Eviyan's set, the Angolan-born, Lisbon-based instrument maker Victor Gama made his first Boston-area appearance with three of his own remarkable instruments — the acru, the toha, and the dino — demonstrated through several meditative selections from his own composition, "Pangeia Instrumentos."

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