



CAL PERFORMANCES
AT HOME

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, May 6, 2021, 7pm

Steel Hammer

Music and Text by Julia Wolfe

featuring

Bang on a Can All-Stars

Robert Black, *bass*

Vicky Chow, *piano and melodica*

David Cossin, *percussion*

Arlen Hlusko, *cello*

Mark Stewart, *electric guitar, banjo, mountain dulcimer, harmonica*

Ken Thomson, *clarinets and harmonica*

with

Rebecca L. Hargrove, *voice*

Sonya Headlam, *voice*

Molly Netter, *voice*

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances on location at
Art Factory, Paterson, NJ; Berlin, Germany; David's Studio, NYC;
Hartford, CT; MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA
in March and April 2021.

The *Cal Performances at Home* Spring 2021 season
is dedicated to Gail and Dan Rubinfield, leading supporters of Cal Performances
and the well-being of our artists for almost 30 years.

Major support provided by the U.S. Bank Foundation.

This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsor Françoise Stone.

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert
will be available on demand through August 4, 2021.*

Steel Hammer

Music and Text by Julia Wolfe

Some Say
The States
Destiny
Mountain
Characteristics
Polly Ann
The Race
Winner
Lord Lord

Steel Hammer was commissioned by Bang on a Can
with generous support from Maria and Robert A. Skirnick and Carnegie Hall.

Steel Hammer Film Credits

Jeremy Robins, *director, editor, and animator*
Kharon Benson, *camera operator*
Hugo Faraco, *camera operator*
Clements Wronski, *camera operator* (Berlin)
Ras Dia, *set operators coordinator*
Emily Hart, *archival researcher*
Máirion Talán Del Rosa, *costume design*
Theo Kogan, *stylist*

Steel Hammer Film Soundtrack Credits (2021)

Produced by David Cossin
David Bloom, *music director*
Recorded at the Bunker Studio, Brooklyn, NY and David's Studio, New York, NY, March – April 2021
Engineered by Alex Conroy and David Cossin
Edited, mixed, and mastered by David Cossin

The *Steel Hammer* film soundtrack also includes previously recorded audio recorded at the James L. Dolan Music Recording Studio at New York University, November 2011 & February 2012.

Produced, edited, mixed, and mastered by Damian leGassick

Engineered by Paul Geluso

Assisted by Brian A Bourque and Eric Xu

Kenny Savelson, executive director for Bang on a Can

Publisher:

Ricordi New York/Universal Music Corp. (ASCAP)

Special Thanks

Karl Larson, Sruly Lazaros, Tim McEvoy/MASS MoCA,
Allen Moon/David Lieberman Artist's Representatives, Vince Peterson,
Andy Plovnick/The Bunker Studio, Zachary Ritter, Tim Thomas, Philippa Thompson

For More Information

juliawolfmusic.com

Bangonacan.org



Peter Seifling

Julia Wolfe

Steel Hammer is a meditation on over 200 versions of the “John Henry” ballad. The various versions, based on hearsay, recollection, and tall tales, reveal both the evolution of the story, as well as the timeless tale of human versus machine. Many of the facts are unclear: some say that Henry was from West Virginia; some say he was from South Carolina. Some have said that his fate was set before he picked up a hammer, that his woman’s name was Liza Jane or Polly Ann—that Polly drove steel just like a man. But regardless of the details, John Henry, wielding a steel hammer, faced the onslaught of the industrial age as his super-human strength is challenged in a contest to out-dig an engine.

I drew upon the extreme variations of the story, fragmenting and weaving the contradictory versions of the ballad that have circulated since the late 1800s into a new whole—at times meditating on single words or phrases—in order to tell “the story of the story” and to embody the simultaneous diverse paths it traveled. To tell the tale, the Bang on a Can All-Stars have added a slew of instruments—mountain dulcimer, wooden bones, banjo, harmonicas, and body percussion—to their usual line up, as well as a dynamic trio of three female voices.

—Julia Wolfe

SOME SAY

Some say he's from
 some say he
 some say he's from
 some say
 some say he
 say he
 he

THE STATES

Georgia
 Tennessee
 Columbus, Ohio
 Kentucky
 Alabama
 New Jersey
 Yew Pine Mountains
 Mississippi
 Mountain
 West Virginia
 South Carolina

DESTINY

John Henry
 was a little boy
 sitting on his papa's knee
 John Henry
 was a little man
 sitting on his mama's knee
 a baby boy
 sitting on his daddy's knee
 John Henry
 he said, "I'm gonna be a steel drivin' man."
 He picked up his hammer and a little piece
 of steel
 He said, "This hammer's gonna be the death
 of me."

MOUNTAIN

The mountain was so tall
 John Henry was so small

CHARACTERISTICS

He was small
 He was tall
 He was black
 He was white

He was true
 He was false
 He was two hundred pounds
 He was two twenty-five
 He's a worker
 Convict
 Singer
 Thirty-five years
 Twenty-two
 Fifty
 Cotton picker
 Steel Driver (hammer, hammer, steel, steel)
 He was true
 He was false
 He was six feet tall
 He was five foot one
 He was tall
 He was small
 He was small
 He was tall

POLLY ANN

John Henry had a little woman
 And her name was
 Polly Ann, Mary Ann, Julie Ann, Sary Ann,
 Sally Ann,
 Martha Ann, Liza Ann, Lucy Ann,
 Mary Magdalena, Magdalena
 John Henry had a little woman
 and she was all dressed in blue,
 dressed in red,
 red, blue, black
 John Henry's woman said to him,
 "My darling Johnny, I've been true."
 true to you, true to you
 John Henry had a little woman
 and her name was Ida Red,
 and her name was Liza Jane,
 and her name was Maggadee,
 Polly Ann, Mary Ann, Julie Ann, Sary Ann,
 Sally Ann,
 Martha Ann, Liza Ann, Lucy Ann,
 Mary Magdalena, Magdalena
 Ida Red, Maggadee, Liza Jane,
 Polly
 When John Henry he took sick to bed,
 then Polly drove steel just like a man.

THE RACE

The captain told John Henry
 “gonna bring that steam drill ‘round”
 John Henry told the captain
 “a man ain’t nothin’ but a man”
 nothin’, nothin’, nothin’
 but a man, but a man
 John Henry on the right side
 the steam drill’s on the left
 right, left, right, left
 “Before I let your steam drill beat me down,
 I’ll hammer my fool self to death.”
 nine pound hammer
 ten pound hammer
 twelve pound hammer
 twenty pound hammer

two nine pound hammers
 two twenty pound hammers
 sixteen pound hammer
 hammer, hammer, hammer, hammer

WINNER

The man who invented the steam drill,
 he thought he was mighty fine.
 John Henry sunk the steel fourteen feet,
 while the steam drill only made nine,
 Lord Lord,

LORD LORD

Lord Lord
 This old hammer rings like silver
 This old hammer shines like gold

ABOUT THE ARTISTS**Julia Wolfe, composer**

Julia Wolfe’s music is distinguished by an intense physicality and a relentless power that pushes performers to extremes and demands attention from the audience. She draws inspiration from folk, classical, and rock genres, bringing a modern sensibility to each while simultaneously tearing down the walls between them.

The 2019 world premiere of *Fire in my mouth*, a large-scale work for orchestra and women’s chorus, by the New York Philharmonic with The Crossing and the Young People’s Chorus of New York City, received extensive acclaim—one reviewer called the work “a monumental achievement in high musical drama, among the most commandingly imaginative and emotively potent works of any kind that I’ve ever experienced” (*The Nation Magazine*). The work is the third in a series of compositions about the American worker: 2009’s *Steel Hammer* examines the folk-hero John Henry, and the 2015 Pulitzer Prize-winning work *Anthracite Fields*, a concert-length oratorio for chorus and instruments, draws on oral histories, interviews, speeches, and more to honor the people who persevered and endured in the Pennsylvania Anthracite coal region. Mark Swed of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that *Anthracite Fields* “captures not only the sadness of hard lives lost...

but also of the sweetness and passion of a way of daily life now also lost. The music compels without overstatement. This is a major, profound work.”

Upcoming and recent work includes *Flower Power*, a concerto for the Bang on a Can All-Stars co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Danish National Symphony; *Oxygen* for 12 flutes, commissioned by the National Flute Association and premiered by 12 flute choirs (144 flutes); and a new large-scale work, *Her Story*, for orchestra with the women’s chamber choir Lorelei, which will receive multiple performances in the 2022–23 season with a consortium of five orchestras: the Nashville Symphony, Boston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, and National Symphony Orchestra.

Wolfe has collaborated with theater artist Anna Deavere Smith; projection/scenic designer Jeff Sugg; filmmaker Bill Morrison; visual artist Laurie Olander; and directors François Girard, Anne Bogart, and Anne Kauffman, among others. Her music has been heard at venues throughout the world, including Carnegie Hall, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Lincoln Center, Muziekgebouw (Netherlands), the Southbank and Barbican centers (UK), Settembre Musica (Italy), and Théâtre de

la Ville (France.) Wolfe's music has been recorded on Decca Gold, Naxos, Cantaloupe Music, Teldec, Sony Classical, and Universal.

In addition to receiving the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in Music, Wolfe was a 2016 MacArthur Fellow. She received the 2015 Herb Alpert Award in Music, and was named Musical America's 2019 Composer of the Year. Julia Wolfe is co-founder/co-artistic director of New York's Bang on a Can, and artistic director of NYU Steinhardt Music Composition. Her music is published by Ricordi New York (ASCAP).

Rebecca L. Hargrove, voice

Rebecca L. Hargrove is an actress and singer. She is a recent Grammy Award winner (Best Opera Album) for her participation in the ensemble of the Metropolitan Opera's *Porgy and Bess*. She has also been featured in the companies of *Evita* and *Cabin in the Sky* at New York City Center. During the 2019–20 season, Hargrove starred (title role) in the *New York Times*' "Critic's Pick" performances of *Acquanetta* at Bard Summerscape; *The Grey Land* monodrama as The Mother at Roulette Intermedium (album available on all streaming platforms); and as Yum-Yum in *The Mikado* with New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players. Previous engagements include *Two Wings: The Music of Black America in Migration* with Jason Moran and Alicia Hall-Moran at Carnegie Hall; *In the Parlour* as Nellie Quander at the National Black Theater; and a series of new plays at the Lucille Lortel Foundation. Follow her updates at www.RebeccaLHargrove.com and on Instagram @Rhargrov.

Sonya Headlam, voice

Soprano Sonya Headlam is a soloist, chamber, and ensemble singer who performs a diverse range of repertoire that ranges from the Baroque period to the 21st century. She is a member of the Grammy-nominated Choir of Trinity Wall Street, and performs regularly with the Vocalis Consort, a group of musicians devoted to sharing their passion for art song, and with the Raritan Players, an ensemble that "explores lost performance practices and repertoire of the 17th and 18th centuries through engage-

ment with period instruments and new research in musicology." She joins the Raritan Players on the recently released recording *In the Salon of Madame Brillon*. Recent opera roles include le Feu in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, Fiordiligi in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and the title role in Delibes' *Lakmé*. Other recent soloist performances include Beethoven's *Mass in C* with Downtown Voices, Ellen Reid's *dreams of the new world* at the 2018 Prototype Festival, and Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the West Village Chorale. Music-making during the Covid-19 pandemic has included several virtual recitals, and the premiere of a short opera film, *How They Broke Away*, music and film direction by Andy Teirstein. Headlam received her doctorate in music arts from Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts, where she has also worked as a part-time lecturer in the music department.

Molly Netter, voice

A versatile and joyous musician, Canadian-American soprano Molly Netter enlivens complex and beautiful music, both old and new, with "a natural warmth" (*Los Angeles Times*) and "clear, beautiful tone and vivacious personality" (*New York Times*). She can be heard on five Grammy-nominated albums since 2017 and has performed as a soloist with ensembles such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, the Boston Early Music Festival, Apollo's Fire, the Smithsonian Chamber Orchestra, Juilliard415, and Heartbeat Opera. Netter has been a full-time member of the Choir at Trinity Wall Street since 2015 and is an active performer, curator, educator, and advocate of new music, regularly commissioning new works by living composers. Recent collaborators include David Lang, Julia Wolfe, Amy Beth Kirsten, Doug Balliett, Katherine Balch, Molly Joyce, and Jessica Meyer. Notable chamber performance highlights include inaugural casts of Pulitzer-winning operas *Angel's Bone* (Du Yun, 2015) and *PRISM* (Ellen Reid, 2017). Netter was a featured curator/performer on Trinity Wall Street's 2018 acclaimed Time's Arrow Festival, programming an eclectic evening of Barbara Strozzi paired with newly

commissioned contemporary works. In 2020, she began commissioning an entirely new repertoire for self-accompanied singer and clavichtherium, emphasizing the florid voice, early music vocal techniques, and improvisation as a bridge between style and genre. Netter holds a bachelor's degree in composition and contemporary voice from Oberlin Conservatory and an master's in early music voice from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. She is currently on voice faculty at the Oberlin Baroque Performance Institute. www.mollynettervoice.com.

BANG ON A CAN ALL-STARS

Robert Black, *bass*

Robert Black, a founding and current member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, tours the world creating unheard-of music for the double bass, collaborating with the most adventurous composers, musicians, dancers, artists, actors, and technophiles from all walks of life. Current projects include *First Fridays with Robert Black*—a monthly series of streamed solo bass recitals; a 10-channel audio/video double bass installation reflecting on the Anthropocene with sound artists Brian House and Sue Huang, filmed at the Freshkills landfill in NYC; an outdoor environmental work for 24 basses with composer Eve Beglarian, and commissions from Carman Moore, Joan Tower, Nick Dunston, Žibuolkė Martinaitytė, Kristis Auznieks, Jakhongir Shukurov, and Daniel Sabzghabaei. Solo recordings include *Possessed* (Cantaloupe Records), *Modern American Bass* (New World Records), *The Bass Music of Christian Wolff* and *Giacinto Scelsi* (Mode Records), and *State of the Bass* (O.O. Discs). Black teaches at the Hartt School/University of Hartford, the Manhattan School of Music, and the New Music on the Point Festival.

Vicky Chow, *piano*

Chinese-Canadian pianist Vicky Chow has been described as “brilliant” (*The New York Times*) and “one of our era’s most brilliant pianists” (*Pitchfork*). She is currently the pianist for Bang on a Can All-Stars. *The New Yorker* de-

scribed her recording of Michael Gordon’s *Sonatra* as “a milestone of composition, and Vicky Chow’s recording of it is a milestone of pianism.” Her album *Surface Image*, composed by Tristan Perich, was among the top ranked avant albums in the *Rolling Stone* magazine. As an artist frequently broadcasted on WNYC radio, her recorded work can be found on the Nonesuch, New Amsterdam, Tzadik, and Cantaloupe Music labels. Interviews and articles featuring Chow have been published in the *Huffington Post*, *Gramophone*, the *New York Times*, and elsewhere. As an educator, she has given master classes, seminars, and workshops at the Juilliard School, Manhattan School of Music, New England Conservatory, New York University, Beijing Conservatory, Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Bard College, and Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Chow is on faculty at the Bang on a Can Summer Festival at MASS MoCA in North Adams (MA) and has also been on faculty at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. She is also on the board of advisors for Composers Now, and is a mentor for the Juilliard School mentoring program. Chow is a Yamaha Artist. www.vickychow.com.

David Cossin, *percussion*

David Cossin was born and raised in Queens (NY) and studied classical percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. His interest in classical percussion, drum set, non-western hand drumming, composition, and improvisation has led to performances across a broad spectrum of musical and artistic forms. Cossin has recorded and performed internationally with Steve Reich and Musicians, Philip Glass, Yo-Yo Ma, Meredith Monk, Tan Dun, Cecil Taylor, Talujon Percussion Quartet, and the trio Real Quiet, as well as with Sting on his *Symphonicity* world tour. Theater work includes Blue Man Group, Mabou Mines, and projects with the director Peter Sellars. Cossin was featured as the solo percussionist in Tan Dun’s award-winning score to the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. As a soloist, he has performed with orchestras throughout the world including the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Orchestra Radio France. His sonic installations have been

presented in New York, Italy, and Germany, and he is also an active producer, composer, and instrument inventor, expanding the limits of traditional percussion. Cossin teaches percussion at the Aaron Copland School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music's Contemporary Performance Program.

Arlen Hlusko, cello

Internationally acclaimed Canadian cellist Arlen Hlusko is a dynamic, versatile young artist who has performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician across North America, Asia, and Europe. A laureate of numerous competitions, a Grammy Award winner for her collaboration with The Crossing, and a recent graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, Hlusko is currently a member of Ensemble Connect (the resident ensemble of Carnegie Hall) and regularly performs with several ensembles based on the East Coast, including the Bang on a Can All-Stars and Dolce Suono Ensemble. She has recently been featured performer with groups including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Concert Orchestra, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra. Hlusko has also been on the roster of preeminent summer festivals including Music from Angel Fire, Tippet Rise, Spoleto USA, and Bay Chamber Concerts. As a teacher, she has served on faculty of Curtis Summerfest, the New York Philharmonic, and Philadelphia Orchestra Teaching Artists, and given master classes in the USA, Canada, and Germany. Committed to using her music to serve her community, Hlusko founded her own interactive chamber music concert series, Philadelphia Performances for Autism, and is involved with several communities in Philadelphia and New York City, including Carnegie Hall's "Musical Connections" at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. arlenhpusko.com.

Mark Stewart, electric guitar, banjo, mountain dulcimer, harmonica

Multi-instrumentalist, singer, song leader, composer, and instrument designer Mark Stewart has been heard around the world, performing old and new music. As the music director for Paul Simon's band, Stewart has recorded and

toured with Simon since 1998. A founding member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars and the duo Polygraph Lounge with keyboard and theremin wizard Rob Schwimmer, Mark has also worked with Steve Reich, Sting, Anthony Braxton, Bob Dylan, Wynton Marsalis, Meredith Monk, Stevie Wonder, Phillip Glass, Bruce Springsteen, Terry Riley, Ornette Coleman, Edie Brickell, Don Byron, Joan Baez, Hugh Masakela, Paul McCartney, Cecil Taylor, Bill Frisell, Jimmy Cliff, Charles Wourinen, the Everly Brothers, Steve Gadd, Fred Frith, Alison Krauss, David Krakauer & Klezmer Madness, Bobby McFerrin, David Byrne, James Taylor, The Roches, Aaron Neville, Bette Midler, and Marc Ribot. He is the inventor of the Whirly-Copter, a bicycle-powered Pythagorean choir of singing tubes and the Big Boing, a 24-foot sonic banquet table *mbira* that seats 30 children playing 490 found objects, and he is a visiting lecturer in musical instrument design and performance practice at MIT. Stewart is also a curator at MASS MoCA of the immersive Gunnar Schonbeck exhibit of musical instruments and co-founder of SoundstewArt, a company that designs immersive sound environments and community music-making experiences. He lives in Brooklyn and North Adams, MA, playing, singing, and writing popular music, semi-popular music, and unpopular music, while designing instruments that *everyone* can play.

Ken Thomson, clarinets and harmonica

A staple of New York City's contemporary music and jazz communities, Ken Thomson is widely respected for his ability to blend a rich variety of influences and styles into his own musical language while maintaining a voice unmistakably his own. Thomson has a growing catalog of music written for ensembles of differing sizes, and has toured with and released a number of albums with groups that he has created. His latest project combining the sounds of jazz and contemporary music, *Sextet*, has toured across the US and Europe and selected one of the top recordings of 2018 by websites Second Inversion and AnEarful. Thomson released two albums with his previous project, a five-piece group called Slow/Fast, that were

praised by the *New York Times* for their “intricate long-form compositions” and earned a five-star review in *All About Jazz*. He has two full-length CDs available of his chamber music compositions: 2013’s *Thaw* with the JACK Quartet and 2016’s *Restless* with cellist Ashley Bathgate and pianist Karl Larson. Thomson is also active as a freelance clarinetist and saxophonist, performing with groups including the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Ensemble Signal, International Contemporary Ensemble, and Novus. He is also on faculty on the Bang on a Can Summer Institute at MASS MoCA. Thomson is a D’Addario Woodwinds artist. www.ktonline.net

Bang on a Can

Founded in 1987 by composers Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe, Bang on a Can has been creating an international community dedicated to innovative music, wherever it is found, and has grown from a one-day New York-based marathon concert to a multifaceted performing arts organization with a broad range of year-round international activities. In addition to its festivals LOUD Weekend at MASS MoCA and LONG PLAY, current projects include live.bangonacan.org, a digital streaming platform launched during the pandemic with an ongoing schedule of live-streamed concerts and world-premiere performances of new commissions; The People’s Commissioning Fund, a membership program to commission emerging composers; the Bang on a Can All-Stars, who tour to major festivals and concert venues around the world every year; recording projects; the Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival at MASS MoCA, a professional development program for young composers and performers led by today’s pioneers of experimental music; Asphalt Orchestra, Bang on a Can’s extreme street band that offers mobile performances re-contextualizing unusual music; Found Sound Nation, a new technology-based musical outreach program now partnering with the US State Department to create OneBeat, a revolutionary, post-political

residency program that uses music to bridge the gulf between young American musicians and young musicians from developing countries; cross-disciplinary collaborations and projects with DJs, visual artists, choreographers, filmmakers, and more. Each new program has evolved to answer specific challenges faced by today’s musicians, composers, and audiences, in order to make innovative music widely accessible and wildly received. Bang on a Can’s inventive and aggressive approach to programming and presentation has created a large and vibrant international audience made up of people of all ages who are rediscovering the value of contemporary music. Bang on a Can has also recently launched its new digital archive, CANLAND, an extensive archive of its recordings, videos, posters, program books, and more. Thirty-three years of collected music and associated ephemera have been digitized and archived online and is publicly accessible in its entirety at www.canland.org.

For more information about Bang on a Can, please visit www.bangonacan.org.

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Major support for the Cal Performances Digital Classroom is provided by Wells Fargo.

Major support for Beyond the Stage is provided by Bank of America.

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