

Insider

Khruangbin takes a dub journey

The Houston-based trio Khruangbin is making some of the best instrumental music around. And its attention to detail is clear on its new album, "Hasta El Cielo."

Anyone who knows the band will recognize the opener, "With All the World." In fact, the whole album will sound strikingly familiar. That's because Khruangbin is trying something new, reimagining its 2018 project "Con Todo El Mundo" through a different musical lens: dub. The same dub that started as an offshoot of reggae in the '60s, pioneered by the likes of Osborne "King Tubby" Ruddock, and that has influenced countless musicians since.

Characterized by electronic blips, heavy basslines, and spacey echoes, often in wild remixes, the genre opens up new vistas for the band in "Hasta El Cielo."

Khruangbin's music can serve as the perfect soundtrack

to passive activity, like taking a walk. But by reimagining an album this way, listeners take that same walk in a new place, triggering a sense of discovery.

Khruangbin isn't jumping into dub completely blind. The band's bassist, Laura Lee, has said she learned how to play the instrument by listening to the genre, calling dub reggae her "ABCs of music." One of the albums that always stood out to her is the 1982 album "Scientist Wins the World Cup" by Hopeton Brown (professionally known as dub producer Scientist). Khruangbin even enlisted Brown to remix two new tracks on the album, "Rules" and "Cómo Te Quiero."

For years, Khruangbin have been considered to be dub-adjacent, hailed for their ability to make songs that might be considered repetitive sound enthralling. Some songs, like "A La Sala" (a remake of "Evan Finds the Third Room"), had very little done to them because they were already so similar to dub.

That's not all this album is, though. Khruangbin's original songs on "Con Todo El Mundo" drew on traditions as wide-ranging as Thai funk, southern jazz, Latin American folk, and psychedelic rock. And in rethinking them together, this just might be the band's most unified piece of work. The ability to harness such rich diversity in sound is what makes this band stand out.

CHRIS TRIUNFO



GALLERIES | CATE MCQUAID

Looking into the darkness, at Mills Gallery



Nyugen E. Smith's "Letter Home (Hoping to Reach You Soon) Partial Poem Sculpture" (top) and "Trauma (on site/sight)" (above left). Above right: A detail of Marina Leybishkis's "Black Album."



PHOTOS BY MELISSA BLACKALL

In the Words, In the Bones," a sobering and strangely hopeful exhibition curated by Magdalena Moskalewicz at the Boston Center for the Arts' Mills Gallery, considers the content and consequences of cultural silence.

Marina Leybishkis was raised a Jew in Uzbekistan, outside the dominant Muslim culture. Members of her mother's family are buried in unmarked graves in Soviet labor camps. Burning into black paper with a laser to leave ashy images ("Black Album"), and fixing shadowy prints into the thinnest porcelain, which she displays in light boxes ("Album"), Leybishkis re-creates family photos and documents in materials nearly as ephemeral as memory itself.

IN THE WORDS, IN THE BONES

At Mills Gallery, Boston Center for the Arts, 551 Tremont St., through July 21. 617-426-5000, www.bcaonline.org

Hungarian-born Zsuzsanna Varga-Szegedi grapples with the strictures of communist and post-communist Eastern Europe. She challenges Hungary's recent erasure of Marxist philosopher György Lukács from the public sphere. A Lukács statue was removed from a Budapest park in 2017. Varga-Szegedi has made a dour model of the statue's head, "Memorial for Absence (Lukács)," and, in an effort to get to know the visage and perhaps the man, mapped it with 3-D scans. She projects an image of the lost statue onto the Mills Gallery's façade, as if conjuring a ghost. (The next projection is scheduled for 8:30-10 p.m. on July 18.)

Although Nyugen E. Smith is of Haitian descent, he never learned Haitian Creole. He examines the hierarchies and omissions of language in "Letter Home (Hoping to Reach You Soon) Partial Poem Sculpture." The poem laments his distance from home: "I see your hand in all that I do. All that I make./ Your son is afraid," he writes.

He cuts the poem's text from rubber and piles it like spaghetti in a bowl, then collages the snipped bits of the letters' negative spaces — denoting absence or background — into the series "Masta My Language," creating an inscrutable hieroglyphic text. All of these artists caution that authorities rarely tell the whole story, and to know ourselves, whatever our culture, we must look into the negative spaces.

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A fairy tale vision for Shakespeare on the Common

►SHAKESPEARE

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band is banished, he becomes convinced Imogen has cheated on him and tells his servant to murder her. Imogen flees into the forest, disguising herself as a man, only to discover her brothers are living there, kidnapped from court as babies and raised as wild young men. Shakespeare adds to the chaos by setting the action in three locations: Rome, ancient England, and the wilderness of Wales, and includes some mythological creatures and a cameo appearance by Jupiter.

"At one level, the play feels like the highlight reel of the playwright's best works," says Nora Eschenheimer, who plays Imogen. "But Fred found a way to bind them all together using the glue of the fairy tale."

Although "Cymbeline's" mash-up of plot twists and far-flung settings has made it one of Shakespeare's rarely performed plays, Sullivan says he was excited to have the chance to direct it.

After all, he says, "Cymbeline" is the only Shakespeare romance he hasn't worked on during a career performing in 300 plays and directing 60 others, at both Trinity Repertory Company, where he was a member of the company for 35 years, and at the Gamm Theatre in Warwick, R.I.

The reason we continue to produce Shakespeare's plays, Sullivan says, is because "he understood what we struggle with. Our Disney references are fun, but the story also drops into deep emotions and gives us a powerful woman to follow on a journey to forgiveness."

"Imogen is a fantastic female character," says Eschenheimer. "She steps into worlds that aren't her own — she disguises herself as a simple country



From left: actors Jonathan Higinbotham, Nora Eschenheimer, and Michael Underhill rehearse Commonwealth Shakespeare Company's production of "Cymbeline," under the direction of Fred Sullivan Jr.

boy named Fidele, becomes a page to a Roman soldier — and develops an empathy for others while staying loyal to the people she loves. Along the way she has a bit of Juliet's innocence, Rosalind's sense of adventure, Beatrice's determination, and her own giant heart."

Sullivan says he was careful to surround himself with a 24-member ensemble with complementary strengths.

"I was very thoughtful about where to place these actors," says Sullivan, "not only on the stage but in relation to each other."

The company includes athletic actors who manage handstands in the

scenes in the woods, and others who provide musical accompaniment on an array of instruments. It also includes Tony Estrella, artistic director of the Gamm Theatre, where he also appears regularly onstage.

As King Cymbeline, he is playing Eschenheimer's father for the third time, and he says the shorthand they have helps them navigate the complex father-daughter emotions on display.

"I love the wildly operatic emotions these characters experience," he says. "Cymbeline is Lear-like in the beginning: He wants what's best for his daughter, but he refuses to listen to her when she is honest with him. As an ac-



PHOTOS BY ERIN CLARK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

tor, we can't be afraid of expressing those big emotions. It's a play where the character's impulses are given free reign and then at the end, order is restored."

Estrella says it's no mistake the hero of the story is a woman.

"When we think about how the story plays for us today," he says, "we still accept that men go to war, that it's OK for men to indulge our aggressive impulses. Imogen is punished by her father, falsely accused by her husband. She considers revenge, but her strength comes from her compassion and her willingness to forgive them."

Commonwealth Shakespeare Com-

CYMBELINE

Presented by Commonwealth Shakespeare Company. At Boston Common, July 17-Aug. 4. Free.

pany artistic director Steve Maler, who has begun alternating directing responsibility every other year, says it was easy to hand over the directing reins to Sullivan this year. Maler cast him in 13 of the past 23 Shakespeare on the Common productions. As he works to sustain the popular Shakespeare on the Common production while building out a richer year-round season of contemporary and classic plays through his partnership with Babson College, Maler says he's eager to provide directors with the resources they need to do their best work.

"I can be an unbiased pair of eyes," says Maler, "but I want to give them the freedom to present their vision. Fred is very savvy about what works theatrically, especially on the unique canvas the outdoor stage on the Common provides."

What's most important, says Maler, "is that Fred really understands the material and knows how the actors should propel the action and activate the language."

It's extraordinary that Shakespeare's plays are so flexible, says Sullivan.

"We don't need to dress actors in pumpkin pants to have his work feel authentic," he says. "As long as we are true to the emotions of the characters, and audience are both moved and feel great joy, we've done our job."

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