

newsletter

NATIONAL MUSIC COUNCIL

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November 21, 1977

The Council will hold its winter general membership meeting on Wednesday, January 11, 1978 at the Hotel Gotham, New York City. As the main feature of this meeting a panel discussion is planned concerning the Federal government's involvement with the arts. Sam Hope, Executive Director of the National Association of Schools of Music, will be the moderator of this panel. Mr. John Roberts, President of the International Music Council and Executive Director of the Canadian Music Center, has been invited to be our luncheon speaker.

Committee meetings will be planned for Tuesday afternoon, January 10, 1978. Further details and a reservation card will be sent to you a few weeks before this meeting. Please plan now to have your organization represented at this meeting.

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The Newsletter of the National Music Council, heretofore issued biannually primarily to announce Council meetings, will be brought out more frequently in an attempt to improve communications among member organizations and to stimulate individuals and organizations to take action in support of music.

The Council's Committee on Music Education conceived the idea that, among other things, member organizations should be made aware of arts legislation pending in Congress that they might influence and also be given the opportunity to react in an appropriate manner to crisis situations arising in music education. (Music education is construed in the broadest sense to include all activities dedicated to the teaching-learning process as it is applied to music.) In addition, items of timely interest to the membership which would not appear in the Bulletin of the National Music Council issued twice each year will be included. For example, the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts, Inc., has moved to 570 Seventh Avenue, 17th Floor, New York 10018. The new telephone number is (212) 840-0808. Marcy Horwitz is acting director.

If you have items of interest suitable for inclusion in this type of publication, please send them to Newsletter editor, Thomas Hill, Department of Fine and Performing Arts, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030, (703) 323-2517 or 2450. Present plans call for issuing the Newsletter whenever sufficient material has been received or a situation warrants contacting the membership without delay. Printing and distribution will be handled by the Council's New York office.

Pauline, Here is a proposal I've been working on with Bert.
I'd be interested in speaking to you about your reactions
Paul Fester

This is a proposal to present an ongoing series of concerts and workshops in non-western music at U.C.S.D.

While most forward looking music departments (and many not so forward looking) have regular instructional programs in the performance and/or theory of some type of non-western music, U.C.S.D. stands out quite notably as sorely lacking in virtually any type of non-western music performance. I don't think I need to emphasize the importance of performance courses as opposed to the occasional survey course which may cover some aspects of history, theory, or sociology of a non-western musical style. This is particularly true in studying the music of a culture which transmits its music orally and aurally.

This lack is even more inappropriate when one considers that many contemporary composers are looking directly to the music and other cultural attributes of the non-western world. Such composers as Terry Riley, Stockhausen, Lou Harrison, Steve Reich, Messiaen, Takemitsu, and Phil Glass immediately come to mind.

To generate interest in such a potential program, an ongoing series of concert/workshops in non-western music would be an excellent way to expose people to a variety of musical cultures. From my own brief survey, I have found that a large majority of students have had little or no opportunity at contact with non-western musicians, but that virtually all would be interested in participating in such a program.

There are large numbers of non-western musicians teaching and performing in the Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay areas. Most of them are anxious to have their music heard by a larger audience. Thus it would not be difficult, nor extremely expensive to find performers and teachers for such a program. I am personally acquainted with many of these musicians and would be able to initiate contact with them.

There are also many artists making tours of the U.S. Nearly all have performances in the Bay Area and Los Angeles (and often at the U.C. campuses there). It would be quite easy to include U.C.S.D. as another stop on some of these artists tours. For some of the larger or more expensive touring groups, such as the Dancers of Bali, it might be possible to work with another part of the U.C.S.D. bureaucracy and present a larger concert to a wider audience. It might also be possible to work with other departments such as Visual Arts, Cultural Traditions, or Drama and Dance since these arts are often mutually intertwined with music in non-western cultures.

I feel it is important to also include workshops with the performance whenever possible. It is here perhaps where people will gain a greater understanding of how the music is put together. In some instances, such as in Javanese or African music, it would be possible, if the workshop could last a few days, for students to actually participate in a performance.

Taking a longer view of the potential instructional program in non-western music, one is immediately presented with the question of the specific type of orientation such a program should take. I propose a program that is directly in line with the two primary interests of this department, composition and performance. It is often the case that academic departments concentrate on the standard ethnomusicological approach of studying music in culture. This results in a great deal of effort spent studying the social context of the music in a specific culture, covering such subjects as the social role of the musicians, religious and philosophical influences on the music, and cultural history. While all this information is valuable, it is usually done to

the detriment of actual direct contact with the music, namely performance. This approach is perhaps most appropriate for an institution like U.C. Berkeley which has musicology as its primary focus. But, for U.C.S.D, which is a community of performers and composers, the most relevant approach would be to study the music of the culture and thus concentrate on performance. This is also the best way to extract information relevant to composition (such as formal, rhythmic, polyphonic, and timbral organization) in oral music traditions. The material covered by the standard ethnomusicological approach can be obtained by direct contact with a musician from the culture in question. Indeed, this is how the ethnomusicologists obtained their information in the first place.

Another problem which immediately comes to mind is the availability and expense of instruments upon which to teach.

I propose the construction of an American Gamelon (gamelon is the integrated orchestra from Indonesia which consists primarily, though not exclusively, of metallophones and gongs) which would be able to faithfully reproduce the timbre and form of the three main gamelon traditions of Indonesia, and additionally be useful (through extension of the instruments intonation and range) to composers of contemporary music.

I suggest this orientation towards gamelon for a number of reasons. First, there has been a long tradition of gamelon on the West Coast and consequently there are several native teachers of Indonesian music in the state in addition to some of their very experienced American students, who are sometimes more useful in teaching beginning Americans because of their ability to relate to the specific problems of being an American learning Indonesian music.

Gamelon itself is expanding at a phenomenal rate in this country's colleges and universities. Lou Harrison, who is trying to keep track of the expansion of gamelon in America, has told me there are around 75 gamelons in the country, including full scale Javanese Court Gamelons at five institutions, among them U.C.L.A. and U.C.B.

The reasons for this expansion are numerous. Besides the exquisite beauty and variety of the sound produced by a gamelon (which is probably the primary reason for this interest), the music is particularly well suited to teaching because the stratified structure of the polyphony allows for both virtuoso musicians and relative novices (in terms of manual techniques) to play essential roles in the totality of the music. Thus, one can participate almost immediately and as one gains understanding and physical expertise, one can move to more complex parts in the polyphony. This is also the case in much African music, which would also be well suited to U.C.S.D.

Another primary reason for this focus on gamelon is its relevance to trends in contemporary music composition. Such composers as Lou Harrison and Steve Reich acknowledge direct influence on their writing by the music of Indonesia. Indeed, there is a young, though strong, movement in the U.S. which is being called "American Gamelon." These are ensembles of instruments built by Americans but modeled (in a variety of ways) on Indonesian gamelons (of which there are a great variety). These groups are performing both traditional Indonesian music and new music by contemporary American composers for these instruments. Several of these compositions by Lou Harrison (who would, along with his colleague Bill Colvig, have to be considered the fathers of American Gamelon) are published and several recordings are forthcoming. One, on Cambridge Records, includes a piece by Lou Harrison performed on a full gamelon built by myself and a piece by Richard Felciano (commissioned by the International

Musicological Society for its conference this summer) for Javanese Gamelon and grand organ. There will also be a record, on the 1750 Arch Street label, of Lou Harrison's gamelon compositions performed on my gamelon. Several compositions for gamelon have been published in Soundings, and there are several performing American gamelons presenting these works.

The design and construction of American gamelons is not particularly difficult nor expensive. In fact, given the tools and a space to work, it would be possible for a class to be organized the purpose of which would be the construction of a gamelon. This allows students direct contact with the physics of sound (a topic much discussed around here but less often made available to direct experience). In addition to the experience of building oneself an instrument upon which to play music.

As a result of a grant from the San Francisco Foundation, I have a complete set of designs with detailed instructions and drawings for the gamelon which I built. The gamelon was just one ensemble of several which were built for this grant, the purpose of which was the design a world music curriculum for teaching in the schools. Other ensembles included ones modeled upon West African, Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern instrumental groups.

The gamelon which was built for the San Francisco Foundation and shown in the article could be built for \$1500. This includes materials and labor. This cost could be potentially reduced if materials were available through the University. This is for a complete set of instruments in a single tuning system. The actual complete Javanese gamelon has two complete sets of instruments, each with a distinctly different tuning system. Balinese gamelons have only one tuning system. The labor cost could be substantially reduced if the gamelon were built as a class project or by an interested group of students. Some of this labor saving amount would be offset by the need for more tools (for simultaneous working of several individuals) and material and tool loss because of inexperience. However, I still feel that this would represent a substantial reduction in cost.

It should also be pointed out that a gamelon of this design and size is very easily expandable (in any increments) in size, range, intonation, and timbre as the needs, funds, and interest dictates. It should also be pointed out that a set of instruments with only a single tuning system is not a problem since there is a complete repertoire of pieces for either system, and it is not uncommon to find single tuning gamelons in Indonesia.

Thank You Sincerely,

Paul Dresher

"Talking Drums" Of T Beat A Path To The

by A. Rithmick

The gamelan, Indonesia's version of the European symphony orchestra, includes as many as 30 percussion instruments. Western ears, unaccustomed to so much drumming, are often surprised at its melodic ring. But in that vast, wonder world in and around the Indian Ocean, "talking drums" are an ancient, polyphonic tradition.

The stateside evolution of this sound in the last 15 years -- through psychedelics, electronics and ethnomusicology -- has produced 40 American gamelans. They have become a new "trance music" playground for westerners. Here, a funky Berkeley gamelan of aluminum and redwood has begun to reach the people over the last few years.

Built largely by Dan Schmidt and Paul Dresher, the Berkeley Gamelan was seeded in 1974 when composers, instrument builders and players came together at the Center for World Music at the old St. John's Presbyterian Church at College and Derby. The inspiration for their experimentation was a magnificent Javanese gamelan which the Center's Sam Scripps had brought to the U.S.

That instrument has since been given to the University of California, on the condition that it be made available to the public. Consequently, it has made its presence vibrantly felt through the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts and the Cazadero Music Camp (see Barb, Aug. 26).

Said Dresher: "I got a grant to build ethnic instruments in 1975, but I needed more money to build a gamelan. I've completed one tuning system of a gamelan, and Dan Schmidt has done another."

Schmidt got into traditional gamelan while studying for his masters degree at Cal Arts in Valencia. He now sees the instrument as a way to break through the elite quality of much western music.

"It is non-virtuoso," he said, "and doesn't demand technique. Most important, it's not soloistic, but cooperative."

Dresher furthers this philosophy by pointing out that the gamelan is polyphonic and fits into contemporary musical thought. Both he and Schmidt agree that instrument building is essential to the gamelan experience.

The pair used fallen redwood rounds and aluminum discs and tubes to build the Berkeley Gamelan. Dresher built the disc-like xylophone part of the gamelan, while Schmidt produced tubes which supplied a skeletal melody. They are convinced that anyone can do it.

The Berkeley Gamelan reached a high



The East West

joint this spring when it was played at the 60th birthday celebration for Lou Harrison (the godfather of the local gamelan) at the new St. John's Church. This transplanted Indonesian instrument seems to have a promising future in its new Berkeley home.

Through the gamelan, Schmidt sees the growth of world music in Berkeley. "Musicians tend to want to take music of other cultures to another space before they understand it," he said. "But one must get steeped in the musical experience and know the strength of the instruments."

Dresher would like to further his efforts with new sounds, ethnic intonations, polyrhythms and new timbres. "I hope to expand and reinforce the timbre," he said, "and produce layered textures like a Bach fugue."

To further these ends, Schmidt is developing a more sophisticated gamelan which will be made of particle board. Since Dresher will soon be leaving for UC San Diego to study for his masters, taking parts of the Berkeley Gamelan with him, Schmidt will also have to complete the local instrument.

Dan Schmidt will be teaching gamelan courses through the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts this fall -- a Javanese gamelan class for adults at UC Berkeley, and a Berkeley gamelan class for young people at his home. For more information, call 234-5624.

The Berkeley Gamelan will perform at the Exploratorium, 3601 Lyon, S.F., at 8 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 14. 25 cents.



The Berkeley Gamelan