Process Music for Gamelan
Works by composers of Gamelan Son of Lion

UCSC Performance Studio 131, January 27, 2017 4pm

Macramé/Counter-Braid (ca. 1975)	Barbara Benary (b. 1946)
Braid (1971/1974)	Barbara Benary
Gamelan II (ca. 1975)	Philip Corner (b. 1933)
Sleeping Braid (1976)	Barbara Benary

Jenny Debouzek/Zeki Schwartz—Soloists

Circular Thoughts (1974)	Daniel Goode (b. 1936)
Backtracking Braid (ca. 1979)	Barbara Benary

This afternoon's program includes a collection of early compositions for gamelan by American composers. The three composers featured co-founded the New York based composers' collective Gamelan Son of Lion in 1976, and the works presented today are representative of that group's early repertory known as "process music for gamelan." Each of these works engages different kinds of mathematical, procedural, and/or conceptual processes that draw on the specific characteristics of Javanese gamelan instruments in different ways. Notes to each piece may be found on the reverse side.

Special thanks to Amy Beal, Barbara Benary, Bill Coulter, Jenny DeBouzek, Rae Ann Stahl, Burhan Sukarma, Undang Sumarna, and the UCSC Music department.

Performers

Jay Arms, Brian Baumbusch, Sam Cushman, Ed Garcia, Zachary Hejny, Lucas Helland, Jon Myers, Zeki Schwartz, and Emerson Sebastia

Guest Artist

Jenny DeBouzek, Contributing Faculty, Contemporary Music program,
Santa Fe University of Art and Design
Artistic Director of Gamelan Encantada

The two companion pieces ***Macramé*** and ***Counter-Braid*** combine early minimalist techniques with an idiosyncratic reimagining of Javanese musical structures. The *saron* trio plays a melody known as the *braid row*, devised by way of a systematic arrangement of the pitch gamut of the *pélog* scale. The trio gradually phases the *braid row* to produce to a new pattern, after which the full gamelan joins with a countermelody that Benary calls a *balungan*, the term for the skeletal melody of Javanese *karawitan.*

Braid is the earliest composition on this program and was originally composed for the "droning group" Benary participated in at Wesleyan University in the late 1960s. Each player follows the same fourteen-note *braid row* used in *Macramé,* but proceeds through the row slowly at his or her own pace, interlocking with one another, and alternating only two notes at a time. The resulting patterns variable from performance to performance, but are restricted by the number of choices available to the performers. This piece can be played on any instrumentation with a scale of any number of pitches. This performance uses the seven-tone Balinese *Semar Pegulingan* in order to utilize the particular characteristics of the paired tunings.

Gamelan II is the second of Philip Corner's five hundred some compositions for gamelan. The piece highlights the characteristic of gamelan that Mantle Hood described as "stratified polyphony," but through Corner's own approach using an easily perceivable arithmetic process beginning with the *peking* and ending with the *gong ageng*. The companion piece, titled simply *Gamelan* (not performed today), uses the same idea in reverse (from *gong* to *peking*), but employing an exponential rather than arithmetic process.

Benary composed ***Sleeping Braid*** as a lullaby for her then newborn daughter, Lyra Silverstein. It uses only two of the percussion instruments of the full gamelan with *kecapi* (or other zither), *suling* (bamboo flute), and voice. The *demung* and *slenthem* play a canon based on the *pélog braid row* with symmetrical ornamentation provided by the *kecapi.* The *Suling* and voice interact to produce a second canon, alternately aligning or departing from the pitch material of the first canon.

Circular Thoughts draws its process from a solo-clarinet piece composed by Goode. It explores a continuously repeating seven-tone scale, which is subjected to different accent patterns that converge and produce contrasting, hocketed melodies between two groups. This lengthy piece begins slowly and introduces new material gradually, increasing the rate of change as the piece approaches its conclusion.

The process of braiding pitches to produce a *braid row* can be applied to any pitch gamut. The concluding piece, ***Backtracking Braid,*** illustrates this concept by applying the same process used in four of the preceding pieces to the five-tone *slendro* scale. This elaborate piece draws more overtly from Javanese gamelan structures, but treats them in unusual ways. The piece begins with a melody produced by a process of subtraction over a sixteen beat cycle. This melody is then "inverted" so that its concluding pitch is shifted to each tone of the *slendro* scale. After the last inversion, the same melody is played in canon, and the sixteen-beat melody is superimposed over a five-beat gong cycle (punctuated by the *slenthem* and *kenong*). Following this canon, the instrumentalist shift to play the complete *slendro braid row* eventually slowing down and "backtracking." Each backtracking slows the tempo roughly by half, and filling in the space with more elaborate melodies extrapolated from the initial *braid row*. These backtrackings are recognizably influenced by the Javanese notion of *irama*, but adjusted to the mathematical symmetry of the colotomic and melody structuring of Benary's composition. This performance draws on our own familiarity with Sundanese music in our approach to the *gong* cycles and *kendang* performance.