Greetings from the Director

Greetings from the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments. In this issue of the Stearns Newsletter, I offer you a number of interesting reports and notes: a summary of Stearns activities since the beginning of the year, a call for membership, a personal note from Professor Evan Chambers, U-M, who used a set of Stearns angklung (tuned bamboo tubes) in his new composition, and an essay by Professor Randy Baier describing the instrument. I hope you enjoy reading the materials, and that you will send in your comments and suggestions. Your communications with the Stearns is critical to our future growth. Please send your communications to: The Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, School of Music, Theatre, and Dance, University of Michigan, 1100 Baits Drive, Ann Arbor, MI, 48109. Or email: Carol Stepanchuk at “cstep@umich.edu.”

Lectures-Recitals

In the spring and fall of 2008, the collection presented three lectures and co-sponsored a concert. The first lecture, entitled “Cimbaloms in the Carpathians: Moravian Music, Central European Musical Instrument,” was presented on February 16th, by Dr. Jesse Johnston, who was then a Ph.D. candidate of the Musicology Department of the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, U-M. With historical pictures and recordings, Dr. Johnston told a fascinating story about the cimbalom (hammer dulcimer), and its transformation from a traditional musical instrument commonly found in central Europe to a musical and ethnic icon of Moravia, one that is now featured in all kinds of Moravian music.

The second lecture was presented on September 27, by Professor Randal Baier of Eastern Michigan University. In the lecture, entitled, “The Sundanese Angklung: A History through Photographs and Sound,” Professor Baier showed not only specimens of the instrument but also a number of historical pictures and recordings. The question and answer session that followed his lecture turned into a lively workshop.
Lectures, continued

when he discussed and demonstrated performance techniques. See his article on the angklung on this page.

On March 15, internationally renowned Korean komungo (zither) virtuoso and composer, Jun Hi Kim performed a unique recital, one that the Stearns co-sponsored with the Center for Korean Studies, U-M. Entitled “Digital Buddha,” the piece featured both traditional/acoustic komungo and its electrically amplified counterpart. To enhance the expression of her music, Ms. Kim had visual images projected on a big screen in the concert hall, illustrating her new sonorities and interlocking rhythms. Reflecting both the traditional and the technologically advanced sides of contemporary Korea, Ms. Kim’s 70-minute performance left deep impressions on its audience.

The last lecture of 2008 was presented by Professor Amy Stillman, U-M, an internationally renowned authority on hula music and dance. Entitled “Hula Sounding!” Professor Stillman’s lecture featured live-performance of hula dancing and chanting, which cap-

The Sundanese Angklung

by Dr. Randal Baier
Eastern Michigan University

A ngklung is a popular bamboo instrument from West Java, Indonesia, played in ensembles that accompany agricultural ritual, public processions and a myriad of popular music occasions. It is closely associated with Sundanese culture, yet its popularity has become a kind of identifier within national Indonesian arts, education and media, and its popularity has spread to other Southeast Asian countries, especially Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. One telling example of angklung serving as a nostalgic reminder of home is its popularity among Indonesian students living in Japan, shown by this illustration taken from an entry in the SandClow blog, which merges both manga-style illustration with mention of the Tokyo-based Anklung Kanto student club.

Angklung ensembles play compositions using both indigenous and Western tunings in separate sets, with each player shaking a single instrument in interlocking patterns to create a collective melody. In some ways the sonority of an angklung ensemble is reminiscent of marimba or steel drum ensembles. Traditional Sundanese ensembles are tuned to the indigenous five-tone scale known as salèndro, with each tube tuned in octaves. The Western-tuned angklung, however, consist not only of tubes tuned...
Sundanese Angklung, continued

in octaves but also tuned as major, minor and 7th chords. In addition to ensemble playing, angklung are also suspended on racks, which allows a single performer to play full compositions, perhaps accompanied by bass guitar and drums, a style that is quite popular in clubs, hotels and television performances. Although most Indonesians probably know about angklung through their use in the public schools and musical variety shows on TV—witness a 2007 cover of Rihanna’s “My Umbrella” by Toi Angklung on the Malaysian satellite channel Astro Ria—the ensemble continues to represent a rich Sundanese tradition connected to village life and agricultural ritual.

Each angklung is a shaken instrument consisting of 2-4 tuned bamboo tubes, ranging in size from several inches to upwards of five feet in height. These large angklung are characteristic of the ensembles found in the mountainous areas of western West Java. A representative example from the Angklung Gubrag ensemble of Cipining village is pictured below:

There is really no one standard ensemble, but the well-known, or “iconic,” angklung buncis of the Bandung-Sumedang region consists of nine to eighteen angklung players, four dog-dog drummers, and a terompet (double reed oboe) player. The musicians are frequently joined in performance by dancers or martial arts performers. In the following illustration from Ujungberung village, a neighborhood buncis group performs in a public square, varying their positions by creating circular, linear and figure-eight configurations.

*Buncis* is one of several traditional ensembles, but angklung can also be organized into massive public orchestras, in some cases consisting of several thousand instruments performing at political rallies or festive state-oriented commemorations. Due to ubiquitous public media, it is more likely that one might hear a rendition of the theme from “Mission Impossible” rather than Sundanese songs such as “Kacang Buncis” or “Doclang,” but village ensembles still perform in many areas of West Java and often participate in harvest rituals and other annual celebrations.

The village tradition of angklung represented by the *buncis* and *gubrag* ensembles pictured above is intimately connected to both agricultural and rice-cycle ritual as well as annual ceremonies marking national, family or religious events. It is not uncommon for groups to perform for circumcisions, regional sports competitions, and *Tujuhbelasan*, or Indonesian Independence Day. In the agricultural sphere, however, angklung has a more symbolic and somewhat prescribed role, since it is one of the major agricultural genres, represented by both its sound quality and its lively performance style, which entertains the rice goddess and symbolically brings prosperity to the earth on a regular basis.

In the agricultural realm, which is truly angklung’s...
University in Chicago, and the author of *Songs from Continuity and Change in Azerbaijani Mugham* will lecture on Azerbaijani music and musical instruments in her presentation: “Ethno-historicism: two heroines marking the borders between traditional and composed music” Dr. Naroditskaya will discuss two Azerbaijani operas that frame a hundred years of Azerbaijan’s history. She writes: “I am focusing on the intriguing juxtaposition of oral and written, composed and improvised music, western and native instruments within these operas. The issues of musical language and musical choices are entwined with the discussion of gender and the transition from a Muslim province to a Soviet Republic and most recently to the Azerbaijani State.”

On March 21, The Stearns welcomes Weslyan professor Sumarsam when he presents “Gamelan Instruments and Ensembles Throughout History” His presentation will examine gamelan instruments and ensembles from early drawings on the walls of temples, early drawings by European adventurers, early description of music in Javanese poems, and recent video documentation. All three of the above lectures will be held at 2:00 in Room 506, Burton Memorial Tower, Central Campus, U-M.

Finally, the intricate and fascinating classical Chinese opera form, *kunqu*, will be the subject of a special Stearns presentation at the main branch of the Ann Arbor Public Library on March 14th at 2:00pm. The Stearns collection will welcome Professor Zhang Xunpeng, an internationally renowned *kunqu* artist and teacher at the Shanghai Theater and Drama college.

**Upcoming Lectures-Recitals**

In the winter of 2009, the collection will feature four presentations. We will begin the new year with lecture on January 31 by Piotr Michalowski, the George G. Cameron Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the U-M, who will present a lecture entitled, “The Harmonies of the Sumerian Spheres: On The Music of Ancient Mesopotamia.”

On February 14, Professor Inna Naroditskaya, Associate Professor of Musicology at Northwestern University in Chicago, and the author of *Songs from Continuity and Change in Azerbaijani Mugham* will lecture on Azerbaijani music and musical instruments in her presentation: “Ethno-historicism: two heroines marking the borders between traditional and composed music” Dr. Naroditskaya will discuss two Azerbaijani operas that frame a hundred years of Azerbaijan’s history. She writes: “I am focusing on the intriguing juxtaposition of oral and written, composed and improvised music, western and native instruments within these operas. The issues of musical language and musical choices are entwined with the discussion of gender and the transition from a Muslim province to a Soviet Republic and most recently to the Azerbaijani State.”

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origin, the fertility of rice is represented by the Sundanese rice deity known as *Nyi Pohaci*. The six to eight month growth of rice is ritually likened to the gestation and birth of a child, and certain oral texts and folklore from throughout West Java and the region point to the importance of bamboo in this complex of associations. In physical reality bamboo is used in many ways to help in the growth of rice, for instance as irrigation tools and as noise makers to keep birds from eating the crop. On the belief side, clumps of bamboo are often described as locations for spiritual power, and the echo-like resonance of bamboo itself can have a haunting, or spirit-filled quality. Certain aspects of the rice cycle, from planting, to irrigation and weeding, and finally to harvest and storage, have various performances associated with them.

The performance of *angklung gubrag*, for instance, is marked by the recitation of a text that describes the various characteristics of the body of Nyi Pohaci, represented by various colors, as she invests the earth with her fertility. The *gubrag* musicians tell a story about their village, Cipining, which describes a pestilence, curiously the result of Nyi Pohaci at one time being bored and therefore unwilling to fertilize the crops. As the result of some plaintive entreaties and negotiations by an inventive young boy, who created enjoyable-sounding angklung and other bamboo devices, and by the villagers, who agreed to perform on a regular basis, Pohaci agreed to return to the fields for annual angklung performances that would ensure bountiful harvests once again. This is but one instance of similar performance traditions throughout West Java that confirm angklung’s place in the link between agriculture, spirituality, and musical celebration.

As both a deeply symbolic agricultural tradition and as a popular educational and entertainment genre, angklung continues to serve as a marker of regional Sundanese and national Indonesian music. Perhaps it is the sophisticated simplicity of this instrument that is the key to its appeal. It is born of a natural, widely available material; its sound is appealing and “friendly,” simultaneously rich in resonance but also discrete; and, apart from its use as a solo instrument in certain contexts, it continues to represent collective music making. Although identified with Southeast Asian traditions, the appearance of the angklung in Turkish musician Okay Temiz’s jazz fusion recording, “Fish Market,” is but one indication that angklung’s incorporation into global popular music has taken it beyond its regional roots.

**Stearns Instruments and a World Music Education serve U. of M. Composer**

The Stearns asked U. of M. Composition Chair Evan Chambers to reflect on his use of the angklung in the orchestration of his recent song cycle for orchestra. The University Symphony Orchestra performed the work on tour in 2008, using angklungs loaned from the Stearns Collection. Professor Chambers writes:

“When I was an undergraduate at Bowling Green State University, I played in a Balinese Gamelan Angklung, something that turned out to be a formative experience for me. I was a particular fan of playing the fast interlocking patterns on the *angklung* (a tuned set of bamboo rattles), and on the *rayongs* (rows of button gongs). In 2007, when I was orchestrating the introduction to The Old Burying Ground, I was searching to find a way to create a pivotal hair-raising moment of chorused wooden rattling sounds when I remembered my days playing the angklung. It was just the right sound, and I was thrilled to learn that the Stearns Collection owns a large set of angklung used for demonstration purposes by its outreach program.

Working with Stearns staff, I selected the ideal pitches for the individual instruments needed, and the Stearns generously loaned them for use during the premiere of the piece by the University Symphony Orchestra in Ann Arbor in 2007, as well as for a commercial recording and a concert tour that included dates in Oberlin Ohio, Ithaca NY, and also in Carnegie Hall in New York in February 08. I’m grateful to the Stearns Collection; without their generosity, getting just the right sound for that crucial and evocative moment in the piece would not have been possible!
Representing the School of Music, Theatre, and Dance, U-M, the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments will host the 38th Annual Meeting of the American Musical Instrument Society. Founded in 1971 to promote understanding of musical instruments in all historical and contemporary cultures, this international organization provides a forum for all institutions and individuals interested in musical instruments to meet and share their knowledge. Its annual meetings are noted for rich programs of paper presentations, discussions, music demonstrations and performances, auctions of musical instruments, and convivial activities. The Stearns is proud to host the conference. Welcome to Ann Arbor, AMIS delegates! For further details about AMIS and the 2009 conference in Ann Arbor, see http://www.amis.org.

Mr. Chris Dempsey, part-time curator of the collection for recent years, has left to pursue his career interests. He has contributed much to the collection: most notably, he formatted many issues of the Stearns Newsletter, set up the on-line database of the collection, and took many photographs of its musical instruments and activities, building up its archive of images. Until the Stearns can hire a new curator, part time or full time, various curatorial tasks will be shared among Stearns staff. Ms. Suzanne Camino, a long-time member of the Stearns, has assumed new duties as the Assistant Director of the Stearns. Ms. Carol Stephanchuk continues as the Outreach Director, a role that she has played for several years; thanks to her efforts, outreach activities of the collection have greatly developed. Mr. Benjamin Rolston, a student at the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, is now serving as a part-time assistant. If you would like to join the collection as a volunteer staff and help out with various Stearns tasks and activities, please email Carol Stepanchuk at “cstep@umich.edu.”

To better communicate with Stearns patrons, and to expand support for Stearns activities, we would like to invite you to become a member of the Friends of the Stearns, a volunteer and support group for the collection. If you are already a member, please renew your membership. The Friends of the Stearns has always been an integral component of the collection and it is time to reinvigorate our communication and collaboration! We want to see all friends of the collection at its exciting lectures and displays. To become a new member or renew your membership, please fill out the attached membership form and send it, with the annual membership fee of $25.00, to: the Stearns Collections, The School of Music, Theater and Dance, University of Michigan, 1100 Baits Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.