

The Bates Gamelan and L/A Arts
presents
Contemporary Music for Sundanese Gamelan Degung
with guest composer-performers Burhan Sukarma, *suling* (bamboo flute)
and Brian Shankar Adler, *tabla*

April 13, 2024 at 7:30
L/A Arts,

Program

Samagaha (“twilight”) (1998) laras pélog degung	Burhan Sukarma (b. 1945)
	Burhan Sukarma, <i>suling</i>
Ayang-ayangan (“tangled”) (2001) laras pélog degung	Burhan Sukarma
	Burhan Sukarma, <i>suling</i>
Ningnang (“disharmony”) (2018) laras madenda	Burhan Sukarma
	Burhan Sukarma, <i>suling</i>
We Are A Body of Water (world premiere) Themes and Variations for gamelan degung, cello & tabla (2023)	Brian Shankar Adler (b.1983)
I. Together, We II. Break Patterns III. Unlocking Possibilities V. Thoughts and Dreams VI. Confluence VII. Submerging / Emerging VIII. Together	
	Nathaniel Taylor, cello Brian Shankar Adler, <i>tabla</i> Burhan Sukarma, <i>suling</i>
Maya Selas laras pélog degung	traditional West Javanese
	Burhan Sukarma, <i>suling</i>

Program Notes

Samagaha. The title of this piece is a Sundanese metaphor for emotional confusion. In this contemporary work, Sukarma employs a common Indonesian compositional strategy: recombining and recontextualizing motifs and segments of other pieces. He creates meaning in the work by juxtaposing the associations and expectations that listeners have for each musical component, manipulating each item as a poet manipulates words or phrases to create a new whole. Samagaha features extensive *suling* solos which contrast with lively ensemble playing.

Ayang-Ayangan (“tangled”) has four sections, each of which is an expanded version of the previous one. As the essence of the tune becomes more and more “untangled” in each section, it acquires a different affect – hurried, solemn, lively, and introspective. Burhan Sukarma composed this

piece many years ago, but it has more recently been frequently performed and recorded by Burhan's gamelan group Pusaka Sunda.

“**Ningnang**,” pits two clashing rhythmic treatments against each other. The first section introduces a dynamic melody set in triple meter. In the second section, several of the metallophones (peking and cempres) insist on continuing their triplet figurations while the other resources (drum, bonang, and sarons) resolutely switch to the duple rhythmic patterns that characterize most gamelan music. These dueling rhythms abruptly give way, in the third section, to a very slow, indubitably duple accompaniment to a beautiful suling melody, only to return to the vigorous triple-meter first section. Both duple and triple work well on their own, but can they find a way to occupy the same space at the same time? Attentive listeners may come to realize that *ningnang*—which means “mismatch” or “clash” in the Sundanese language—can be a good thing. --Henry Spiller

We Are a Body of Water, Composers Notes

I first heard a gamelan in Boston, Massachusetts while studying at New England Conservatory. I closed my eyes and the shimmering tones of metallophones reminded me of the sounds, states and forces of water. The performance made a lasting impression on me both as a percussionist, with its complex interlocking rhythms, and as a composer, with its long, cyclical forms.

Fast forward more than twenty years and I was fortunate to receive a commission from Bates to compose a work for their gamelan ensemble. I knew right away that I wanted the piece to relate to water, but I wasn't sure how.

Soon thereafter, I visited Iguazu, the site of one of the world's largest waterfalls, which shares a border with Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. I was awestruck by the scale, the force and the flooding that was taking place at this confluence of rivers. My usual thought patterns were halted and WATER was all that I could hear or think about; it was everywhere! As I stood viewing the falls from the perspective of each of the three countries, it struck me that the rivers are not separate, countries are not separate, people are not separate. Water is the single element that connects us all. At this moment, I knew that I had found my inspiration for the piece, and that it would be called: “We Are a Body of Water.”

The compositional process began with a series of informative discussions with Professor Gina Fatone, the director of the Bates Gamelan. I made recordings of the fundamental tone of each bar, gong and drum in the gamelan set (51 in total) and experimented with various techniques of sound production. I was curious about the sonic possibilities of mixing gamelan with instruments from other parts of the world (tabla and cello) and juxtaposing other scales and pitches against the gamelan's fixed pentatonic scales. It was also important to me that the gamelan did not take a subservient role accompanying solo instruments, but rather to offer each instrument a democratic voice in creating a larger melodic statement. Inspired by my memories of Iguazu falls, I explored themes, which slowly developed into eight distinct movements and 15 minutes of music.

As the writing continued, I couldn't help but follow the global events of 2023 and found that in doing so, the themes of water took on a more complex meaning. The confluence of existential threats on humanity's horizon: climate change, border wars, tensions resulting from racism, income inequality and more, related to water as well and became intertwined in the symbolism and structure of the piece.

Ultimately, “We Are a Body of Water” stands as an eight part call to action, to shift the paradigm, come together and break humanity's destructive patterns. Though conceptually “heavy” in nature, the piece emerges from a deep sense of hope that the most beautiful, unimaginable possibilities may result if we can act together and not separately.

It has been a pleasure collaborating with the Bates Gamelan during the rehearsal process. I thank them for their efforts and commitment to this piece. --Brian Shankar Adler

Mayaselas. This stately traditional piece provides a backdrop for florid *suling* improvisations and sets a peaceful mood.

Artist Bios

Burhan Sukarma is first and foremost a virtuoso on the *suling* (West Javanese bamboo flute). Burhan's style of playing the *suling* has influenced all succeeding generations of younger players in West Java, Indonesia. His extensive teaching and concertizing activities in the United States have inspired American musicians and audiences since he immigrated here three decades ago. Burhan's ability to make his simple bamboo flute produce soulful, expressive melodic lines that speak across cultural boundaries has earned him an international reputation.

Burhan was born in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia, and became interested in music as a young man. From 1972-1986 he was famous as a principal musician at the prestigious Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) in Bandung. He toured France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Saudi Arabia as a cultural representative of Indonesia. Through these activities, Burhan became—and remains today—the standard against which all other West Javanese *suling* players are judged.

Burhan's countless recordings (numbering in the hundreds) for Indonesian recording companies in the 1970s and 1980s epitomize the astonishing musical creativity that thrived in those decades. One of his many recordings, *Degung Sangkala*, achieved unprecedented popularity throughout Indonesia, transcending traditional regional/ethnic boundaries. When Elektra/Nonesuch released the album in the US in the mid 1980s, Burhan's inventive improvisations on the *suling* came to the attention of non-Indonesian listeners for the first time.

Burhan is associated in particular with the development of a new instrumental genre, called *kacapi-suling*, which featured rhapsodic improvisations on the *suling* accompanied by two *kacapi* (zithers). Live broadcasts of *kacapi-suling* via RRI Bandung reached millions of listeners, many of whom rushed out to buy the inexpensive cassette recordings of Burhan and his colleagues. Burhan was and continues to be involved in experiments to expand the repertory of the *gamelan degung* (small bronze percussion ensemble), again with remarkable success. His ground-breaking recordings are popular all over Indonesia; it is not uncommon to hear a recording of Burhan's *suling* playing luring foreign tourists into souvenir shops on the distant island of Bali!

Since relocating to the United States, Burhan has explored ways to transplant and transform his art in this new context. Burhan has appeared all over the United States, Indonesia and Canada with a cross-section of American musicians. His accomplishments include appearances at the Ravinia Festival in Chicago, his solo improvised *suling* concerts for CNMAT (Center for New Music and Technology) in Berkeley, and appearances with the Evergreen Club in Toronto. Teaching Sundanese music to Americans has provided another avenue for furthering his art; Burhan was artist-in-residence at the University of Washington and has taught at San Jose State University, UC Santa Cruz, UC Berkeley, Western Carolina University, as well as privately in his San Jose studio.

Pusaka Sunda, a gamelan group comprising American musicians which Burhan founded in 1987 with his wife, Rae Ann Stahl, provides a voice for Burhan's own compositions as well as a means for promulgating the traditional music of West Java. "Pusaka Sunda" means "Sundanese heirloom" ("Sundanese" is the language and ethnic identity of most West Javanese), and in choosing that name, Burhan stresses the connection of the group and the music it plays to his Sundanese homeland and emphasizes his belief that the group represents the inevitable flowering of Sundanese art which, despite

the American heritage of many of its members, is nevertheless *khas Sunda* (truly Sundanese). (See PusakaSunda.org)

With Pusaka Sunda, Burhan has produced six CDs of traditional, arranged, and original music. Burhan and Pusaka Sunda have performed all over the United States, including at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, and have received grants from the California Arts Council and Santa Clara County in support of Burhan's compositional activities.

Brian Shankar Adler is a multidisciplinary percussionist and composer. Described as "a polyrhythmic force... New York City gritty yet still somehow capable of evoking the delicacy of a summer breeze..." (JazzTimes), his work transcends the terrain between genre and geographic region, asking: *how can we find connection through rhythm?*

Adler has performed in caves, forests and adjacent glacial ice fields as well as Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center and The Stone. He has recorded and/or composed for forty albums including his solo works: *For a Gallery on the Moon* (Chant Records, 2020), *Fourth Dimension* (Chant Records, 2019), and his recent collaboration: *Air Space: Cricket Cipher* (Adhyâropa Records, 2024). With an equal focus on improvisational and compositional practices, he uses rhythm as a tool for collaboration.

Brian Shankar Adler has toured, performed and/or recorded with Ballet Hispanico's *Doña Perón*, Kamala Sankaram's operas *Thumbprint* (LA Opera), *A Rose* (Houston Grand Opera) and *The Jungle Book* (Glimmerglass), and Elizabeth Swados' final theatrical productions *The Nomad* and *The Golem*. He traveled to Germany to perform with singer Sunny Kim and Kuwait to perform with oudist Ahmed Alshaiba. He has been featured in Jason Bivins' book "Spirits Rejoice," The Center For Deep Listening's "A Year of Deep Listening," NPR's "New Sounds," PBS's "Next at the Kennedy Center" as well as Downbeat and Modern Drummer Magazine. His music video, "Mantra" won best music video at Transcinema International Film Festival in Peru and an official selection at Quiet City Film Festival in New York City.

Adler has composed over one hundred pieces for various ensembles. He was commissioned to compose and arrange several pieces for Palaver Strings and to write "We Are a Body of Water" for the Bates College Gamelan Orchestra. Adler was a composer in residence at Antenna Cloud Farm and he received multiple Composer's Now Grants, and a 2023 ASCAP Plus Award. Adler is currently on faculties at Bowdoin, Bates College and Vermont Jazz Center.

Gamelan Notes

laras means "scale"

pélog degung = Sundanese 5-tone scale (Bates pelog degung is currently C-Db-Eb-G-Ab)

madenda (or sorog) = Sundanese five-tone scale (Bates madenda is F-G-Ab-C-Db)

Gamelan is the generic Indonesian term for a set of musical instruments, but usually refers to a traditional ensemble comprising mainly bronze metallophones (instruments with metal "keys" suspended over resonators), horizontally mounted "gong-chimes," and vertically hanging gongs.

In the mid-twentieth century, as the result of ethnomusicology programs in universities such as UCLA and Wesleyan, gamelan ensembles began appearing in academic institutions in the U.S. and other countries outside of Indonesia. Since then, contact between Indonesian and non-Indonesian artists, teachers, composers and students has continually increased. Currently, it is not uncommon to find a gamelan and an Indonesian artist functioning within a music department at a U.S. college or university.

Emblematic music of the Sundanese people of West Java, gamelan degung was created in the early 20th century for local regents who administered the colonial Dutch cultivation system for the province. These regents promoted music and other performing arts for their own entertainment and for the pleasure of other Dutch colonial aristocrats. Retaining its associations with elegance, in Indonesia degung is currently played for weddings, receptions, and other events where a touch of formality is sought. In Indonesia, gamelan instruments are played primarily by men while women frequently sing with the ensemble. Both expert and amateur gamelan ensembles exist in Indonesia; however, only a minority of the population currently participates in the making of traditional music. Western style popular music and Indian film music have the broadest appeal in contemporary Indonesian culture.

Bates houses gamelan instruments and traditional puppets from Central Java and West Java, Indonesia. The bronze gamelan degung we are performing on tonight was generously donated to Bates by Mr. Tony Lydgate of Kaula'i in 2007.

Tonight's concert was made possible through the generosity of the Brandow Family Fund for the Arts, and the Bates Music Department.

The Bates Gamelan Ensemble

Gina Fatone, director

Labeeb Ali '25

Sofia Hahn '24

Gary Jarvis**

Christine Murray*

Harris Ramlee '25

Jeremy Schrieber '24

Jess Woodhams '25

*Bates Faculty/Staff

**Community member

Special thanks to Rae Ann Stahl, Stuart Gurley, Jim Parakilas, Elijah True,
Gerald Walsh and Marisa Wickersham