Musical Instruments

Sounds of the Asia Pacific

This exhibition features Asia Pacific musical instruments from the Ethnomusicology Instrument Collection at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The collection has been acquired over the past 70 years, initially established by Professor Barbara B. Smith, and continues today under the supervision of Professor Ricardo D. Trimillos. This collection is an invaluable resource for the community because the instruments are meant to be utilized rather than to be displayed as museum pieces. Many of the instruments in the collection are used in the various musical ensembles at the university including Indonesian gamelan (traditional ensemble comprised primarily of metallophones and gongs) and Japanese gagaku (ancient court music), as well as Hawaiian and Tahitian dance, koto (Japanese zither), Chinese, Korean, Okinawan, and Philippine ensembles. The collection is comprised of nearly 2,500 instruments from across the globe.

Professor Barbara Smith first came to Hawai‘i in 1949 intending to teach Western classical music but found herself surrounded by musical cultures from across Asia and the Pacific. Her exploration into those musics led her to begin acquiring instruments from non-Western musical traditions and establish a graduate program in Ethnomusicology in 1960. By 1970, the instrument collection had become so large that a catalog of instruments was established. Through the years, instruments have been donated by ethnomusicologists, graduate students who traveled to carry out studies and fieldwork, visiting performers who preferred to leave their instruments rather than ship them home, and others who have donated family heirlooms.

The East-West Center has showcased many of the Music Department’s Asia Pacific ensembles and performers from the region. Many of the instruments displayed reflect performances presented by EWC or locally-based ensembles. Others are highlighted as unique and notable for their beautiful craftsmanship, history, or an interesting element of charm or surprise.

This exhibition also features costumes, masks, other performing arts materials, photographs, sound examples, and video to assist in understanding the fuller cultural context of the instruments. Music in the Asia Pacific region is closely associated with dance, theatre, and/or other cultural practices and this exhibition underscores these relationships. The instruments are displayed in three sections: Pacific Islands, East Asia, and South & Southeast Asia.
The Hawaiian pahu drum commonly accompanies the most sacred mele hula dances in Hawaiian performances. The pahu is a single-headed drum and the drumhead on the pahu featured in this exhibition is made of sharkskin. In Tahitian music the to’ere is the finely-crafted slit log drum made from hollowed out branches or tree trunks. The to’ere is primarily used to accompany dance but secondarily used to call meetings in the community. Panpipes are icon to the Solomon Islands. Panpipes are commonly made of bamboo and range in various sizes. Some are blown into to produce sound; larger ones are struck on one open end, using materials such as rubber slippers as mallets to create a unique sound.

East Asia

This exhibition features instruments from China, Japan, Korea, and Okinawa. Much of the music of East Asia is associated with highly-stylized theatrical traditions. Some music has its roots in royal courts while other music accompanies communal dances. The Chinese yangqin, also known as the “butterfly harp,” is played with two small elongated hammers, like the hammer dulcimer. The music of the butterfly harp accompanies vocal music, chamber music, and various Chinese theatre traditions. The Korean changgo is a double-headed hourglass-shaped drum that is used in various performance genres. In some traditional styles, the dancers themselves drum while dancing. The changgo is also used to accompany unique pansori dramatic epic storytelling performances.

In Japan the taiko drums are used for a wide variety of performances, from traditional kabuki theatre to energetic choreographed stage shows to accompaniment for communal, seasonal bon odori festival dances. The sanshin is a plucked three-string lute and is the iconic instrument of Okinawan performance traditions. Musicians often play the sanshin to accompany themselves in song.

The body of the Okinawan sanshin is covered with snakeskin.

Instruments clockwise from far left: kundu drum, Papua New Guinea; pahu drum, Hawai’i; sogo drum, Korea; sanshin, Okinawa
**South & Southeast Asia**

This exhibition features instruments from Burma (Myanmar), India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. Across the Southeast Asia region there are various ensembles that are comprised of tuned bronze kettles and various-sized gongs. There is a similarity in instrument form and their geographic distribution is linked with waterways and trade routes. Yet, the context and function of these instruments vary widely from one cultural context to another. Some performances are based in localized animist beliefs or in historical Hindu royal courts while others are based in Islamic culture.

The Javanese gamelan ensemble from Indonesia was acquired for the collection in 1970. While the entire set consists of over thirty instruments, only the gender (metallophone) and kendang (double-headed drum) are displayed in this exhibition. The gender ornaments the central melody and the musicians play with two mallets, one in each hand in a refined technique that involves damping the sound with the side of the hand as the next bar is struck. The kendang player is the leader of the gamelan ensemble, signaling tempo and dynamic changes. The kendang player follows the dramatic cues when accompanying dance or shadow puppetry performances.

The musics of India reflect the incredible diversity of the country, ranging from classical to folk traditions. Classical music in India is highly complex. Classical music of Northern India is called Hindustani music while classical music of Southern India is called Carnatic music. The two primary components of Hindustani music are the raga (melodic system) and the tala (rhythmic system). Raga do not just specify a scale of notes but often are associated with a mood, time of day, season, and color.

This exhibition features a beautifully hand-crafted sitar which is a large stringed instrument that plays ornamented melodies in Hindustani music. There are seven primary strings that are plucked while the sympathetic strings, which are never touched, resonate to add a richness to the sound. The sitar is commonly combined with the tabla drum pair which provides the rhythm. In training, the tabla rhythms are vocalized prior to being applied to the instrument. The tabla are capable of complex rhythms with an extensive vocabulary of striking techniques with individual fingers. Representing folk traditions, the Chhau drum is played to accompany masked dance performances of eastern India.

The masks and drums featured in this exhibition were donated to the collection following a performance at the East-West Center in the 1980s.


The Family Camarillo Rondalla. Photographer: Tibor Franyo. Photo courtesy of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and Hawai‘i State Archives. Instruments below, left to right: gabbang, Philippines; sapeh, Malaysia.

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The East-West Center promotes better relations and understanding among the people and nations of the United States, Asia, and the Pacific through cooperative study, research, and dialogue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1960, the Center serves as a resource for information and analysis on critical issues of common concern, bringing people together to exchange views, build expertise, and develop policy options. The Center is an independent, public, nonprofit organization with funding from the U.S. government, and additional support provided by private agencies, individuals, foundations, corporations, and governments in the region.

The East-West Center Arts Program for nearly 40 years has enriched the community through concerts, exhibitions, and community engagement focused on arts of the Asia Pacific region, and by arranging cultural and educational programs by artists who are skilled in bridging cultures.

EWC Arts Team: Karen Knudsen, director, Office of External Affairs; Eric Chang, arts program coordinator; Michael Schuster, curator; Annie Reynolds, arts program assistant; William Feitz, adjunct arts specialist; Hunter Kaye, Marina George, student assistants

Mahalo: Chiao-Wen Chiang, Benjamin Fairfield, Mary Jo Freshley, Fred Lau, Byong Won Lee, Hae In Lee, Lynn Martin, Darin Miyashiro, Byron Moon, Jane Freeman Moulin, Nola A. Nahulu, Aaron Sala, Masatoshi Shamoto, Mika Shamoto, Scott Shamoto, Travis Shaver, Sho’on Shibata, Aaron Singer, Ricardo D. Trimmelos, Desiree Quintero, Wayland Quintero, Ju-Hua Wei, Noenoelani Zuttermeister, Jonathan Johnson, Hawai‘i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, Adam Jansen, Hawai‘i State Archives, Lynne Najita, Kennedy & Foundation on Culture and the Arts, Adam Jansen, Hawai‘i Charities, Barbara B. Smith, Richard Murakami Fund for the Arts, Friends of Hawai‘i for Hawai‘i""

Panel: “India-Hawai‘i Musical Connections” by Teri Skillman, PhD, Associate Director, Hawai‘i Arts Alliance; Sai Bhatawadekar, PhD, Director, UHM Center for South Asian Studies, and UHM Associate Professor; and Nawahineokala’i Lanzilotti, MFA, composer/performer

Sunday, March 29, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Instrument Collection Highlights from the Rest of the World: Africa, Europe and the Americas” by Kirk Sullivan, PhD Candidate, UHM Ethnomusicology

This exhibition is dedicated to Professor Barbara B. Smith as part of the year-long celebration of her 100th birthday.

Special Events | In the EWC Gallery with free admission

Guided gallery tours will be offered Sundays at 3:00 p.m.
Visit us online for upcoming EWC performing arts event info.

Sunday, February 2, 2:00–3:30 p.m.
Exhibition Gala Opening including reception, gallery walkthrough with the curators, and special performances

Sunday, March 1, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Panel: “India-Hawai‘i Musical Connections” by Teri Skillman, PhD, Associate Director, Hawai‘i Arts Alliance; Sai Bhatawadekar, PhD, Director, UHM Center for South Asian Studies, and UHM Associate Professor; and Nawahineokala’i Lanzilotti, MFA, composer/performer

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Sunday, April 5, 1:00–3:00 p.m.
MAKING MUSIC Workshops
1–2 p.m. Make your own instrument out of repurposed materials
2–3 p.m. Learn to play your instrument For ages 8 and up. By Benjamin Fairfield, PhD, UHM Ethnomusicology Lecturer
RSVP to arts@EastWestCenter.org by March 20

Sunday, April 26, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Eo e Lil‘u: Sharing the Queen’s Compositions” by Nola A. Nahulu, UHM Music Lecturer in Music and Artistic Director, featuring Choral presentation by Hawai‘i Youth Opera Chorus

Sunday, May 3, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Illustrated Talk: “Original Heavy Metal Music-Making & Dancing from Sagada, Northern Philippines” by Wayland Quintero, PhD, UH-Hilo Lecturer and Desiree Quintero, PhD, UHM Dance Lecturer

Sunday, May 17, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
Panel: “The Legacy of Barbara B. Smith for Hawai‘i” moderated by Ricardo D. Trimmelos, PhD, UHM Professor Emeritus in Asian Studies and Ethnomusicology

East-West Center Gallery

John A. Burns Hall, 1601 East-West Road (corner Dole St. & East-West Rd.)

Gallery admission is free

Hours: Open Weekdays 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. and Sundays Noon–4:00 p.m.
Closed Saturdays and February 16, 17, April 12
Parking on the UH Mānoa campus is normally free and ample on Sundays.

Free school & group tours available.

For further information: 944-7177
arts@EastWestCenter.org
http://arts.EastWestCenter.org

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