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Perfect harmony

Two world-music institutions team up for a concert series

By Peter Holslin



"It's always an economic crisis with a nonprofit organization," says John Gabriel, executive director of the Center for World Music, a San Diego nonprofit.

No one familiar with the nonprofit world would argue with that statement—so it's a bit surprising to hear that the Center for World Music is faring remarkably well amid the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

The organization's operating budget has increased by a third during the past three years and, this year, the National Endowment for the Arts gave it a \$50,000 grant— twice as much as last year. Programming has "exploded," Gabriel says:

The organization now offers more destinations for its study-abroad programs and works with more schools in music workshops than ever before.

On the other hand, the School of Music and Dance at San Diego State University—another prominent champion of world music in San Diego—hasn't been so fortunate. Responding to the CSU system's huge budget cuts last summer, the school had to let go of some part-time instructors and cut a class on African drumming and dance.

"We just kind of had to trim down everything," Donna Conaty, the department's director, says.

Now, these two enduring world-music institutions are teaming up to co-produce a fall concert series featuring SDSU instructors and San Diego artists performing everything from Appalachian folk tunes to Javanese gamelan.

For more than 20 years, Conaty says, the School of Music and Dance has hosted this concert series as part of the school's world-music course material. "These classes don't have textbooks with them. They have live performances, instead," she says.

This year, the series' 10 shows will be open to the public, which will help offset costs and offer non-students a look at music that's as entertaining as it is educational.

The series spans almost every continent. It began on Sept. 20 with a performance by Dornob, a local collective that brings a jazzy twist to Persian classical music played on instruments like the *oud*, a Middle Eastern sister to the lute. It ends on Dec. 6 with a performance by SDSU's Javanese gamelan ensemble, a gong orchestra headed by Djoko Walujo, an SDSU instructor and renowned expert in this regal, mystical Indonesian institution.

A performance on Monday, Sept. 27, by Sene Africa, a local band with members from the West African country of Senegal, will offer a lesson in how West African pop music mines ancient tradition. Over Ibrahima Ba's gentle guitar and soaring vocals, Amadou Fall plucks out marvelous swirls on the kora, a West African harp used for centuries by griots, wandering poets who are repositories of the region's oral history.

Conaty says she's thankful for the partnership, but Gabriel doesn't think of it as a bailout.

"It's our common mission to promote world music," Gabriel says.

"It's a perfect match."

Sene Africa will perform at SDSU's J. Dayton Smith Recital Hall on Monday, Sept. 27. For the rest of the program, go to centerforworldmusic.org. Tickets: \$12 to \$15.