

391 for gamelan by Nick Gray, Department of Music, SOAS University of London

391 was created for the SOAS centenary.

The piece also celebrates the contemporaneity of the gamelan traditions of Java and Bali, in which new music is continually emerging (while older traditions continue) and the continuing dialogic interaction between new gamelan music composition in Indonesia, Europe, America, Japan and elsewhere.

In this piece, I tried to make the musical situation fluid and interactive, involving much co-operation between players, hopefully reflecting some of the many positive aspects of SOAS life. The piece is also especially designed for instruments from two of the SOAS gamelan sets (one Javanese and one Balinese), tailored to the individuality of their particular tuning – again, celebrating the uniqueness of SOAS. Individuality in the tuning of gamelan sets is an important cultural concept (see Perlman 1994 for an exploration of this in Java). The title, 391, is drawn from the name of a Dadaist arts journal founded in 1917 by Francis Picabia. The fluidity and chance elements are, in part, homage to this art movement. The openness of parts of the score necessitated the involvement of the musicians in the compositional process, meaning that each performance would be realised somewhat differently.

The piece is in three sections. The first uses interlocking techniques that begin as a simple pattern that changes mode and thickens in texture into a more complex four-part polyphonic web. The second section is modular with flexibility for the performers in progressing between the six modules. The third is a 43 beat interlocking groove to which other elements can be added: for one of the performances on 10th September there was dance (an improvised *joged* style dance by Ni Made Pujawati and Dewi Ariati of the Lila Bhawa Dance Troupe), and in the future there may be a rap (an option being explored with rapper and SOAS alumni, Reveal Poison).

The first performances took place (three in all) took place as part of the events at the opening of the Paul Webley Wing, on Thursday 8th September and Saturday 10th September 2016. The players were: Rob Campion, Charlie Cawood, Andy Channing, Aris Daryono, Cathy Eastburn, Paula Friar, Nick Gray, Manuel Jimenez, Lucie Treacher.

References:

Perlman, Marc. 1994. "American Gamelan in the Garden of Eden: Intonation in a Cross-cultural Encounter." *The Musical Quarterly* 78(3): 510–55

A video of the performance can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/Gpyr4EgJsJg>