

Linda Burman-Hall

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By Nick Sestanovich

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Linda Burman-Hall, an ethnomusicologist, musician and longtime UC Santa Cruz professor who brought the annual Baroque Festival to town, died suddenly Monday while traveling in Malaysia. She was 78.

Amy Beal, chair of the UC Santa Cruz Music Department, announced Burman-Hall's passing in an email to faculty.

"Linda joined the UCSC Music Department as a Lecturer in 1976, and has been a vital part of our community for the past 47 years," she wrote. "Her loss will be felt deeply throughout this community and beyond."

Burman-Hall had a lifelong love of music. Born in Los Angeles in 1945, she moved to Santa Cruz in 1970, where she hosted a radio show on KUSP. She received her Bachelor of Arts in music composition at UCLA and Master of Fine Arts in music theory at Princeton University. She served as a music theory lecturer at UCLA from 1973 to 1974 before moving to UC Santa Cruz, where she taught courses in early music, Balinese gamelan, research skills, theory and musicianship.

Leta Miller, a UC Santa Cruz music professor emerita, said Burman-Hall was the first faculty member she met when starting at the institution and the two became lifelong friends. The two performed together often, and Miller said Burman-Hall was a brilliant harpsichordist who was extremely knowledgeable about music history and many kinds of world music. "Her facility on the instrument was absolutely amazing, but also her insight into musical interpretation into the inner meaning of the compositions she was performing was extremely perceptive," she said. "Her performances were heart-rending and beautifully moving."

Burman-Hall retired from teaching in 2014 but immediately took up the mantle of research professor at the university. Her research was centered on performance practices and improvisation in both Western and non-Western music, and specialized in Baroque and classical literature for early keyboards such as the harpsichord, organ and fortepiano. She was also an ethnomusicologist of traditional Euro-American and Indonesian music and had published articles on South American folk fiddling, traditional and contemporary Balinese and Sudanese gamelans and Ottoman music performances.

Burman-Hall's biggest contribution to the area was the Santa Cruz Baroque Festival, which had its inaugural concert in 1972 and became a haven for the music of the era that dominated classical compositions from the 16th to 18th centuries. As artistic director, Burman-Hall curated the concerts and judged the youth chamber music and Bach chorale competitions. In addition to performing the great works of Vivaldi and Bach, Burman-Hall chose some inventive themes for each concert, such as a celebration of music written for Shakespeare's plays to a music collage set to the territory-marking sounds of Kloss' gibbons, an endangered primate native to the Mentawai Islands just west of Sumatra.

Burman-Hall told the Sentinel in 2013 that her goal was not only to perform Baroque-era compositions but to present a similar setting to what audiences might have experienced when witnessing this music, right down to having period-appropriate attire and instruments, a stark contrast to Santa Cruz Shakespeare's modernizations of productions from a similar time. "When you look at what they do, they present actors in costumes and settings of various modern guises, but they don't change the words of the play," she said. "We don't do that. We try to produce everything authentic to the period in which it was first performed."

Miller said she performed with Burman-Hall many times at the festival. "Some of the times when I performed with her in the early years, she had us all appear in Baroque costumes," she said. "I still have a photo on my wall of myself in Baroque costume with a Baroque flute that was taken as part of the publicity for the festival in the early years."

Burman-Hall, who often performed music by Medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen, was less strict about which compositions could be performed at the Baroque Festival, with some dating as far back as the Middle Ages and also including folk, Celtic, Turkish and Romani music. "I would say we do about 75% of our program from the Baroque," she said in 2013. "But we will fearlessly run back to the Middle Ages as well."

Miller said the festival was a great showcase for musical talent. "The performances were of that high-end caliber," she said. "She used some local musicians, but she also brought in great artists from around the country and around the world. What the festival offered to the community is absolutely remarkable."

Burman-Hall performed or recorded with such artists as Meredith Monk, Steve Reich, Judith Nelson, Max van Egmond, Randall Wong, Elizabeth Blumenstock, the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Chanticleer, the American Baroque Ensemble, Music Pacific and Lux Musica, the Baroque Festival's house ensemble. She was named Santa Cruz County Artist of the Year in 1994 and received an Excellence in Teaching Award in 2000.

She was also a board member for the Santa Cruz community radio station KSQD. The station paid tribute on its Facebook page, recalling how she and sound engineer Sandy Stone drove out to San Jose to pick up the station's eventual mascot, a 12-foot animatronic squid named Squidmore, after a caller said they wanted to donate a squid to the station. "She was one of the keyboard members who was there at the very beginning," the station wrote. "May her memory be a blessing and her life be an inspiration."

Mathilde Rand, the station's treasurer, said she was very resourceful in everything from the station's pledge drives to bringing in connections from UC Santa Cruz. "She just knew how to put pieces in place into the whole puzzle of putting KSQD together that helped make it so compact and so functioning as it is right now," she said.

Miller said that Burman-Hall was very supportive of her students and department colleagues. "There was a collaborative spirit in the department where we made music together," she said. "Linda really encouraged the collaboration, working together, and a lot of us made music together, which is just unbeatable."

Miller said Burman-Hall left an indelible mark on Santa Cruz's flourishing music scene. "Her contributions to the music scene in Santa Cruz County are going to leave a huge hole," she said.

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*By Wallace Baine
In Lookout Santa Cruz
August 31, 2023*

Santa Cruz lost one of its great artistic souls last week with the death of Linda Burman-Hall, the founder and longtime artistic director of the Santa Cruz Baroque Festival. Linda was an intellectual voracious mind and lover of an astonishing range of musical traditions. A former faculty member at UC Santa Cruz, she traveled widely around the world as a musicologist and researcher, always bringing back to town a new interest or passion.

Her musical interests embraced everything from African piano to Indonesian gamelan to mountain folk. She once crafted a musical collage from the songs of gibbons in Sumatra. But her abiding love for baroque music fueled her many explorations as the leading artistic force of the Baroque Festival.

The [Baroque Festival](#) had just finished its 50th season when Linda passed away unexpectedly while traveling in Malaysia at the age of 78. First arriving in Santa Cruz back in 1970, she was emblematic of a generation of artistically ambitious academics and creators that shaped Santa Cruz's character in the years after the opening of the university.

She was also a kind soul and stimulating conversationalist. We won't see her like again.

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By Public Affairs
UCSC Tuesday Newsday
Sept. 8, 2023

The UC Santa Cruz Arts Division community was deeply saddened to hear that Professor Emerita Linda Burman-Hall, recently passed away very suddenly while travelling in Malaysia. She joined the UC Santa Cruz Music Department as a Lecturer in 1976, and has been a vital part of the community for the past 47 years.

Burman-Hall retired from teaching in 2014 but became a research professor at the university. Her research was centered on performance practices and improvisation in both Western and non-Western music, and specialized in Baroque and classical literature for early keyboards such as the harpsichord, organ and fortepiano. She was also an ethnomusicologist of traditional Euro-American and Indonesian music and had published articles on South American folk fiddling, traditional and contemporary Balinese and Sudanese gamelans and Ottoman music performances.

A noted harpsichordist, cultural musicologist and early music producer, she studied at the College of Letters and Science of University of California in Los Angeles (B.A. in Music with Honors), Princeton University (M.F.A. Music in Theory and Musicology, and Ph.D. Music in Theory and Musicology). She had postdoctoral research at the Institute of Ethnomusicology, University of Amsterdam. While approaching early keyboard literature from an independent perspective, she studied with Alan Curtis and Dutch scholar-performer Gustav Leonhardt.

She was featured in concerts at the Getty, de Young, and Huntington Museums, and on local and national radio. She performed and recorded with celebrated performers of early music and California artists, including Judith Nelson, Max van Egmond, Randall Wong, Elizabeth Blumenstock, Leta Miller, Anner Bylsma, Amy Brodo, John Dornenburg, Roland Hutchinson, and Nicole Paiement. She appeared with groups such as Philharmonia Baroque, Chanticleer, America's premiere vocal ensemble, American Baroque Ensemble, Musica Pacifica, and the group Lux Musica of which she was a founder.

In contemporary music, she performed with artists as diverse as Steve Reich and Meredith Monk, and commissioned, premiered and recorded new music by contemporary Indonesian composers and by her colleagues at UC Santa Cruz (David Jones, David Cope – EMI, and Robert Strizich).

Burman-Hall also was the founder and longtime artistic director of the Santa Cruz Baroque Festival. Under her direction, the Baroque Festival presented hundreds of early music concerts across 46 years. Her Baroque chamber and solo music recordings are available on the Centaur, Helicon, Kleos, Wildboar, GoldenHorn, MSR, East Meets West Music, Gourd and Koustic labels.