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## Interview with Ramón Sender and Judy Levy–Sender

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Ramon Sender (\*1934 Spain) is a composer of electronic music, well-known writer of fiction and memoirs, communal archivist and artist and has been working as Clown Zero. He studied piano with George Copeland and composition with Elliott Carter, Harold Shapiro in New York, with Robert Erickson at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and at Mills College with Darius Milhaud. Together with Morton Subotnick he founded The San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1962. Judy Levy-Sender worked as a SFUSD teacher of ESL-Bilingual education to junior and senior high schooler, she is a 'wrtartist' drawing and writing lines 'whimsical and otherwise'<sup>1</sup>.

*Dorothea Schürch (DS): I am researching the history of the San Francisco Tape Music Center<sup>2</sup> using the archive of the Center of Contemporary Music at the Mills College / Northeastern University. Additionally I am studying the Pauline Oliveros Papers at the T.W.Olin Library. I am looking for notes and sketchbooks about the working process at the tape music center. Do you have documentary material, notes, or sketchbooks of this time?*

Ramón Sender (RS): I have copies of all my pieces of tapes. And I have some notes.

Judy Levy-Sender (JLS): The Conservatory of Music has got a file about Ramóns work. Mary Clare Bryztwa and Tessa Updike interviewed Ramón for hours.<sup>3</sup> You should check

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<sup>1</sup> For more biographical notes see <https://whimsyart.org/jls-bio.html> (visited 21.11.2023)  
see also Judy Levy-Sender: *Lines Whimsical and Other Wise*, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The San Francisco Tape Music Center (SFTMC) was founded in 1962 by Ramón Sender and Morton Subotnick and existed as an community-sponsored composer's guild till 1966. Afterward, it merged with the Music Department of Mills College. The SFTMC also included the composer Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016) and the artist and light designer Tony Martin (1937–2021).

<sup>3</sup> Interviews by Mary Clare Bryztwa and Tessa Updike: Ramón Sender Oral History, San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives Interview conducted April 14, 16 and 21, 2014. The Conservatory's Oral History Project has the goal of seeking out and collecting memories of historical significance to the Conservatory through recorded interviews with members of the Conservatory's community, which will then be preserved, transcribed, and made available to the public.

their files. You should call Michael Patterson who was in charge. He is the person you should contact, because the two women that interviewed Ramón they're no longer there.

*DS: 1961, you launched the Sonic Series<sup>4</sup> in the attic of the conservatory. How did the piece selection come about?*

*RS: I wanted to start a series of electronic music.<sup>5</sup> And for the first one, I had my friends use my little studio to create pieces. It was a concert of first performances. And then after that was over, I realized I planned a series, but I don't have any more music. Luciano Berio<sup>6</sup> just arrived at Mills College with a suitcase full of music from the electronic studios in*

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<sup>4</sup> Concerning the *Sonic series* and the first studio at the San Francisco Conservatory

- «18th December, 1961 The Sonic series begins at the San Francisco Conservatory. *Sonics I* includes Ramón Sender, *Transversals* (1961); Pauline Oliveros, *Time Sound Study / Time Perspectives* (1961); Terry Riley, *M... Mix* (1960-61); *Improvisation for Mixed Instruments and Tape* (Pauline Oliveros, Ramón Sender, Phil Winsor, and Laurel Johnson).» zit. nach: David W. Bernstein: *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, S.269
- concerning the first studio in the attic of the conservatory, see Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.223.
- equipment: 2 Ampex 403, 1 Ampex 601-2, 1 Viking tape desk, mixer, sound-making devices with contact mikrophon. mixer. «We decided that Sonics' grand opening would be a 'bring your own speaker» concert'.» Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.224.

<sup>5</sup> Ramón Sender developed an early interest in electronic music. While studying at Brandeis University, he contacted Milton Babbitt in 1953/54, who taught composition at Princeton University. Sender in his autobiographical book *My Life*:

- In December 1954: «[w]e went to a concert [...] at the Martha Graham Studio, given under the auspices of Aaron Copland, and heard a varied program of live and recorded contemporary works, with some 'music concrete' by Boulez and Messiaen. It's possible that I may get a performance of some of my things. However, the difficulty lies in finding performers. [...] I learned that the Composer's Forum next concert at the Martha Graham Foundation would include new electronic music by the young German Karlheinz Stockhausen, and a lecture by a couple. Louis and Bebe Barron. I went and was impressed by both, although 'impressed' is not a strong enough word. The Stockhausen '*Gesang der Jünglinge*' really knocked me out. I thought it was a terrific piece of music. It made me even more excited to learn about electronic music, or 'tape music', as we called it later. The concert was my real introduction to it. Louis and Bebe gave a demonstration of how they produced electronic music for the film 'Forbidden Planet' by building little circuits that would interact with each other. A lot of the language they used was sexually suggestive, and titters erupted throughout the audience. [...] I became irritated because I felt that the Carter-Babbitt-Forum crowd were not taking the Barrons seriously.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 180
- In 1954 Ramón Sender composes his first electronic piece, a ten-minute piece for a wire-recorder for a dancer: «She wanted me to perform the piece live at her event, but I said, "Just use the recording." That was my first experience using a recorder, other than going to a studio a few times to record discs for Papá. I loved the freedom it gave me to immediately receive feedback and not have to depend on musicians (or myself) to read score.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Luciano Berio (1925 Oneglia – 2003 Rome), who co-founded the Studio di Fonologia Musicale in Milan in 1955 with Bruno Maderna, also served as the editor of the magazine *Incontri Musicali*. From 1962 to 1964, he taught at Mills College in Oakland, California, at the invitation of Darius Milhaud. On this occasion, he brought the most recent electronic studio productions from Europe to Mills, «from the RAI und the French studios [...] Nono, Maderna, Pousseur», zit. nach Ramón Sender Barayón: *My Life – As Recalled and Recovered From Family Records*, San Francisco: Calm Unity Press, S. 224

Europe. So we approached Luciano and asked, whether we could play these tapes for our series. He said, of course! So, we had enough music to continue.

*DS: The San Francisco Tape Music Center was well-known for unusual presentation of the pieces, how did this come about?*

RS: We discovered very quickly that there is a visual element to regular concerts. And when it's not present, the audience is missing something. If you don't have something to look at like the musicians performing, you're losing a whole aspect. At that point we decided to add the visual element. I invited Anthony Martin<sup>7</sup> to do visuals for us. At first, he was reticent. But I begged him and said there will be a small salary of some sort and that he can buy paint or whatever. This convinced him. It became a big thing for him.<sup>8/9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Antony Martin (1937–2021) American painter and multi-media light artist, worked for the SFTMC during 1963–1966. When SFTMC moved to Mills College, Pauline Oliveros became director; Anthony Martin became visual director; Bill Maginnis its technical director.

More about Antony Martin see Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 240.

<sup>8</sup> Review from the *The San Francisco Call-Bulletin* summer 1964 by Dean Wallace: «Morton Subotnick's 'Mandolin: A Theater Piece' and Ramón Sender's 'Desert Amubalance' are interesting not only for their aural impact, but also for the visual poetry of Anthony Martin's light projections that are an integral part of their theatricality.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 251.

About the collaborations with Lee Romero and Bill Ham see Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 238.

<sup>9</sup> Video documentations of the work with space and light of «a half-dozen other 'golden oldies' from the Tape Music Center»: See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 226

- University of California Press – Youtube Chanel (visited 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023)  
The collections shows how important the visuals were for the performances  
<https://www.youtube.com/@UCPress/search?query=San%20Francisco%20Tape%20Music%20Center>
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 1  
Oliveros, Martin, *Circuitry*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ogr2PRIN5qE&t=295s>
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 2  
Subotnick, *Until Spring Revisted*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l\\_d0Hdmu8A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l_d0Hdmu8A)
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 3  
Martin, *Silent Light (1)*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dMsLTVq1nk>
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 4  
Sender-Subotnick-Oliveros-Maginnis: *Tropical Fish Opera*:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ql\\_wMkcuzZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ql_wMkcuzZE)
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 5  
Oliveros: *Bye Bye Butterfly* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RzPkz7P5U>
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 6  
Sender: *Great-Grandpa Lemuesl's Death Rattle Reincarnation Blues*:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCIHt\\_hmwJs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCIHt_hmwJs)
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 7  
Subotnick, Sender, Oliveros, Maginnis: *Improvisation (1)*:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcA160IIPrg>
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 8  
Sender: *Kore*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mutqG\\_HaZfY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mutqG_HaZfY)
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 9  
Subotnick, Sender, Oliveros, Maginnis: *Improvisation (2)*:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8qbpXDy\\_ms](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8qbpXDy_ms)
- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 10  
Oliveros, *Apple Box Double*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exNwJnhWNd4>

DS: David Bernsteins<sup>10</sup> book includes video documentations of the concert-performances. How did the visuals evolve over the years?

RS: Tony sort of caught fire and his work became more and more imaginative. Mort Subotnick, of course, had his own input to all this too. Back in those days, it was just me, Mort, and Michael Callahan, who was our technician<sup>11</sup>. Pauline was very involved, too.

DS: Are you familiar with the concept of the Acousmonium? I interviewed François Bayle<sup>12</sup>, the former director of the Groupe de recherche musical about the Acousmonium, a multi-channel loudspeaker installation that surround the public, beside the faintly illuminated loudspeaker orchestra there is nothing to look at on stage.

RS: Well, this was his approach. There was another composer [Stan Shaff] who invented the Audium.<sup>13</sup> I think it's still going. He created this very special space with many, many speakers. And it was all done in the darkness. It focuses more deeply just on the sonic aspect. But I still wouldn't choose this for myself, I would miss the other.

DS: In the piece *Desert Ambulance* you give Pauline Oliveros instructions over the ear.<sup>14</sup> Was she the only one performing the piece, or did you perform it with other people?

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- The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 11  
Sender, Martin: *Desert Ambulance*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxjn2iKIRUK>
  - The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 12  
Martin: *Silent Light (2)*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huRse5b4gg8>
  - The San Francisco Tape Music Center, video 13  
Oliveros: Pauline's Solo: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cy7FTh3FpE>

<sup>10</sup> David Bernstein is chair of Mills Music Department and Northeastern University and co-editor of *Music Theory Spectrum*, and autor of *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*.

<sup>11</sup> More about Michael Callahan and Bill Maginnis, see Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.236.

<sup>12</sup> François Bayle (born in 1932 in Tamatave, Madagascar) is a composer of concrete and electroacoustic music. He studied with Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Schaeffer, and Karl-Heinz Stockhausen. Since 1968, he has been a member of the GRM (Groupe de Recherches Musicales), of which he served as the director from 1975 to 1997. He is credited with introducing the terms 'acousmatic' and the invention of the 'acousmonium' in 1974, a system of 80 loudspeakers for the spatialization of musique concrète.

<sup>13</sup>Vgl. [https://www.audium.org/archive\\_history/](https://www.audium.org/archive_history/) (visited 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023):

Stan Shaff (n.d.) began working with tape recorders and special composition in the early 1950's. Shaff created *The Audium* together with the system and equipment designer Doug McEachern (n.d.) for a three-dimensional, spatial music experience.

Stan Shaff was playing at the premiere of Terry Riley famous composition *in C* at the SFTMC on the 4th and 6th November 1964. *In C* was performed by Terry Riley, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Subtonick, Ramon Sender, Steve Reich, Jon Gibson, Jeannie Brechan, James Lowe, Sonny Lewis, Mel Weitsman, Warner Jepson, Stan Shaff, and Phil Winsor with visual environments by Anthony Martin. See David Bernstein: *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, S.276.

<sup>14</sup> «One track contained the sounds the audience heard, the other track my instructions to Pauline about what and when I wanted her to play on the accordion. That way we could keep her in total darkness and project a film on her.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 240.

RS No, just with her. Just for that piece. Sometimes it would be plugged in the wrong way and the audience would be hearing the instructions.

DS: *Discovering ways of collaborating, ways of writing scores is an important subject of study. I wonder, if your instruction would be executed by students, would that be possible?*

RS: I guess it would be awesome. How would you get a hold of the score? Getting a hold of the things is going to be complicated.

JLS: The conservatory has a lot of Ramón papers; he just got a big award from them in 2019. Ramón was the alumna of the year. They have a lot of information about him.

DS: *Congratulations! – It's a question of principle, someone else performing the piece.*

RS: That would be great if they could go on, wonderful.

DS: *It would be important to get hold of the instructions and notes explaining the setup.*

JLS: That's very complicated because his archives are all over the place. He's got an attic, a basement, and a garage, that's why I'm so glad we gave what we did to the conservatory.

RS: I just went through the stored books. I have about 10 storage boxes full of materials that I just went through a few days ago and relabeled so I know exactly what's in them. I know what's in each box. Anyway, but I think the best thing is if you go to the conservatory.

JLS: One of the things that people are really interested in is the pieces *Desert Ambulance*. And the other one is the *Tropical Fish Opera*. And those are the ones that people have done recently.

DS: *How important was improvisation in interaction with the electronic devices?*

RS: The easiest thing for me would be to look in my book, 550 pages book of my life story, just published: *My Life – As Recalled and Recovered From Family Records*. In it should be a lot of answers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ramón Sender about the Ericksonian style of improvisation (about the composer Robert Erickson see below).

- «I met composer Pauline Oliveros, and re-met Loren Rush, because both dropped by Erickson's class. Also Terry Riley, another of Bob's students from his years teaching at San Francisco State, stopped by and we became friends After class we frequently retired to the old upright piano in the attic. With Terry on piano, Pauline on accordion or French horn, me and Loren on various instruments, we improvised in what might be called 'Ericksonian free style' as we listened deeply to each other.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.218.
- «Being devout Ericksonianites, we included a free improvisation on the program with Pauline, her friend Laurel Johnsen and Loren and me. » See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.224.
- Review from the *The San Francisco Call-Bulletin* summer 1964 by Dean Wallace: «And lest anyone conceive the idea that these people are anything less than highly skilled musicians, the same climatic effect is produced by instruments alone in a pair of improvisatory tone-and-texture studies with Sender, piano, Subotnick, clarinet and Miss Oliveros, French horn. In the final phase, a tape circuit modifies the sound of these instruments, allowing the alter listener to follow electronic music in the making.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 251.

DS: Was the tape recorder been used?

RS: We would use two tape recorders and make a slight delay.

DS: Did you work with overdubbing?

RS: No, no, it's just a straight delay. We used two Wollensack recorders spaced a little bit. We would record on one and play back on the other. We varied the space depending on what seemed to work best.<sup>16</sup>

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- SFTMC on tour 1964: «We left San Francisco on June 15<sup>th</sup> in two cars, along with sound and light equipment, arriving in Minneapolis [...] We gave the program under the auspices of the First Unitarian Church via KPFA's Will Ogden's connection. The warm audience response felt almost like home, and interest in the improvisation led to another event the following evening with local artists and dancers.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 251.

American Composer Robert Erickson (1919–1997) was one of the first to give up twelve tone composition for systematically studying timbre in music. He founded the music department of the University of California San Diego (UCSD) in 1967 and appointed Pauline Oliveros as a director of the Center for Music Experiment at UCSD (1967–1981). Erickson wrote about his own tape compositions: «If you get right down to the bottom of what composers do, I think that what composers do now and have always done is to compose their environment in some sense. So I get a special little lift about working with environmental sounds.» See Robert Erickson: *Sierra & Other Works* (1991 CRI CD 616), liner notes by Alan Rich.

<sup>16</sup> Further Notes on composition, conceptions and on splicing by Ramon Sender Barayón:

- «bypass the capstan and just use the adjustable tension to move the tape at various speeds. I once recorded all of a Wagner opera on a piece of tape about three feet long. It went by as an extended burp. I thought, «Gosh, I could record the whole «Ring» as multiple burps and sell it to music students. They could come to class on Monday and say, “Yeah, I heard the whole Ring over the weekend!” Of course it would go by in less than ten seconds.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 241
- «Finally, I pre-recorded the opening of Wagner's ‘Siegfried's Idyll.’ I made a loop of it, put the one loop through all four tape recorders, punched a button and recorded the results off the mater Ampex. It started over-recording the original in three separate places, and the over-recording and over-recording, so within twenty minutes it began to sound like a train disappearing into the distance. Finally it just became white noise. I was fascinated, I loved it – so this became a piece I titled ‘Wagner’». See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 237.
- «We had the loop decks made from the Vikings that I used for a series of pieces. On one of them, I took a phrase from that Vaughn Williams-ish student cantata I wrote where the soprano sings, ‘To see him with my eyes.’ I put it on all ten loop decks so that the phrase staked up on itself in various ways. I liked that a lot, and remembered how as a kid in the New York apartment we had a Magnavox Hi Fi radio set in the living room. I found I could set the tuner to one place where I must have picked up all the stations simultaneously, because it was a very rich sound. Out of it I could hallucinate any sound I wanted. I could say, ‘Here's a symphony orchestra – oh yeah, there is! Now here come the oboe solo!’ – I would hear the oboe. I loved that – it was amazing! » See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 241.
- «Sometimes I think my whole composing career was an attempt to rediscover that sound again, that lost chord. A lot of my richly textured pieces are attempts to evoke that feeling in listeners where they can hallucinate their own composition.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 241.
- «The whole Columbia-Princeton crowd spliced, while we basically were anti-splicing. I don't think they really considered you serious about electronic music unless you spliced.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 252.
- «At Columbia-Princeton's new lab I kept looking for a way to work without splicing, so I tried ‘the Terry Riley loop.’ I made a large loop that went all the way around the room and through two tape machines. I'd listen to it on one machine and then gauged where I wanted the new sound to record from the second machine. The heads on studio Ampex's have lids, so I could slam the lid shut, record the sound, then open it before the erase head erased anything else.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 253.
- «I was signed in in the Columbia Princeton Studios for work for two or three weeks with Mario [Davidovsky] and that was fun. I worked first in the old studio [...], and then I went up to the new one,

DS: Did you work on a conceptual approach like Pierre Schaeffer and the Groupe de Recherche Musicale in Paris, who developed a theory of concrete music?<sup>17</sup>

RS: That was the Milton Babbitt crowd...

DS: ...instead collaborations beyond disciplines were important, with the San Francisco Mime Groupe<sup>18</sup> and the dancer Anna Halprin.<sup>19</sup>

RS: The San Francisco Mime Group was involved in the sense that they found the building that we finally rented and suggested we share it. And I thought, we couldn't really share with them. It's such a huge chaotic group. It just wouldn't share easily. They found

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that was really nice. I could not get into the splicing thing. It seems that was the initiation, for Mario's point of view that what separated the sheep from the goats. If you really gonna be an electronic music composer, you spliced.» See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qaju5XaGvII> [10:50] Ramon Sender on San Francisco Tape Music Center – The Video Archive of Electroacoustic Music, 1997 (visited 20th November 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Schaeffer: *Treatise on Musical Objects. An Essay across Disciplines*, transl. by Christine North and John Dack, University of California Press, Oakland California 2017. Original: Editions du Seuil, 1966.

<sup>18</sup> shows or happenings:

- The collaboration with the Mime Troupe lead to the Ronnie Davis show: «...we invited Mime Troupe director, Ron Davis, to 'come and do something experimental, something more unusual than what you're doing with the Mime Troupe.' He came in with a couple of actors [...]. We also approached the Ampex Foundation for a possible grant. Mort twisted the arm of their guy over the phone and he finally said, reluctantly, that he would visit. He dropped by unannounced during our very experimental Ronnie Davis show, the audience seated under a large trap with their heads sticking out through holes. Behind them, an actor was giving a overly detailed soliloquy about taking a crap while two other actors sat on toilets in front. A third of the way through the evening, a fourth actor walked through the room wearing a striped shirt, and striped hip-high stockings, but nothing in-between. At that point, the Ampex guy walked out. Mort followed him out, wringing his hands saying, «But-but-but – most of our concerts aren't like this!» We never heard from the Ampex Foundation again.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.231.
- The presentation at the Vancouver University is a happening: «That February [1963] Mort and I traveled to Vancouver along with artist Bob La Vigne to stage a happening at the university. We invited their band to march th[r]ough the auditorium, and inflated two large weather balloons with a backward vacuum cleaner to bounce around. When one of them burst and covered a little old lady with gray powder, we belatedly realized what we had forgotten to remove the dust bag!» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.231.
- *City Scale* [1963] a citywide happening with a 'car ballet', with Stuart Dempster playing trombone in the Broadway tunnel, with a soprano singing Debussy in a bathrobe etc., see Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S.231f.
- «So we had a fat '64-'65 season with Rockefeller money to pay musicians. We also offered a free workshop for learning how to navigate our studio and several composers took it including Warner Jepson and 'Shep' Shapiro, also studying at Mills. More and more young composers were beginning to work out of theirs houses, like Steve Reich. [...] Also three composers came on Swedish government grants to work at the Tape Center [...] Jan Bark, [...] Ame Mellnas, [...] Folke Rabe. [...] The Tape Music Center was beginning to appear on the cultural map whatever composers came through the city; they were sent to us. We had a second visit from Mario Davidovsky and Vladimir Ussachevsky on their way back from Tokyo. Pauline produced the David Tudor-Cage festival in conjunction with KPFA. Cage attended the last concert on his way to Hawaii, very sweet and warm, and wanting to hear all our pieces.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 249 f.

<sup>19</sup> «We started adding other performers to SONICS. I originally had met dancer Anna Halprin [...], we invited three of her dancers to perform in our improvisations, which they were very happy to do – John Graham, A. A. Leath an Lyn Palmer. They were wonderful – really hilarious!» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 2

another place that they liked and took it. At that point I rented that place, it had three large rooms. And one of them was big enough to be a very good concert hall and would seat about 300 people. The other room also had a high ceiling and I invited Anna to rent it. I covered the rent over the sublets. So, all I had to do every month was raise enough money to pay the electricity, water and so forth. So it was a very good opportunity.

DS: KPFA, the radio was also one of the parties.

RS: That's right, they were part of it too. The building had an original sound studio tucked under a corner, and so it was perfect for KPFA to take. That worked very well too, a good collaboration. We're very pleased with each other.

DS: Do you consider the way you worked and collaborated as a political aspect of the SFTMC?

RS: We really were not political. We didn't talk politics. It did not occur to us to get involved in the politics; we were involved in what we were doing.

DS: When the Rockefeller grant<sup>20</sup> was secured – you departed from the SFTMC.

RS: There came a point where we were all going in different directions. I wanted to go live on the communes<sup>21</sup> and Mort wanted to do something else. And it seemed the easiest to park the show somewhere and then we could each go our separate ways. I left all the electronics, and I went back to writing music that could be sung around a campfire. And it was a whole other world because we were living without the electronics. I simplified back to writing pieces that could be sung around the campfire and learned quickly.

I wrote songs. I don't know how to point to them. They might be in my book. But there might be other places too. I wrote quite a few of them. And the whole idea was something easy to sing. You could sing around a campfire. I started a whole new aspect in my music. Something

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<sup>20</sup> 25. Februar 1965, the SFTMC is given 200'000 Dollar grant by the a *Rockefeller Foundation* under the condition to merge with the *Mills Performing Group* under roof of the Mills College: «as a joint center for creative and performing arts on the Mills College campus.» See Thomas M. Welsh: «Chronologie», in Bernstein: *The San Francisco Tape Music Center*, S. 265 – 282, here S. 281.

<sup>21</sup> About the Morning Star Ranch 1966–73 see:

- Unohoo, Coyote, Rick and the Mighty Avengers (Hrsg): *The Morningstar Scrapbook First Edition - 'n the Pursuit of Happiness*.
- Ramón Sender Barrayón: *Home free home: a history of two open-door California communes: Morning Star Ranch and Wheeler's (Ahimsa) Ranch*, San Francisco: Calm Unity Press, 2017.

«During the late sixties, two open-door communal ranches arose in Sonoma County, California. Nothing quite like them had ever existed before, and people came from all over the country to live there. Together they rediscovered a tribal, neoprimitive way of life that consumed less energy and offered more freedom than our regulated, consumption-oriented Great Society could give. It was a magical five years until the Sonoma County authorities discovered they could use the health and buildings codes to bulldoze the houses, expel the inhabitants, and close down both communities. Their names were Morning Star and Wheeler's Ranch. Different in many respects, they both celebrated the freedom of each individual to do their thing, as long as no harm came to anyone. But the change was too sudden for many neighbors, who feared that drug-crazed hippies would lead their children astray. In the case of each ranch, one politically powerful neighbor acted as the catalyst, and saw to it that the district attorney acted on his complaint. By 1973, it was all over. This is their story.» See: Sender Barrayón: *Home free home*, abstract.



easy to learn, that you could learn quickly and that would have some meaning to them for them. I tried to write songs that had some message that was understandable and important that people would appreciate.<sup>22</sup>

*DS: How do they relate to your compositions at the San Francisco Tape Music Center?*

RS: It's a new chapter, living on the commune and not being involved in electronics.

JLS: They are published in one of your books, in the Morningstar book.<sup>23</sup>

*DS: Did you come back to electronics?*

RS: There was one winter when at the commune it was very cold, and everyone was crowded into these houses. There were so many people in the houses I needed to get away. I called up my friend who was building electronics, Don Buchla,<sup>24</sup> and he asked him to put me to work. He offered me to come to his house and stuff circuit boards for him. So I spent the winter working for Don, sleeping in his main room where he had all his instruments set up, so I could play with them when I wasn't working. That was my one return to the world of electronics. I always appreciated that he did that for me. He got me out of that crazy scene. In the summer, I went back to the commune and my simpler life.

*DS: In your opinion, what is the most important legacy of the SFTMC?*

RS: I think the most important thing to continue would be the openness and allowing people to come in and work there. We considered ourselves an open studio, and anyone could come in and work.

*DS: Thank you for taking your time for these interviews.*

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<sup>22</sup> «I started putting together chants that could be learned quickly around the campfire. Also I composed some sacred songs, one of which went to New Mexico [...]. It began to be sung at the Native American Church peyote ceremonies, which pleased me more than if I had a piece performed at Carnegie Hall. I also composed a song cycle on a Native American corn-planting ceremony that I hoped someday a grade school class might perform.» See Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 271 f.

<sup>23</sup> Two songs are published in Sender Barayón: *My Life*, S. 271 f.

<sup>24</sup> The *Buchla* was the first modular synthesizer, commissioned by Ramón Sender and Morton Subotnick in 1965 and installed at the San Francisco Tape Music Center. It was named after its inventor, Donald 'Don' Buchla (1937–2016). Buchla, who studied physics, physiology, and music, is a pioneer in electronic music and sound synthesis. In the 1960s, electronic music was primarily composed using wave generators, oscillators, or musique concrète. The *Buchla 100* was relocated to Mills College in 1966.

*DS: The act of playing the Buchla involves an entirely different approach than any other instrument.*

RS: It was very different, obviously. You just got used to the knobs instead of the keys. You had total flexibility.

*DS: And a sound that never stops. A sound that never exhausts itself, that never gets tired. It goes on and on and on. A world of music in which sounds are in a different relationship to the strength of a body playing an instrument. A sound that goes on and on without any physical effort.*

RS: Yes, that is true.