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## Barry Phillips unveils his 'Ragas' at Baroque Festival

By WALLACE BAINE  
Posted: 03/18/2010 08:00:51 AM PDT

Some time in the 1700s, as the British-based East India Company began its gradual rule of India -- later formally to become the British raj -- two great but radically different musical expressions came together. Western European classical music met traditional Indian classical music.

Santa Cruz composer and cellist Barry Phillips reimagined that moment to envision a new piece that will be the central piece in the Santa Cruz Baroque Festival's latest concert "Imaginary Intersections: Raga & Raj."

"Eight Ragas" is a musical hybrid in both form and time, representing Indian music played Western instruments and using both period and contemporary styles. Phillips, who will lead the Lux Musica Ensemble, will indeed perform on a hybrid instrument himself, a custom-made cello designed with sympathetic strings a la the Indian sitar.

"It has absolutely everything in it," said Phillips, a locally acclaimed performer and recording artist, "from very baroque melodies to the influence of Ravi Shankar."

Phillips has license to evoke the name of the celebrated Shankar, perhaps the best-known Indian musician in history. For almost 15 years, he's studied composition under the Indian master and tours with Shankar's daughter, Anoushka Shankar.

Though well-known for his recordings of traditional American music on the Santa Cruz-based Gourd label, Phillips has developed, through his association with Shankar, an abiding interest in the Indian "raga," a

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be percussionist Debopriyo Sarkar on tabla and Barry's wife Shelley Phillips on tanpura, a lute-like instrument that resembles a sitar.

The cello that Barry Phillips will be playing is what he calls a "Mondal cello," after the designer. It features the four strings of the traditional cello, along with 11 additional "sympathetic" strings, which aren't directly struck or bowed, but which vibrate in an undertone or drone when the main strings are played.

"Sometimes, the sympathetic strings make it sound like two instruments," said Phillips, "if they're working right. And I have to tune them as well. So, yes, I'll be tuning right up to the time to perform."

composition style that is the dominant form of Indian music.

Traditionally, ragas are associated with -- and are designed to evoke -- a distinct time of day, or season of the year. "Eight Ragas," said Phillips, was composed in that same manner. The 40-minute piece begins with a section inspired by the darkness of the pre-dawn hours and moves on to another piece meant to evoke sunrise, early afternoon, etc.

"It's a walk through the day, into the night," he said.

Besides Phillips on his custom-designed cello, Lux Musica features Lars Johannesson on flutes, David Wilson on violin, Amy Brodo on cello and Linda Burman-Hall, the festival's director, on harpsichord. Also performing will

### IF YOU GO

'imaginary intersections: raga & raj'  
presented by: Santa Cruz Baroque Festival  
when: Saturday, 7:30 p.m.  
where: First Congregational Church, 900 High St., Santa Cruz  
Cost: General, \$22; seniors, \$16; students, \$5; grades K-12, \$2  
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