

# Gamelans and New Music

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## Introduction

GAMELANS have been flowing out of Indonesia as fast as her oil. Some fifty are now in the United States, twenty in Holland, four in England, two in West Germany, six in Australia, three in New Zealand, three in Japan, two in or on their way to Sweden, as well as a scattering of others in various countries, particularly in museums and in Indonesian embassies. The United States also has about fifty “homemade” gamelans, designed and constructed by Americans out of readily available local materials.<sup>1</sup>

Western encounters with gamelans go back at least to Paris in the 1890s, to the well-known impression made upon the eyes and ears of Debussy and Ravel.<sup>2</sup> But most early transfers arrived in the West as museum pieces, that is, instruments to be seen, not heard. However, starting in the 1950s in Holland with Bernard Ijzendraat (who changed his name to Suryabrata when he settled in Indonesia), and then with Ernst Heins in Amsterdam and Mantle Hood at UCLA in the 1950s and 60s, gamelan performance began to take precedence over exhibition.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The figures for the United States come from the lists published in *Ear Magazine*, VIII/4 (1983), an issue subtitled “Gamelan, Indonesian Arts in America,” and added to in *Balungan*, I/1 (June, 1984) – a new magazine from the *American Gamelan Institute*, Box 9911, Oakland, CA 94613. The others were garnered by me through correspondence and conversation. All numbers are approximate. No distinction has been made either with regard to the size, shape, or material of the gamelans listed. The American gamelans are often made from aluminum, whereas in Indonesia bronze and occasionally iron are staples.

<sup>2</sup> A fact often said to have influenced Debussy and Impressionism. The gamelan that Debussy and Ravel heard seems to have been the one that later was seen at a similar exposition in Chicago. Since then it has resided in the Field Museum. The January, 1978, *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin* contains two excellent articles: Sue Carter-de Vale, “The Gamelan,” and Louis Pomerantz, “Restoration of the Gamelan.”

<sup>3</sup> Each of these persons was a student of Jaap Kunst, the father of Indonesian ethnomusicology. For details on Dutch Gamelan performance history, see Otto Mensink, “The White Gamelan in the

Today, most gamelans in the West are being played by local persons, that is, not by Indonesians. On the other hand, the repertory remains predominantly Indonesian,<sup>4</sup> but there is a rapidly growing catalogue of new music, often composed by members of the respective gamelans. This is the case with gamelans that were started by Lou Harrison at Mills College and San Jose State University; with gamelans in the Bay area run by Jody Diamond and Daniel Schmidt; with the Gamelan Pacifica at Seattle's Cornish Institute, the Gamelan Son of Lion led by Barbara Benary in New York, the gamelan at Bowling Green University in Ohio, directed by JaFran Jones, and in the gamelan at Lewis and Clark College in Oregon.

In Europe, the English Gamelan Orchestra, recently organized by Neil Sorrell, rapidly gained recognition with a tour of England in the fall of 1983.<sup>5</sup> New English and old Javanese pieces appeared in equal measure in those concerts. Yet in Holland, practically the home of Western gamelans, not much new music has been written, perhaps, because as a Dutch friend told me, gamelans there "are more Catholic than the pope."<sup>6</sup> All the same, Elsje Plantema's gamelan group in Amsterdam has begun adding new music to its repertory. In 1984 the group was scheduled to play works of Lou Harrison and Ton de Leeuw in Holland and at festivals in Saarbrücken

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Netherlands," in *Ear Magazine* cited in n. 1. Suryabrata died in Jakarta in early 1986. Curiously, a group of American musicians performed gamelan instruments in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston around 1930! Henry Eichheim (b. 1870), a violinist, traveler, and composer, included a small gamelan in a symphonic work dedicated to and played by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Eichheim collected a variety of Asian instruments on his tours to the East and had brought a Javanese gamelan to his home in Santa Barbara in the late 1920s. It was this set that was used in the performances noted above. The same instruments were later at UCLA before the university received the more famous sets now in use; they were also borrowed by motion picture companies for miscellaneous exotic purposes. Their present newly found home is the University of California at Santa Barbara. Dobres Hsu plans a monograph on Eichheim. Lou Harrison also told me that Henry Cowell did in fact study on a gamelan at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik in 1931.

<sup>4</sup> Includes Bali, Java, and Sunda (West Java). Gamelans can be found elsewhere, such as in the islands of Madura and Sumatra, in Indonesia or in neighboring Malaysia, or among overseas Indonesians in Surinam. But I am unaware of any Western gamelans imitating these latter styles.

<sup>5</sup> The title "English Gamelan Orchestra" refers to a group of musicians. It does not designate the set of instruments, as is otherwise common practice in and out of Indonesia. For instance, "Kyai Mendung" (Javanese words) at UCLA or "The Venerable Showers of Beauty" (translated from the Javanese) at Lewis and Clark College refer to those gamelans regardless of who is playing, or whether they are played or not. It is an Indonesian trait to put a high value on the instruments, which with age and good quality may even take on a sacred aura, but to give little public attention to persons. In fact The English Gamelan Orchestra does not yet have a gamelan of its own, but instead borrows the instruments from either the Indonesian Embassy or York University. Their acronym rather pointedly calls attention to the difference: EGO.

<sup>6</sup> Jan de Wolff, Director of Amsterdam's experimental music and dance center, IJsbreker. Here and elsewhere the quotations are from memory, doubtless blurred with time.

and at the redoubtable Darmstadt Summer Course. There are other gamelan sites in Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. At present this writer knows little about them.

In the heartland of gamelans, Indonesia, new compositions are surprisingly commonplace. Bali has a well developed, if comparatively recent, "composer" tradition. And Java, although more conservative, also has new music; the Javanese situation is however obscured by the reticence of the Javanese to focus on individuals for any reason. Most of this "new music" is in a quasi-traditional vein, but music that could be classified as avant-garde or experimental is also performed. The main center for experimental music is ASKI (Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia or Indonesian Academy of Performing Arts) in the city of Solo—sometimes spelled Sala; officially, and on the maps, Surakarta—in Central Java. Since ASKI began performing experimental music in 1978, other teaching institutions around Java and Bali have joined Solo, and annual Jakarta festivals plus some regional ones have become veritable hotbeds of new musical ideas. Thus new music for gamelans, both conservative and avant-garde, is joining the older repertory. Only a few gamelans participate in the ultra-new but, today, many others will place "light" pieces—Indonesian semi-traditional work of recent vintage—alongside established "classics."

#### New Music in Europe and the United States

What new music is being played?<sup>7</sup> In the Gamelan issue of *Ear Magazine*, and in the new *Balungan* (see n. 1), there are articles dealing wholly or partly with the new music. There is even a dissertation in progress at Durham University, U.K., by Alec Roth on the subject of worldwide contemporary music for gamelan. Oddly, in Holland, where people know more about the gamelan than anywhere else in the West, only two works have been composed, Ton de Leeuw's *Gending* (1975) and Wil Eisma's *Liwung* (1977). Both of these compositions show a European face and neither reveals any particularly Indonesian elements. De Leeuw, who has written at length about *Gending*, tells of his desire for an "autonomous" (i.e. contemporary European) conception. Eisma, although "inspired by Balinese gamelan music," writes in a free form with a Western technique.<sup>8</sup> But neither work

<sup>7</sup> This survey will be spotty, for reasons both intentional and otherwise. In the United States, where the output of new works is large, detailed information from other sources is available. Elsewhere, the field is so new and developments are happening so quickly that it is difficult to stay current. I call attention to a few recordings: U.S.: Cambridge CRS-2560 (Felciano and Harrison); Folkways FTS-31312/31313 (Benary, Corner, Goode, Newlin); Composers Recordings CRI-455 (Harrison); TR Records TRC 109 (Harrison); Holland: Composers' Voice CV 7602 (DeLeeuw).

<sup>8</sup> DeLeeuw's analysis can be found in the liner notes of the recording (see n. 7) or restated in *Key Notes*, III/1 (1976), 67-74. DeLeeuw told me in the fall of 1983 that his teacher of ethnomusicology, Jaap Kunst, urged him to write for gamelan in the early 1950s, but the task was too difficult at the time. Eisma's remark is from the preface to the score. Both are published by Donemus, Amsterdam.

is directly transferrable to Western ensembles; the tuning and timbral schemes of the gamelan are too distinctive. *Liwung*, which combines tape and gamelan, may well be playable only on the gamelan for which it was written, that in the museum in the Hague. The tape part is tuned to that one set of instruments, and of course it is unlikely that another set with identical tuning could readily be found. The players in the first performances were predominantly Western music professionals with little or no experience in the gamelan. In 1984 an established gamelan took on the task of reading and performing from De Leeuw's special score. Both scores eschew Indonesian cipher notation in favor of traditional Western (Eisma) or an adaptation of it (De Leeuw).

The English Gamelan Orchestra has often played works of its members—Mark Lockett, Michael Parsons, Neal Sorrell, Jan Steele, and Alec Roth—but has also invited Michael Nyman, a well-known composer not otherwise associated with gamelans, to write a piece for them. Lou Harrison's ensembles and ours in Portland have followed a similar pattern: most new pieces are by members of the group but, for example, Virgil Thomson and Alan Hovhaness have provided pieces on invitation.<sup>9</sup> Thomson's work, *Gending Chelsea*, required considerable adjustment, that is, application to specific gamelan instruments and the addition of a vocal line (by Jody Diamond, an active composer in her own right). Hovhaness' *Stars Sing Bell Songs* and *The Pleiades* needed minor editing and transcription; so, I believe, did the Nyman piece for EGO; as does a work by Tom Johnson of New York.

Gamelan music customarily uses a cipher notation emanating from Java (though its development was probably influenced by the Dutch). (However, the techniques and traditional roles of the various instruments would require a book of description.) Practical observation leads to the conclusion that most gamelan works are and will continue to be composed by persons closely involved with gamelans. Many of the most successful composers do not have compositional backgrounds or any special experience or training in Western composition or Western music of any kind, for instance, Jody Diamond's *In That Bright World*, or Alec Roth's *Scenes from the Tempest*. A robust and refined musicality emerges from untutored and thereby unexpected quarters.

Many of these American works are quite unlike the Dutch pieces and they, in turn, differ from the English which also veer from the Javanese.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison programmed *Gending Chelsea* at Mills College in 1980. "Gending" is a Javanese term with two meanings: (1) a piece of music, or (2) one of several words identifying particular forms of music. For ethnomusicology enthusiasts, Mantle Hood also produced a new work for the same concert, *Marta Budaja*. In 1981, The Venerable Showers of Beauty Gamelan at Lewis and Clark College requested and played the new compositions by Alan Hovhaness (an idea instigated by Lou Harrison).

National styles are emphasized but the cause is not chauvinism. Composers who write for the gamelan adapt to it as best they can, falling back on familiar, friendly ground.

In general, American pieces lean to an earnest simplicity. Modality, regularity, and melody are dominant elements, and traditional Indonesian designs appear with some frequency. The oeuvre and personality of Lou Harrison, the father of American gamelan music, are in this respect influential in the United States.<sup>10</sup> The Dutch works are intricately structured and juxtapose flurries of sound with pristine note-by-note sequences. Neither the Dutch nor the English pieces show as much of Indonesia as the American—though the English do more than the Dutch. The English pieces, on the other hand, project a wit and lightness far from the seriousness of those across the channel—and closer to the American. English themes are incorporated: a text from Shakespeare (Roth, *Scenes from the Tempest*), churchbell change ringing (Parsons, *Changes*), and Rastafarian and Reggae rhythms (Steele, *The Victoria Incident, Part II*).<sup>11</sup> De Leeuw's notes on *Gending* offer a formal numerology (e.g. "protostructure," "transformation · process") reflecting, to my mind, the continuing interest on the Continent in problems/solutions/structure/explication. On the other hand, the program notes for the English Gamelan Orchestra are concise and deal with influences more than structure. Americans are not so verbal even when there is space to do so. Both *Ear Magazine* (Gamelan issue) and *Balungan* present scores, often with little or no commentary. The music must stand on its own feet. The score itself may be words in the Cagean manner with choices presented from which performers draw the piece. Or there is a brief description of the process of quasi-random orderings, suggesting minimalism or repetitive music—as in *Gamelan Son of Lion* pieces by Philip Corner, Iris Brooks, Daniel Goode, and Peter Griggs in *Ear Magazine*. Jody Diamond explains an Indonesian principle and her adaptation of it in *Balungan*. Lou Harrison tells of his great pleasure in tuning by just intonation and its importance to his gamelans (*Ear Magazine*, Gamelan issue, p. 26).

It has already been suggested that tunings vary among gamelans and the "sound" of a piece is always affected when played by different gamelans. Major differences almost always exist among gamelans from different regions of Indonesia; within a single area differences are usually but not always small.

<sup>10</sup> Harrison himself credits Dennis Murphy with being the first, in *Ear Magazine* (Gamelan issue, p. 3), but Harrison's energy, enthusiasm, patience, gracious prodding, and globetrotting have been major factors in the development of American gamelan. Dennis Murphy has written excellent articles in the same issue of *Ear Magazine*.

<sup>11</sup> My source is a program and a private tape of an October, 1983, concert supplied by Alec Roth and Neil Sorrell, which also includes Lockett, *The Monkey Puzzle*; Sorrell, *Gending Kencana*; and Hastanto, *Ro-Lu-Ma-Nem*. (Sri Hastanto is a leading faculty member from ASKI who was in England working for a Ph.D. at Durham University, 1982[?]-84).

American-made gamelans also have a corresponding range of negligible to major differences. When Western instruments are added to the gamelan the problems multiply. Violists performing in my *Sweet-Breathed Minstrel* with The Venerable Showers of Beauty Gamelan must retune the instrument. Even then they find it necessary to occasionally adjust a left-hand finger in order to attain certain pitches. Lou Harrison's gamelans, with their just intonations, allow for a quicker mix. But his *Double Concerto* for violin and cello, successfully performed (and recorded on TR Records) in California with one of Harrison's American gamelans, provided grave problems for Dutch string players when they had to match the intonation of a Javanese gamelan in Amsterdam.<sup>12</sup> I wanted to perform Harrison's beautiful *Threnody for Carlos Chavez* in Portland, but Harrison and I could not arrive at a satisfactory compromise between the scale of his Sundanese gamelan, for which the piece had been written, and our Central Javanese instruments. The piece simply was not transferable. On the other hand, my *Kagoklaras* for prepared piano thrived in transfers from a Javanese ensemble to the American Gamelan Pacifica and, astonishingly, to a Balinese ensemble where its director, JaFran Jones, ingeniously edited the original writing for five- and seven-toned *slendro* and *pelog* scales down to the four available on her gamelan. Needless to say, the particular balance between rhythmic-coloristic elements in a piece and those of pitch melody weigh heavily in its eventual adaptability to other gamelans.

### Tuning in Central Java

The intonation of gamelans is a matter that, in all its manifold variety, causes a fair amount of confusion in the West. Despite the fact of patently obvious differences in the intonations of Indonesian gamelans, not a few Westerners are nevertheless prone to seek an underlying ideal. On the basis of my own experiences in Java, I should like to disabuse them of their hope, for there are as many tunings as there are gamelans. This statement may not be strictly accurate—not all gamelans have been measured and compared<sup>13</sup>—but I believe it to be essentially correct. By “tuning,” I mean both range and tessitura as well as interval gapping. There is no precise standardization, either in practice or in theory. The controlling elements are the scales: *slendro* and *pelog* for the modern gamelans of Central Java.

<sup>12</sup> For an essay on yet another performance, see Dwight W. Thomas, “Lou Harrison's *Double Concerto for Gamelan, Violin, and Cello*: Juxtaposition of Individual and Cultural Expectations,” *Asian Music*, XV/1 (1983) 90-101.

<sup>13</sup> Measurements have been made of many of the better known gamelans in Solo and Yogya (also known as Jogja, Yogyakarta, or Jogjakarta). See Wasisto Surjodiningrat, P. J. Sudarjana, and Adhi Susanto, *Tone Measurements of Outstanding Javanese Gamelans in Jogjakarta and Surakarta*, Gadjah Mada University Press, Jogjakarta (Indonesia, 1972).

*Slendro* has five pitches each gapped variously in the area of 200 to 300 cents. *Pelug* has seven pitches (though individual pieces often use or stress only five or six of them) divided into distinctly smaller and larger intervals, those a little under 100 and those a little over 300 cents. *Slendro* uses big seconds and small thirds (little differences, quasi-equidistant) whereas *pelug* uses small seconds and big thirds (larger differences, a gapped scale). Large ensembles are usually “double” gamelans, that is, they have *slendro* and *pelug* halves; smaller ensembles use one scale or the other. But, as befits the tolerant character of the Javanese, no two *slendro* scales nor two *pelug* scales match.<sup>14</sup>

In 1978, I asked Rahayu Supanggah, then the chief of the gamelan department at ASKI, how tuning was decided upon when the school ordered a new gamelan. At the time the school had perhaps eight or nine gamelans, but one of them was especially respected. Knowing the decision was his and pointing to it, I asked, “Will you have the tuning of the new gamelan match that one?” He looked puzzled, paused, and responded, “No.” I waited for him to expand on this but, as nothing was forthcoming, I continued, “What tuning will it be then?” Again, a pause, and then a single word, “Different.” I said, “Different than the special one? Different than the others?” “Yes,” he replied, “Different.” Now I was becoming shrill, “Different how? In its general pitch height?” “Yes.” “Different in interval gapping?” “Yes, of course.” Thinking my frenzy was giving way to understanding, Supanggah calmly proceeded “You see? Different.” “Different,” I muttered, resigned to agree.

This Javanese aesthetic and analytic perspective is built, I believe, upon the renowned tolerance that runs through its culture, socially, philosophically, and artistically. Gamelans, like people, have individual characters with their own distinctive tunings. Replication is seen as unnatural regimentation. Differences are expected, tolerated, and prized. So it is between gamelans, and inside of a single gamelan, where octave equivalence, even among the fixed pitch instruments, is uninteresting and avoided. The same principles apply to the variably pitched instruments, such as voice or *rebab* (a fiddle). Bapak Sukanto, a respected elder of the Solonese tradition, told me that the singer or *rebab* player should by no means necessarily match the fixed interval gaps of any particular gamelan. It is all right to be different; and it is unavoidable. It is, above all, delightful and, in the end, there is no other course than “to tune to one’s own heart.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Regarding tolerance, see Benedict R. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*, Modern Indonesian Project, Cornell University, 1965.

<sup>15</sup> Solo, March, 1984. Bapak Sukanto has taught at both California Institute of the Arts and at Wesleyan University. R. Supanggah disagreed in part with this statement when I talked with him in Paris, where he was working on a Ph.D. in July, 1984. Such a difference of opinion is common in Javanese artistic and educational circles. It goes, so to speak, with the territory. (Bapak Sukanto has recently been “knighted,” i.e. awarded a court title for his stature and his contribution to music.)

## New Music in Indonesia

The conventional Western wisdom holds that the traditional arts of the East are static and unchanging. With regard to the music of Central Java (and Sunda and Bali), this is just not so. The fact is that there is a great deal of change in both the evolution of older performance styles and in the composition of new pieces.

The evolution of Central Javanese style is not widely acknowledged today, either inside or outside of Indonesia. Outside of Indonesia, teachers, imported or homegrown, share a particular style they have learned and love. Pupils strive to perfect an imitation of that style which then becomes sanctified. In this natural, if thoughtless, chain of events such a style may seem perfect, eternal, unchanging. But in Solo in 1978, Supanggih and I worked on a project together. I had been wondering about style change and in the library of the Mangkunegaran Palace had come across recordings of Palace performances from the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>16</sup> We listened, and Supanggih was amazed at the difference in performance from then to now, particularly with regard to the *sinden* (female vocal solo), *gerong* (male chorus), and *gender* (metal keys with tube resonators). Differences in the *sinden* parts were confirmed by Nyai Bei Mardusari, herself a participant in those early recordings. Supanggih and I discussed these performance changes with her.

In 1971, I worked with Sumarsam, then at ASKI, now at Wesleyan University, on an article for *Ethnomusicology* about the influence of *gender* parts in determining *patet* (or *pathet*), that is, mode.<sup>17</sup> In that article certain *gender* cadence patterns were adjudged significant as concerns *patet* identification. On my trip to Solo in 1983-84, a faculty member at ASKI, Santosa, informed me that Bapak Martopangrawit, a renowned statesman of ASKI and of Solonese style, had recently developed a whole set of *gender* patterns different from the earlier ones. Thus there were changes not only from 1930 to 1970 but, it seems, between 1970-83! Furthermore, the *Ethnomusicology* article suggests that *patet* depended not upon any single instrument's part alone, but on a combination of parts. Now we can see that mode in Javanese music depends not only upon fascinating arrays of eternal inter-instrumental relationships, but upon changing interrelationships from one period of time to another—a modality of modes.

Yet such changes, insofar as they are noted at all by contemporary musicians, usually have a negative sound to them. They take the form

<sup>16</sup> I learned later from Ernst Heins of the Jaap Kunst Ethnomusicology Center that Amsterdam had made tape copies from recordings in their collection and had sent them to the Mangkunegaran as a courtesy.

<sup>17</sup> Published as "Central Javanese Music: The Patet of Laras Slendro and the Gender Barung," *Ethnomusicology*, XIX/2 (1975), 233-44.



of an elder's commentary on the ignorance and/or failings of younger musicians. Certainly Ibu Mardusari was displeased with today's *sinden*. And the renowned Indonesian K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat (known formerly as K. R. T. Wasitodipura and familiarly as Pak Cokro or Chokro) of the California Institute of the Arts has mentioned to me his bemusement in regard to what young rebabists are playing today. But I should like to remark particularly that *sinden* seem to me to come in for more than their fair share of invidious comparisons; their contribution to a general decline from perfection is particularly discussed. But I do not know why. Their style may be different, but I have heard *sinden* around ASKI, Sudarti, for instance, whose voices and musicality are wonderful. And I have seen them work with an intensity and dedication that rival any in my experience. No doubt some of the past is beautiful but the new is also very healthy.

My belief in a Heraclitean flow of style is affected still more by new compositions and by new methods of composition. There are the works by K. Nartosabdho and K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat discussed by Judith Becker in her fine *Traditional Music in Modern Java* (Honolulu, 1980); these are composed largely within an older stylistic tradition, venturing outside only to "light classic" pieces. *Rujit* of Bapak Martopangrawit,<sup>18</sup> and Rustopo's *Panembrama*, and Pak Cokro's *Purnomo-Siddi* are recent serious works that also fit this description; the last named was commissioned by a consortium of American gamelans (with Lou Harrison).<sup>19</sup>

But there are also new works that go beyond the tradition. Westerners may use the word "revolutionary"; the Javanese on the other hand are not inclined toward radical statement and controversy nor for any complaint against their immediate past. In any case, radically new works came into being in Solo first in 1978, according to Sri Hastanto, who may have been the first to compose in the new vein (conversation in Durham, November, 1983). I witnessed rehearsals and performances in Solo and in Jakarta in late 1978 where new works of the avant-garde were presented with others along traditional lines. *Wayang Buddha*, idea and choreography by Suprpto and music by Supanggih, is an avant-garde mixture of puppetry, dance, chanting, and contemporary music that could be played without apology anywhere in the West without seeming especially exotic. The new directions of 1978 were quite possibly instigated and certainly supported by the then Director of ASKI-Solo, Bapak S. D. Humardani (d. 1983). He was a

<sup>18</sup> Recorded commercially in Indonesia on cassette, Ira Record WD-582. The composer's name is not identified, as is the tradition. Pak Marto died in the spring of 1986.

<sup>19</sup> The notation for *Purnomo-Siddi* is utterly unique for the genre insofar as the part for every instrument is written out. Pak Cokro told me that writing out all parts was one of the most taxing assignments of his career, and he wishes not to repeat it. Such parts traditionally are partially improvised using standard patterns.

remarkable man with great energy and broad vision who, I believe, moved ASKI into the forefront of the great performing arts schools of the world. He wished to perpetuate old traditions but sought to do so always through the vigor of the young and the inclusion of new ideas. He dreamed of a modern Indonesia, not of an old Java. He was forceful and controversial and disturbed the quiet Javanese social fabric. (He told me he grew weary of Westerners telling him what he ought to preserve!) Doubtless he was a force behind the new compositions.

Most of the radically new works explore new sounds, new ways to handle old as well as new instruments, and are hybrids using different scales, tunings, and styles. The results are often extremely close to what we hear in Western experimental music, both good and bad. These musicians are largely ignorant of Western classic traditions, old or new. I cannot explain the reasons for this remarkable similarity nor will I comment on the lack of similar experimentation among Western gamelans, who thus appear ultraconservative alongside their Indonesian brethren. That much of the newest music, East and West, is crude beside the sumptuous traditional repertory is only partly explained as a case of children in an antique shop. It is partly due to a new aesthetic wherein suavity has little appeal. Indonesia and the West are alike in that respect. In any case, and without interruption in the steady flow of mainstream traditional performances, there has come a steady stream of avant-garde works since 1978.

This is not to say there is a unified Indonesian style in the new work anymore than in the old. Traditionally in the West, there is a tripartite division in Indonesian gamelan styles: Sunda, Central Java, and Bali. This division is based on broad linguistic, geographic, and political differences as well as on musical style. But I began to wonder about this on a trip in 1978 to Cirebon, a major city and old cultural center in West Java (or Sunda), close to the border of Central Java. The style was certainly different from that of Central Java and what I heard in Jakarta, West Java. In early 1984 I was astonished by a statement by Santosa, a faculty member of ASKI charged with developing ethnomusicological resources, who sent groups of students to distant villages to study local style and repertory. He said that there were "about 500!" styles in Java. I asked him if he might not reconsider that number; if there might not be coalescence here and there. And if so, how many? "Maybe around sixteen." Whether sixteen or 500, without doubt, the number 3 is no longer sacred in Indonesian music. I also remember a conversation with Sri Hastanto, who was speaking about a collection of well-known old Javanese songs published by Indonesia's Department of Education. He said they were all presented in Solonese style and that singers in other places would likely be intimidated by this official printed statement into doubting their own style. "That would

not be Java!” he said; even in Java alone there are untold numbers of styles, and each should be upheld.

Considering Solo and Bali together, the output of avant-garde works is large, probably equal in number to the sizeable American repertory which itself burgeoned also at the end of the 1970s. Every gamelan graduate from ASKI (they also have dance and *wayang* departments) is required to compose a new work, and faculty members seem continually occupied with new pieces. The most prolific composer seems to be Aloysius (Al.) Suwardi (b. 1951). I have heard several of his sensitive and inventive compositions, for example *Gender* and *Sebauh Proses* (1984), *Bauran* (1982), *Debah* (1981), and *Onde-Onde* and *Malam* (1980). His discoveries and imagination for new colors in old instruments are quite remarkable. He placed *gender* keys over a set of rotating discs in tubes, thereby making a Javanese vibraphone tuned to *slendro*. At the start of *Debah*, he draws a bow across the edge of keys. A little later in the same piece he introduces the water *bonang*, a *bonang* pot turned over, filled partly with water, struck, then tipped. It produces an extraordinarily lovely and ethereal glissando. (Alec Roth uses this technique in a stunning manner in his *Scenes from the Tempest*.) Still later in *Debah*, the chorus enters with kazoos. There is humor but it is made poignant in context. Vocal sound effects are wide ranging in *Bauran*, and in *Malam* the chorus sings a Western major scale (called doremi in Java—an eminent gamelan builder said he had tuned a new gamelan to doremi to be sent to America). Suwardi rarely uses a standard beater for any instrument, but whether he is scraping a gong, letting rounded keys roll side to side on a hard surface, or tapping and pounding on the floor, his sounds are aimed in cogent musical directions. The methods just described may remind us, not necessarily pleasantly, of the 1960s and Western experimental music. But Suwardi puts his sounds in dramatic frameworks that are nearly always comprehensible and enlightening.

Suwardi is, as well, a leading teacher of traditional music at ASKI, yet I have seen elder court musicians turn to him with questions about old practice, a most unusual thing in an age-first society. He is respected by and respectful toward the old, a typically Javanese trait, idealized if not actually practiced by all young composers in Solo.

Among the other new pieces of note are the following: Hastanto: *Dandangulo* (1979), Supanggih: *Gambuh* (1979); Made Pande Sukerta (a Balinese musician in Solo): *Rekaman Penentuan Pengajian* (1983) and *Asanaweli* (1980); and Subono and Santosa: *Ouah-Ouah* (1983).

Attribution of works is not always clear in Indonesia. It is a particularly Javanese trait not to name the composer. Traditionally, works are anonymous or said to be attributed to the reigning prince of the day. Modern Indonesian programs and record liner notes ignore the matter. Through con-

versations with active and learned musicians, one could compile a who's who but, in a larger and public sense, it is simply not an issue. Furthermore, new works are often sketchy at early rehearsals, and the composer develops the piece within the group whose members eventually may contribute much to the outcome. Group consciousness and diffidence are important to Indonesians. They prefer to avoid pointing to themselves or to anyone else; in fact, it is embarrassing to be singled out. I missed the first performance of an Al. Suwardi piece because he neglected to mention the upcoming event, although I saw him almost daily and had attended many rehearsals. If a Westerner can get past his initial bafflement and frustration, there is great charm in this attitude; perhaps even something positive. Nonetheless, basic bibliographic information in Indonesia is not what it is in the West. Facts there are not too important.

### Conclusion

Gamelans are coming out of and being built outside of Indonesia on a fairly substantial scale. Perhaps American gamelans will eventually go to Indonesia. The idea is not wholly farfetched. During the question-answer sessions following a Lou Harrison lecture on the subject of American aluminum gamelans at ASKI in early 1984, a faculty member asked for a price quote and suggested that ASKI would like to import one. Indeed there is much interest at ASKI in new ways. Indonesian music is spreading steadily through the West. More communication will make it a two-way flow or even (considering its growing intercontinental allure) a multiple hookup. If there is a Solonese style, a Yogyanese, and a Cirebonese, why not an Amsterdam, a London, an Oakland, or a Portland style as well.<sup>20</sup>

Music from India catapulted into Western consciousness in the 1960s and although the "fad" aspect has faded, there has been a steady growth of interest in and influence emanating from third-world music. Judith Becker told me a few years ago that gamelan concerts in Ann Arbor were drawing audiences of 2500. New music series in New York, San Francisco, Portland, London, and other places today often include traditional as well as new gamelan music. Let me conclude with the statement of a Boston music critic in 1929: "Javanese music is liquid and golden, the most beautiful music in the world."<sup>21</sup> Lou Harrison expressed the same sentiment at Lewis and Clark College in 1981: "Simply said, gamelan music is the most beautiful music in the world, and I for one see no reason to do any other kind of music ever again."

<sup>20</sup> Judith Becker seems to encourage, at least partially, an Americanization of gamelans in this country. See "One Perspective on Gamelan in America," *Asian Music*, XV/1 (1983), 82-89.

<sup>21</sup> *Boston Evening Transcript*, Nov. 14, 1929, signed by A.H.M. The article previewed a concert featuring Eichheim's work that would include "gamelang" instruments. My opinion is that the critic's words actually came from the remarkable Eichheim.