



New Music of Indonesia

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New Music of Indonesia

Asmat Dream. New Music of Indonesia, Volume 1 (Sunda). SUHENDI, DODY SATYA, ROESLI, and NANO S. Produced by JODY DIAMOND and LARRY POLANSKY. Lyrichord LYRCD 7415. Compact disc. Liner notes with photos.

Mana 689. New Music of Indonesia, Volume 2 (Central Java). PANDE MADE SUKERTA, I WAYAN SADRA, B. SUBONO and OTOK BIMA SIDARTA. Produced by JODY DIAMOND and LARRY POLANSKY. Lyrichord LYRCD 7420. Compact disc. Liner notes with photos.

Karya. New Music of Indonesia, Volume 3. I WAYAN SADRA. Produced by JODY DIAMOND and LARRY POLANSKY. Lyrichord LYRCD 7421. Compact disc. Liner notes.

(No publication dates listed).

The international world of gamelan would be so much the poorer without the visionary enterprises of Jody Diamond, most particularly her founding of the American Gamelan Institute, with its archives for distributing gamelan scores, recordings, and literature, and its excellent journal *Balungan* (though, sadly, there seems to have been no issue past Vol. 5 No.2 Summer/Fall 1993). In addition she has produced numerous recordings of gamelan music, among them the compact disc *Interactions: New Music for Gamelan* issued with the Leonardo Music Journal (Vol. 2 No.1, 1992), a recording with an intriguing mix of six composers, three Indonesian and three American.

New Music Indonesia, a series of three compact discs of new compositions (*komposisi baru*) by Indonesian composers is one of the outcomes of Jody Diamond's Senior Fulbright Research Fellowship sojourn in Indonesia in 1989, with husband Larry Polansky. As Diamond explains in her very informative notes, "Indonesian arts have always had a robust and fertile tradition of innovation, yet progressive and experimental developments have been largely undocumented." (The "progressive and experimental developments" found in *komposisi baru* are generally more extreme, less faithful to tradition, than those in *kreasi baru* ["new creations"], a term generally used for new gamelan compositions which are grounded in traditional forms and performance practice. The use of the term *komposisi*, an Indonesianization of "composition," itself suggests an imported, Western concept.) But as Diamond points out, the compositional process of most of the composers is typically traditional, regardless of how apparently radical or "experimental" the result; the composer arrives at the rehearsal with only general concepts which he works through and develops in collabora-

tion with the performers (all the composers represented are male). Composition is generally regarded as a collective activity, a process of interaction and negotiation between the initiator/composer and his collaborators/performers. Diamond saw her role as that of an additional participant in this collaborative creative process: "After a year of talking to composers all over Indonesia, Larry Polansky and I commissioned and recorded nine new pieces, hoping to increase public knowledge of new Indonesian music and give a few composers a chance to create free of social and economic restrictions. We chose several of the most interesting and influential composers we had met, and invited them to meet us at the [recording] studio with a piece of their choice. This also gave us a chance to work collaboratively, and to change the relationship of "researcher and informant" to one of counterparts—artists working together toward a common goal."

As Diamond points out, musical experimentation in Indonesia is confined largely to the music academies in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Padangpanjang, Denpasar, Bandung, and most especially, Solo, a situation not unlike contemporary music composition in Western academic institutions. However, almost all of the composers recorded here are based in Solo and Bandung—practical considerations may have prevented a more comprehensive representation. (A cassette recording produced by Elaine Barkin, *Prima: New Music in Bali*, featuring Balinese-based composers, is an appropriate complement to this *New Music Indonesia* series).

In her cover notes Diamond sketches the background for Indonesian contemporary gamelan composition, acknowledging pioneer innovators such as K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat and Mang Koko, though, oddly, making no mention of Ki Wasitodipuro and Ki Nartosabdho, whose important contributions are lucidly examined in Judith Becker's *Traditional Music in Modern Java*. But the style of compositions recorded on these discs are, in the main, far more radical than a Nartosabdho composition. These are works which, with one or two exceptions, would never be heard on a commercial cassette in Indonesia. This is music at the cutting edge, music which challenges tradition in sometimes an almost confrontational fashion and which, one feels, also reaches out to an international contemporary music audience.

Interestingly, several of the composers are in fact well-known in Indonesia through commercially produced cassette recordings of compositions which, though innovative, hardly fall within the category of "experimental." Otok Bima Sidarta follows the tradition of his father Bagong Kussudiarja as a multi-disciplinary artist: composer, choreographer, painter, teacher. The innovations of both father and son have been significant in the process of popularization and "democratization" of Javanese gamelan of recent years, a trend sometimes viewed with suspicion by gamelan purists. Similarly Nano

S is an extremely influential figure in the popularization of Sundanese music—his recordings are legion—while Harry Roesli's fame rests on his Western-derived Indonesian pop music which, particularly during the 1970s, introduced elements from traditional music as well as unusual sound sources such as bicycle bells. Unlike most of his composer colleagues, Roesli has access to, and now mainly works with, up-to-date electronic technologies, and is in much demand as a composer of music for theater and dance productions. His *Asmat Dream*, the title track of volume 1, is a purely electronic tape piece that incorporates recordings of Asmat music as well as environmental and electronic sounds.

Altogether eight composers are represented on these three discs, although a lion's share is devoted to the music of one composer, I Wayan Sadra. Sadra is undoubtedly one of the most interesting of the whole group, a composer of vivid aural imagination. He has a special talent for combining elements of different Indonesian regional music traditions into something new and strange, as in *Aku*, which incorporates a *rebana* frame drum, Balinese *suling*, Western flute, Javanese drums, violin, and voices. Like many of the composers, Sadra uses a process of collective improvisation, but each work projects a convincing and unique character, and the working out of the material is generally well judged and seldom overstays its welcome. Sadra's genius in integrating elements of different musical traditions makes him an ideal candidate for intercultural exchanges such as his project with the Amsterdam Nieuw Ensemble in November 1996.

In listening through this collection one can sense in all the composers a pleasure in experimentation, a willingness to take risks, and a belief that the process of composition is as important, if not more so, than the product. To a listener accustomed to the often highly integrated structures of Western music, some of these works may sound rather too much like a sequence of overlapping timbral and textural explorations which lack a clearly defined character or structural focus. For example, Suhendi Afryanto's *Mbub* would, I imagine, make a greater impact in live performance, where one could better appreciate the living-in-the-moment quality of a structured improvisation. Overall, however, the music on these three discs has a compelling immediacy and freshness which can be guaranteed to tickle the ears of ethnomusicologists, composers, gamelan-players, and ordinary music lovers alike. This collection opens new doors in presenting these composers to an international audience, and suggests great promise for the future development of a lively experimental tradition in Indonesian music.

References

- Barkin, Elaine, prod. 1994. *Prima. New Music in Bali*. Works by I Komang Astita, I Wayan Rai, and I Wayan Suweca [cassette]. Distribution: Elaine Barkin, Music Dept., UCLA, Los Angeles, or Linda Burman-Hall, Music Dept., UCSC, Santa Cruz.
- Becker, Judith. 1980. *Traditional Music in Modern Java. Gamelan in a Changing Society*, Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii; with cassette tape *Traditional Music in Modern Java*. Edukits, Honolulu, Hawaii [contains compositions by Ki Wasitodipuro and Ki Nartosabdho].

Music of the Gamelan Gong Kebyar, Volume I. Performed by musicians from STSI Denpasar. Notes and recordings by WAYNE VITALE. Includes works by I WAYAN BERATHA. Vital Records 401. 1996.

Music of the Gamelan Gong Kebyar, Volume II. Works of I NYOMAN WINDHA. Performed by gamelan Mrdangga Giri Kasuma, Candra Metu, and Dharma Kasuma. Notes and recordings by WAYNE VITALE. Vital Records 402. 1996.

The beauty of being an independent scholar and running your own record company is that you can do it *your way*, the way you know it should be done. In the first two volumes of *Music of the Gamelan Gong Kebyar*, Wayne Vitale, of the newly established Vital Records, provides a good example of the benefits of independence. Vitale has kept sight of what is most important to him, and his priorities are evident in every aspect of the two CDs, from the design, to the notes, to the recordings themselves. The recordings and the accompanying booklets are figuratively bursting at the seams with love for the music and the passion to know it and to explain it.

Volume One presents music for *gong kebyar* played by the extremely skilled musicians of STSI Denpasar, the National Arts Institute in Bali. In addition to excellent musicians, Vitale has selected pieces that represent some of the most significant, influential Balinese composers. Three of the pieces are by I Wayan Beratha, an important teacher, tuner and instrument builder, and creator of the innovative 7-tone Gamelan Semara Dana.

Volume 2 is all the work of one composer, the talented I Nyoman Windha, and I applaud Vitale's decision to present a large body of an important artist's work, something too seldom done in "world music" recordings. (There are only a few Indonesian composers whose work makes up the entire contents of a CD: K.R.T. Wasitodiningrat on CMP, I Wayan Sadra on Lyrichord, and I Wayan Lotring on Ocora.) This collection is intended to reveal the many facets of Windha's skills with the gong kebyar ensemble, and allow a richer insight into the identity of an individual than is possible