

# BALUNGAN

A Publication of the American Gamelan Institute



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The American Gamelan Institute (AGI), founded in 1981, is an organization devoted to publishing, recording, distributing and making available information on all aspects of Indonesian performing arts and their international counterparts.

The first issue of **BALUNGAN** was printed in 1984; this is the 21st issue. Since Volume 9–10, 2004, the online edition has included additional media and text files. AGI also maintains an online library with fonts, scores, and writings that may be freely downloaded at [gamelan.org/library](http://gamelan.org/library)

**BALUNGAN** is an international peer-reviewed journal presenting scholarly and artistic perspectives on Indonesian and international gamelan music and related performing arts. The goal of **BALUNGAN** is to encourage a dialogue between scholars and artists involved with this complex ensemble and its many associated traditions in Indonesia and elsewhere. The intention is to provide a deeper understanding of the work of the scholar and the artist, to the benefit of both.

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## EDITORIAL

While working on this issue, I was reminded of a conversation with the composer Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun, a talented musician I am proud to call a friend (and occasional collaborator). I asked him once if he ever received negative responses to his most adventurous compositions, particularly from more conservative pengrawit.

He said he had received rather sharp criticism on numerous occasions. But although he did not agree with their perspective, he considered these individuals to be necessary to the gamelan community at large, because the survival of Javanese gamelan requires a balance between those with an unwavering dedication to the classical style, those who disregard tradition almost entirely, and those who attempt to navigate the space in between (such as himself).

My hope is that *Balungan* can mirror this ongoing process of negotiation: providing resources for the preservation and study of karawitan, while simultaneously showcasing the innovations and developments of the art form both within Indonesia and abroad. The articles and scores you find in this issue cover a broad spectrum from tutorials for making a gamelan from discarded pans to an in-depth look at the little-known wayang beber, to a traditional sea shanty arranged for Javanese instruments, to a contemporary composition by Thoyyib himself. These pieces reflect a continued dedication to spreading the knowledge and appreciation of gamelan in its many forms.

For the last five years, Java has been my permanent home. I came here to study gamelan in 2015, and found myself pulled in a million musical directions. For anyone who has spent extensive time here and studied music beyond the “kraton-sphere,” it becomes apparent that the elegant, beautiful, breathtaking intricacy of the classical style is only a one part of the music being played. At the risk of sounding preachy, I do believe that if students of gamelan wish to avoid the idealization, exoticization, and classicism of our armchair ethnomusicologist predecessors, we must see gamelan (and Indonesia) for what it is, rather than what we would like it to be. We cannot ignore the sometimes violent chaos of *kuda lumping* in East Java, the overt sexualization of *joged bumbung* in Bali, or the irreverent gender-bending humor of *lengger* in Banyumas. All of this is gamelan, in a state of constant transformation.

By embracing both tradition and innovation, we acknowledge that the beauty of gamelan lies in its preservation as well as its evolution. With this issue of *Balungan*, I am reminded that gamelan is a living, breathing art form that speaks to a multitude of voices. The dynamic tension between the past and the future, the sacred and the not-so-sacred, is what makes gamelan such a compelling and enduring musical tradition. I hope to contribute to this ongoing dialogue, to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of gamelan in all its forms, complexities, and contradictions.

—Sean Hayward, 11 February 2025, Yogyakarta

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### **Vol. I, No.1, June 1984**

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### **Vol. I, No. 2, February 1985**

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### **Vol. I, No. 3, Spring 1985**

I Wayan Sinti with Michael Tenzer (J. Diamond), Aesthetic Tradition and Cultural Transition in Java and Bali (K. Devereaux), KOKAR Gamelan on Campus

### **Vol. II, Nos. 1-2, Fall 1985/Winter 1986**

\* Ed. Kent Devereaux  
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### **Vol. II, No. 3, December 1986**

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### **Vol. III, No. 1, November 1987**

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### **Vol. III, No. 2, October 1988**

John Cage (M. Frascioni), Gong-making in Taiwan (K.H. Han), How to Play Gender Panerus (Marsudi), Gamelan in Japan (U. Michio), Balungan

### **Vol. III, No. 3, December 1988**

\* Ed. Richard North: Cirebon.  
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### **Vol. IV, No. 1, May 1989**

\* Ed. David Posnett.  
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### **Vol. IV, No. 2, Fall 1990**

\* Ed. Wayne Vitale: Bali.  
Kotekan: technique of interlocking parts in Balinese music (W. Vitale), Interview: I Wayan Dibia (W. Vitale), Sindu Arsa (Ketut Partha), Gamelan Sekar Jaya

### **Vol. V, No. 1, Winter/Spring 1991**

\* Ed. Deborah Wong: Mainland Southeast Asia.  
Across Three Generations: a Solo Piece for Thai Gong Cycle (D. Wong), Teachers on Tape: Innovation and Experimentation in Teaching Thai Music (P. Myers-Moro)

### **Vol.5, No. 2, Summer/Fall 1993**

\* Ed. Kathy Foley: Sunda.  
Creative Musical Practices in ... Pantun Sunda (A. Weintraub), Tembang Sunda Poetry (G. Young and M.

### **Vol. 6 Nos.1- 2, 1998**

\* Eds. Allan Thomas & Jack Body.  
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### **Vol. 7-8, 2000**

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### **Vol. 9-10, 2004**

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### **Vol. 11, 2010**

\* Eds. Barbara Benary and Tomoko Deguchi. Japan.  
Gamelan in Japan (B. Benary and T. Deguchi), I Gusti Bagus Nyoman Pandji (R. Ornstein), Notes on the Balinese Gambelan Music (I G.B.N. Pandji), The New Waves

### **Vol. 12, 2017**

Alternative Methods in Composition of New Karawitan, by Pande Made Sukerta. The Macapat Style of Pak Netra, by Darsono. Does an Indonesian Composer Need a Regional . . .

### **Vol. 13, 2019**

Djoko Waluyo: How Can I Explain Feeling? (English and Indonesian), Sean Hayward. Lintang, Djoko Waluyo, notes by Sean Hayward. Recipe for Starting a Gamelan Group

### **Vol. 14, GAMELAN DURING COVID, 2020**

\* Eds. Jody Diamond and Linda Hibbs.  
Gamelan and related arts during the COVID era.  
One hundred pages, 70 contributors, one global community.

### **Vol. 15, 2021/2022**

\* Ed. Oscar Smith  
The Gifts of the Pandemic (J. Diamond), Dewa Alit and Gamelan Salukat (O. Smith), The Spoken and the Unspoken: Pedagogical Perspectives on Balinese Gamelan (L. Tilley)

### **Vol. 16, 2023/2024**

Wayang Beber Metropolitan: Tradition as Inspiration (M. Pretković, T. Škrinjarić), Directory of Selected Wayang Beber Groups and Museums (D. Smither), Beyond Expo



## Wayang Beber Metropolitan: a contemporary Javanese picture-scroll theater group

by Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarić

Wayang Beber is a traditional Javanese picture-scroll theatrical form, with a centuries-long narrative performance and ritual tradition, in which colorfully painted horizontal scrolls have a central role. The scrolls are traditionally made of beaten tree bark (*daluang*, or *dluwang*) rolled onto bamboo sticks (Teijgeler 1996; Utami 2016). In performance, the *dhalang* as storyteller unrolls the scrolls from one stick to the other while narrating the story, scene by scene.

In Java, there are only two sets of wayang beber scrolls that are considered original. These scrolls are distinct in their origin, kept in the homes of rural families, and passed down along the male line of descendants since, traditionally, the *dhalang* would be a man. These sets are referred to as “Wayang Beber Pacitan” and “Wayang Beber Wonosari,” the latter named after the city of Wonosari, the capital of Gunung Kidul Regency (Special Region of Yogyakarta). The “Pacitan” set is kept in the village of Gedompol (Karangtalun, Pacitan Regency, East Java), while the other is in the village of

Bejiharjo (Gelaran, Gunung Kidul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta). According to Teijgeler, (2016: 5) the Pacitan scrolls are dated between 1690 and 1739 and the Wonosari scrolls between 1700 and 1735. Neither of the sets is actively used for performances or rituals. There is another set of scrolls with similar characteristics in the Ethnological Museum in Leiden (Stutje 2022).

The stories are not from the Ramayana or Mahabharata, the usual repertoire of many other wayang forms on Java. Rather, wayang beber tells stories from the Javanese cycle of Panji legends that describe life events of Prince Panji from the Jenggala Kingdom and his search for the runaway princess of the Kediri Kingdom. More on Panji in Javanese culture can be found in the work of L. Kieven (2013, 2014). Our research (Pretković and Škrinjarić 2017) and that of others such as Anderson (1974), Soelarto (1983), and Kant-Achilles et al. (1990), showed wayang beber had a significant social and ritual role. Performances were



Figure 1. Scene from the Wonosari scrolls (2016). (All photos are by the authors.)





Figure 2. Traditional performance with Pacitan-style scrolls in Sragen, Central Java (2016).

an integrated part of the ritual *ruwatan*, a ceremony of purification of a village (Figure 2).

The scrolls are occasionally used for healing rituals where individuals ask the dhalang or scroll owner for help with various health or social issues. We were told that the scrolls have the power to guard against evil forces or even resolve specific problems when used in certain healing rituals. One of the rituals that has been passed down through multiple generations to the present day is the preparation of an offering (*sesajen*) and recitation of a prayer each time the original scrolls are taken out of the wooden box (*ampok*) in which they are kept (Figure 3). This is done regardless of whether they are being used for a performance, for healing purposes, or merely being shown to someone who requests to see them.

A typical performance is accompanied by a small ensemble of a few gamelan instruments. The traditional shows in Pacitan area include a *kendhang*, gong, *kenong*, as well as *rebab*, which has a dominant role. In Wonosari, where notation is sometimes used in rehearsals (Figure 4), female singers [*pesindhen*] are present; in Pacitan, *saron* and *slenthem* are added (Figures 5, 6, and 7).

To learn more about wayang beber, we conducted new fieldwork—looking for historical information, exploring the reasons for its decline, and assessing how the tools of cultural anthropology could contribute to preservation efforts. Even though the main performance props of wayang beber are of a material nature, the knowledge behind the storytelling is based on a long oral tradition, and therefore challenging to present and preserve. One of these challenges is variations in the information from different generations.

Wayang theater has been inscribed since 2008 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, n.d.), yet wayang kulit gets most public attention. Bernards Alens Zako, the Program Specialist at the UNESCO Office in Jakarta, told us that UNESCO had not included much detailed information about wayang beber in their reports on wayang, other than that it was fading out.



Figure 3. Storage of wayang beber Wonosari scrolls.

A report on the implementation of the status of elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity stated: "Among the many styles of wayang, some are active and developing (e.g. Surakarta and Yogyakarta Styles of Wayang Kulit, Wayang Bali, Wayang Golek Sunda). [Other] styles are fading out (Wayang Klitik, Wayang Beber)" (UNESCO 2014:12).

There has been some government support for wayang beber, such as the sponsoring of cultural events in the Pacitan and Yogyakarta areas, including a cultural event in Sragen that featured a wayang beber performance by Teha Tri Hartantno with the Wayang Beber Pacitan scrolls on 20 August 2016, the anniversary of the Wayang Beber Sakbendino group in Pacitan on 5 August 2017, and a performance by Selamat Haryadi in the Wonosari area. The cultural department of the Special Region of Yogyakarta commissioned a painter named Utomo to duplicate paintings of the Wonosari scrolls in 2017, intended for more frequent performing and in that way protecting the original set from further damage.

People we talked to had different priorities for the preservation of wayang beber; either the scrolls themselves took precedence, or performances and the meaning they have in the local community was more important. Opinions also differed on who should be in charge of



Figure 5. Rehearsal for a performance in Gelaran (2017).

preservation: the owner, the local community, conservation experts, the government, or if a collaborative effort should be undertaken.

During our fieldwork we also met and interacted with people from different parts of Java who were not involved with wayang beber. When we talked about our interest in this form of wayang, their reactions gave us the impression that many people were unfamiliar with wayang beber or had never even heard of it, although many knew of the more widespread wayang kulit, sometimes having seen a performance. These reactions gave us even deeper appreciation of the significant efforts of individual artists and art groups to revitalize this unique theatrical form.

### Contemporary Wayang Beber Groups in Java

There are many Javanese artists and scholars who have ambitious and creative ideas for the revival of wayang beber. Through communicating with other contemporary wayang beber groups and attempting to learn about their dedication to the tradition, we realized that, contrary to our perception of wayang beber being primarily an historical art form, these young Javanese artists had recognized its potential and transformed it into new creations that bridged a generational and sociocultural gap between the old and new. We became aware of the extensive work and efforts of art groups and individuals to create innovative performing styles in order to contribute to the continuity and preservation of wayang beber. All the groups shared a similar performing style adapted from the traditional Wayang Beber Wonosari in which a dhalang sits in front of a scroll rolled onto wooden rods (longer than the ones in Pacitan and Wonosari), using a long, thin, wooden pointer to indicate which character is speaking. The painted background of their scrolls, however, are less filled in. While not using Panji stories specifically in their performances, all of the groups are inspired by Panji's character as a symbol of important values in life, and as a hero who overcomes evil in many forms.

There are other changes as well. Some groups, like Wayang Beber Metropolitan and Wayang Beber Welingan, occasionally include female storytellers in



Figure 4. Wonosari dhalang showing gamelan notation (2016).

their performances. Modern groups often use the same scroll to tell different stories, and do not make offerings before a performance. Contemporary performances are accompanied by compositions that combine gamelan and modern instruments such as electric guitar and electronic keyboard. The music style and the instruments differ for each performance. Singing and clapping also play an important role.

**Wayang Beber Kota** is considered one of the first groups to pave the way to the world of contemporary wayang beber performances (Lis 2014). The Indonesian word "kota" means "city," so the group's name might be translated as Urban Wayang Beber. Formed in February 2005 by Dani Iswardana, a painter, Tri Ganjar Wicaksono, a young dhalang, and the group's manager Agung Priyo Wibowo (Dani Iswardana, p.c., August 24, 2016), the group performed for a few years, after which they switched their focus to educational artistic activities, led by Iswardana and based on wayang beber style. Iswardana also had an important role in the forming of Wayang Beber Metropolitan, since the founding members often met with him in Surakarta to exchange ideas and knowledge about wayang beber (Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo, p.c., September 18, 2016).

Another contemporary group is **Wayang Beber Sakbendino**, whose name can be translated from



Figure 6. Wayang beber performance in Gedongpol (2016).



Figure 7. Musicians at a performance in Yogyakarta (2017).



Javanese as “Everyday Wayang Beber.” This group was formed in August 2016 in Pacitan by the group’s storyteller, Tri Ganjar Wicaksono of Wayang Beber Kota. They started a year-long project of performing wayang beber every day with the aim of increasing awareness of this local tradition, especially focusing on the character of Panji. At first they used Dani Iswardana’s scrolls to tell different stories, and later started creating their own scrolls (Figure 16). Even after the one-year project had ended, the group continued calling attention to Panji culture and wayang beber through occasional performances, mainly in the Pacitan region, but also by collaborating closely with artists from Mojokerto.

**Wayang Beber Welingan** focuses on ecological topics such as environmental protection and recycling. Their name highlights this. “Welingan” is an abbreviation of *wayang edukasi lingkungan*, or environmental education wayang (Lis 2014, 516). In Javanese, “weling” means a “message,” so the name of the group can be interpreted as a wayang beber meant to convey messages, inform, and educate. Their scrolls are made with the batik fabric technique, using wax and natural dyes. The group was founded in 2012 in Surakarta in Central Java by Anthony Sastrowijoyo, the group’s painter and storyteller (Lis 2014).

While Wayang Beber Welingan only occasionally performs as a singular group (the last performance we saw was in 2016 in Surakarta), some of its members are more active as members of the puppet theatre community **WANGSA**, an acronym of wayang and *sampah* [trash]. Like Wayang Beber Welingan, WANGSA, or **Wayang Sampah**, focuses on themes of environmental preservation and sustainability, ecology, and recycling.

**Wayang Beber Tani** performs a cycle of new stories created by Faris Wibisono, a painter and dhalang (Figure 8). Tani is a root word in Indonesian connected to agriculture, used in *petani* [farmer]. Wibisono's performances focus on the rural way of life and how it is slowly being replaced by contemporary, fast-paced, urban lifestyles. In his family house in Pracimantoro in Wonogiri, Central Java, where



Figure 8. Faris Wibisono holding a workshop on wayang beber style of drawings in Pracimantoro, Central Java (2016).



Figure 9. Detail of a scroll of Faris Wibisono (2016).

he creates the scrolls for Wayang Beber Tani (Figure 9), Wibisono regularly organizes workshops for local children to teach them the basics of wayang beber painting and narration. In addition to his dedication to creating new scrolls, he also makes reproductions of the historical wayang beber scrolls on daluang sheets that he often fashions himself.

Wayang beber collectives and performances also started to emerge in the area of Jombang, Mojokerto (East Java) in 2019, engaging school children in wayang beber performance. These were **Wayang Beber Maheesa Sura** and **Panji Waréngku**—later renamed **Panji Cêmêng** (Arief Budi Santono, online communication, February 2021). They use scrolls that they make themselves, and occasionally those made by Dani Iswardana (Figure 10).

Besides these contemporary groups, numerous individual artists are inspired by wayang beber. The painting style of these individuals resembles the Pacitan style in both content and composition. Some of these artists create an entire set of scrolls similar to the Pacitan ones, while others copy individual scenes.

## Wayang Beber Metropolitan

Wayang Beber Metropolitan is an art group founded in 2009 in Jakarta by Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo, a painter and the dhalang for the majority of their performances. The group members gathered spontaneously, and since all of them had different educational and professional backgrounds, members found different roles within the group as painters, storytellers, musicians, or educators; often one person played more than one role.

Wayang Beber Metropolitan stands out with their active engagement in performances, public discussions, and educational activities, reaching audiences in Jakarta as well as other places on Java. The challenge of attracting an urban audience to a rural tradition and adapting it for city-dwellers unfamiliar with the art form doesn't prevent them from presenting interesting and engaging performances.



The group's knowledge about the history and painting style of the tradition is evident to those more familiar with wayang beber, while to others they present something new and different. Although the group members do not see their activities as primarily a revitalizing mission, we believe their work—raising awareness about the Javanese tradition and opening a dialogue with both the audience and the local government—is a valuable contribution to the preservation of wayang beber.

These collaborators wanted to present a tradition found in only two Javanese villages to a wider, urban audience unfamiliar with it. This urban element is apparent from the group's name, which Samuel explained also connects to the inspiration for their performances:

"It was rather difficult to choose the final name for Wayang Beber Metropolitan. Stories we deal with are not only stories from the urban city environment, but also stories about the impact that large modern cities have on other regions. The concerns of our stories are more to remind society about different systems. We also say that Indonesia is built on its maritime and agricultural strength, but the process of development sometimes makes you forget about these foundations. Every year in our country, rice fields are more and more often turned into residential areas. It is a real pity that our government always talks about self-sufficiency in food, such as rice (they say we can meet our need for food without having to import from abroad) but every year our rice fields disappear, so how will the country meet our food needs? That policy is really conflicting. We are aware that we are people whose path is art, and our task is limited to only reminding about such stories." (Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo, p.c., September 18, 2016)

Paintings on their scrolls depict fast-paced city (metropolitan) life, corruption, the effects of globalization, social alienation, and environmental issues. In parallel, they portray the significance of community organizations, farming, and a simpler lifestyle. These topics are reflected in their storytelling and in private discussions in their sanggar [studio] in Depok, a city within the Jakarta metropolitan area. The members often gather there to craft new stories and translate Javanese traditions into contemporary language understandable by younger generations.

"Wayang is a spectacle, but also carries a message of guidance—an entertainment embodying the meaning of good and setting good examples for how life should be lived. Even though we are contemporary, it doesn't necessarily mean we are "weird," but the oddity that arises from the characters we use has a moral message, has a purpose." (Ibid.)

Although on first viewing, their stories do not have much in common with the traditional Panji legends, they do incorporate, as Samuel suggests, the spirit of Panji. "The wayang character Panji is a wanderer who always adapts to his era. Merging with the existing dynamics of the time and, inspiring those in his environment. Whether we realize it or not, we are all Panji (Wayang Beber Metropolitan 2015).

"I tried to dissect the value of the spirit of Panji and *pewayangan* [puppetry], but I did not want wayang to be disconnected from temporal changes. What I took was the spirit, not the Panji story. The kind of spirit I try to create in Wayang Beber Metropolitan is not just a story that can be found on a scroll, but the spirit of Panji that is delivered through our shows to the communities." (Ibid.)

The group explains on their blog how something connected to old Javanese stories becomes relevant in presenting a moral story for today's audiences.



Figure 10. Wayang Beber Sakbendino performing in the Pacitan region with a scroll painted by Dani Iswardana (2016).





Figure 11. The scroll for “Kota Seribu Satu Mimpi”.

“The story presented in the performances no longer uses Panji as a narrative, but only the spirit of Panji which is inherent in the form of images and narration. Because the message about Panji is the loss of love, we try to revive it through an awareness of social criticism. The spirit of Panji can still be actualized and communicated in the present context through other media. It can be interpreted as lost love which we can present in the expression of wayang beber media.” (Wayang Beber Metropolitan 2012)

The concept of “extracting” the spirit of the traditional Javanese stories and characters, the spirit of their daily struggles, values, and morals, and giving it a new life among the challenges of urban existence, is reflected on a larger scale in the group’s work. The spirit of the wayang beber tradition, seen as a social tool to bring a community together and discuss different issues, is the spirit that the group tries to maintain—as a living organism that changes with the people, the local culture, and social circumstances.

While Wayang Beber Metropolitan’s canvas scrolls are painted in acrylic colors by several artists from the group, the characters maintain a style similar to the traditional wayang beber paintings: they are portrayed from multiple perspectives which is achieved by depicting the bodies of the characters frontally, their heads in a profile, but with both eyes and cheeks visible; their arms, legs and torsos are disproportional, with especially long arms.

As Samuel explains: “Traditional paintings are already influenced by Islam, the form has changed, and we still use it in that way. It is not a problem, we still follow the form and *sungging* painting technique, but with a different expression.” (Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo, p.c., September 18, 2016)

The coloring technique *sungging*, the Javanese word for “painting” and “decoration,” is also adopted from the traditional wayang beber scroll paintings. Color gradation is achieved by using lighter and darker tones of

the same color. The decorative background (overfilling the traditional scrolls in the Pacitan set and to a lesser extent in the Wonosari set) is here reduced to a minimum—the characters stand out on a white background. Each of their scrolls consists mainly of three scenes and, unlike the traditional ones, transitions between scenes are not always accentuated, obvious, or marked consistently. Also, the style in which characters are painted and their position on the scroll give the dhalang freedom to choose which story he will tell and how. As Samuel said in 2016, they have been using the same eight scrolls for the past six years to tell many different, unrelated stories, making every performance unique.

Wayang Beber Metropolitan uses a few scrolls for their performances, including the scroll named “Kota Seribu Satu Mimpi” [City of a Thousand and One Dreams] by artists Surahman and Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo (Figure 11).

In addition to the fine and performing arts that traditional wayang beber already incorporates, Wayang Beber Metropolitan takes a step further by including dance and movement, props made of recycled material, and experiments with stage design, videos, lights, and shadows. Nevertheless, the scroll maintains its central position in their shows. It is placed in front of a dhalang who uses a long cane to point at the characters and parts of the scenes while narrating. We observed that all contemporary groups adopted the same performing style of wayang beber Wonosari, where the dhalang sits in front of the scroll and faces the scenes, unlike the Pacitan version where the dhalang sits behind the scroll and can barely be seen. The Wonosari performing style allows a closer interaction with the audience, such as giving and receiving comments during the show, which has proven to be an important performance aspect to all of the groups whose shows we have seen on our fieldwork. In contrast to traditional performances which

always present the same story with the same scrolls, Wayang Beber Metropolitan and other contemporary groups often use one scroll to present several different stories which reflect on current events and issues in Indonesia, as well as globally. While traditional wayang beber stories use the Javanese language, Wayang Beber Metropolitan uses Indonesian, since Indonesia's capital Jakarta is also home to non-Javanese speaking audiences.

Metropolitan's performances are full of diverse visual elements. Samuel and Sari Atika Sundari, another group member and the only female dhalang in the group who creates and performs contemporary wayang beber, together explained the main role of additional visual impacts in their performances. "The wayang beber performances are static but we make the performances very dynamic, to always keep the viewer interested." (p.c., September 16, 2016).

Lysloff (1992:150) has speculated that this dimension of classic performance, i.e., the lack of movement, that might be the very reason for the gradual decline of the popularity of wayang beber, as it is becomes largely replaced by the "more compelling and action-oriented" wayang kulit tradition. Storytellers do have a great responsibility to make a performance memorable and interesting, but this has become increasingly challenging in a time of vast circulation of information and dynamic stimulation of the senses. Wayang Beber Metropolitan's efforts bring wayang beber closer to contemporary urban audiences and their busy Jakarta lives.

The educational aspect is of great importance so there are discussions before or after their performances. In an environment that's entertaining for both children and adults, Wayang Beber Metropolitan shares their messages and knowledge and opens a space for critical thinking and questioning.

The group's performances are usually open to the public, whether performed in a studio, school, or museum. They often collaborate with other artists, both those familiar and unfamiliar with wayang beber, and create joint events for various cultural occasions in Jakarta and elsewhere in Java. Wayang Beber Metropolitan has also collaborated with the Wayang Museum in Jakarta and presented their work to the

audience through similar combinations of performances, talks, and workshops. This institutional support could be a significant factor in the popularity and acknowledgment of the group, and in reaching larger audiences than their Central Javanese colleagues.

While we had opportunities to see other performances of Wayang Beber Metropolitan, the following section focuses on sharing our observations of the group's style in more detail using the example of their performance entitled *Teror di Teror* [Terror in Terror] presented in the Wayang Museum in Jakarta on 18 September 2016 (Figure 12). Since this performance was the most comprehensive of the ones we saw live, we chose to make it a case study for analyzing the group's performing style. With these notes, we want to explore how their activities relate to traditional knowledge and art in a contemporary setting.

### The performance of "Terror in Terror"

*Terror in terror* was a two-hour-long show telling a story that focused on interpreting different types of terror—external terror from everyday metropolitan society and the internal terror that we experience as individuals.

"It seems heavy, but the title is actually simple. Our story reminds us that in our country and even internationally, terror is understood to be just a bomb. But in our country, terror can be anything, such as traffic jams, education, the economy. ... We incorporate trivial things into the story, and even though the frame is global, we focus on ending the story with a return to introspection and incorporating self-reflection. I am only a speaker, so I also need to reflect on my work." (S. Prasetyo, p.c., September 18, 2016)

As Samuel explains, many social problems that surround and affect us—large or small, local or global—are mentioned in the show, but we should start from ourselves and reflect on how we can respond to these terrors.

No offerings were presented for this show as the original purpose and sacred values of traditional wayang beber performances are becoming less relevant and are even eliminated from most contemporary performances, so presenting offerings is also something that was excluded.



Figure 12. The scroll for "Teror di Teror."





Figure 13. Poster for “Teror di Teror.”



Figure 14. Including elements of wayang kulit in a performance, with a kayon held in front of the painted scroll.

The performance still follows the core principles of the traditional form and gives space for introducing new elements that are relevant to an urban community.

Even though the performance took place in Jakarta, where traditional clothing is not as present in everyday life as in other parts of Java, all performers were wearing some element of traditional dress. The dhalang and musicians all had *blangkon*, special hats with a batik pattern typically worn for various occasions in Java, including wayang performances. Additionally, all musicians wore batik shirts. Since those shirts may be worn for other special occasions, it is the *blangkon* that signifies a closer relation to tradition and to wayang performances in general.

The show incorporated some elements typically seen in wayang kulit performances. These elements were flat leather puppets presenting different characters of the story; the symmetrical pointed flat figure called *gunungan* or *kayon*, traditionally used for marking the beginning and end of a wayang kulit performance, as well as the transitions between scenes; and a banana tree log used as a base onto which the puppets are fixed in an upright position (Figure 14). We saw the use of puppets in conjunction with the picture-scroll performances only occasionally, on one occasion in Wayang Beber Welingan’s performance, while in Wayang Beber Metropolitan somewhat more often.

Samuel, as the dhalang, was sitting in front of the banana tree log onto which both the scrolls and puppets were fixed during the show. He was mostly facing the scrolls and puppets, while his back was turned to the audience. However, he would often turn towards the audience to make a comment directly to them and with this small gesture include them in the show. One of the musicians was assisting the dhalang with unrolling and changing the scrolls, sitting beside him or behind the opened scroll. Two scrolls were used throughout the performance. One depicted a traffic jam, which most Jakarta residents can relate to because besides the stress, it evokes other urban issues. The other scroll was used to depict the imaginary country of Poco-Poco and its citizens, who are under the threats of terrorism in the world. Poco-Poco refers to a very popular song and a line-dance in Indonesia, commonly played during social gatherings.

The story was enacted by the puppets and through the scrolls. The characters on the scrolls were stylized in a manner similar to the original scrolls from Pacitan and Wonosari but placed in a modern setting. The connection to metropolitan life was also achieved through the puppets, which were made of recycled materials, reflecting on the environmental and waste management issues in Jakarta. The dhalang was pointing to the characters on the scrolls with a stick (Figure 16), described previously as typical for the Wonosari style of performing, while changing his voice for each character, typical for both performing styles.

At the back of the stage, behind and above the scroll, was a large screen onto which the group occasionally projected photographs, simple animated illustrations, and



videos. The video created a more dynamic atmosphere and helped to place the story in the context of a metropolitan city, while the illustrations, drawn to resemble sketches, acted as additional commentary on the topics discussed. Something that was already a multimedia form of art was given an extra dimension corresponding to the rapid visual dynamics the younger generations are commonly surrounded with, either through their mobile phones or in the busy city streets.

The dhalang's act of turning towards the audience to give comical remarks and receiving the same from the audience is similar to the interplay we saw in many traditional wayang kulit performances in Central Java. Wayang performances are important and popular social events in Javanese culture. Socializing is an essential element; watching a performance is "not a one-way flow of information but a way of being together" (Mrazek 2007, 275). This event followed this format and engaged the audience to participate with comments to the performers and other spectators. Through interacting with the audience members during and after the shows, we noticed a sense of appreciation for the work of Wayang Beber Metropolitan.

The musicians have an important role in helping the storyteller bring the story to life, and they often communicate and interact with the dhalang during the show. The Wayang Beber Metropolitan team usually experiments with music in their shows to keep their finger on the pulse of the urban/modern life. To explore this, they often use everyday objects to create sound effects, such as metal plates and spoons to symbolically connect to food crisis issues (Pramesti Putri 2011, 84). In one performance we witnessed, there were sound effects related to the video projections. Some of the songs

were reminiscent of traditional songs familiar to most locals, done in the group's own style. The openings and closings of each sequence were accompanied by musical onomatopoeia, which contributed to creating the atmosphere of the show. While the dhalang was narrating, the music was usually very quiet and while the dhalang was finishing one scene the music would become louder and more dominant. This interplay of music and narration was present throughout the show. The music was also accompanied by singing in some songs, which is again closer to the Wonosari style of wayang beber performances.

The show was preceded by a workshop on drawing wayang beber characters, during which Sari described the technique and style of the traditional wayang beber paintings to children and their parents (Figures 17, 18, and 19). Children afterwards presented their work to the audience together with another member of Wayang Beber Metropolitan. Even though the children participating in the workshop were quite young and might not have recognized that this was a presentation of an old Javanese tradition, the workshop presented a unique opportunity to be introduced to wayang beber. The images, the shapes of the characters and their names—these are elements that the children could easily hold on to and later recognize as specific imagery related to wayang beber. A discussion with the audience followed the performance, reflecting on the themes that were covered in the show and on wayang beber in general.

For many young people, Wayang Beber Metropolitan's performances are their first encounter with wayang beber. Because of this, the group makes an effort to introduce the tradition and discuss it with the



Figure 15. Musicians playing during a Wayang Metropolitan performance at the Wayang Museum, 18 September 2016.

audience, especially younger attendees who might become the main agents in safeguarding the cultural heritage. As Samuel said, “when I understand my culture, I will appreciate it” (p.c., September 18, 2016). Taking the time to open a dialogue with the youth about their surroundings and engaging them in artistic activities contributes to an understanding of and appreciation of the local history and culture. Thus, the educational aspect, based on inclusion and discussion in an entertaining environment, is one of the key characteristics of performances and events conducted by members of Wayang Beber Metropolitan and one of the crucial approaches in preserving and passing on the knowledge about wayang beber.

### **Conclusion: understanding, appreciating, safeguarding**

Seeing the importance of wayang beber as an aspect of national identity, Wayang Beber Metropolitan tries to be a solution to reintroduce wayang beber to the public as a performing art. Even they don’t present a classic story, they still try to present the noble values contained in classic stories in a contemporary and innovative form. (Wayang Beber Metropolitan, n.d.)

We were both drawn to wayang beber with great curiosity and eagerness to learn more about it and to share our experiences with all who are interested. We envisioned our fieldwork consisting of opportunities to talk



Figure 16. Sari in a workshop at the Wayang Museum, 2016.



Figure 17. Sari in a workshop at the Wayang Museum, 2016.

to different people about wayang beber, see performances, the scrolls and rituals, and to collect as much information as possible. While exploring different aspects of wayang beber— historical, contemporary, artistic, cultural and social— through literature, observation, and participation, as well as talking to different groups of people, we realized how complex this topic truly is. What wayang beber meant, and means, to different people or groups is something we continue to explore. In its complicated history and its evolving present we found even more beauty, soon realizing that we would be connected to this part of Javanese culture for many years to come.

The main effort in keeping wayang beber alive is usually taken by individual enthusiasts or smaller art groups. Wayang Beber Metropolitan is such a group, whose members gathered because of their shared love towards art and tradition as well as the sense of community that arises in preparing each story and performance. The quality of their work is recognized, and the group nurtures a continuing and successful collaboration with different cultural institutions. For example, besides being frequent guests of the Wayang Museum, they were also invited to speak at “*Diskusi kelompok terpumpun pengelolaan wayang beber*,” [focus group on wayang beber management] at the Jakarta National Museum on 24 August 2018, in an event co-organized by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Figure 20).

The group also presented a short play and conducted a workshop for children. Other speakers were storytellers who presented the traditional styles of Pacitan (Rudhi Prasetyo) and Wonosari (Slamet Haryadi), Prapto Yuwono on behalf of the Museum, while Samuel spoke on behalf of Wayang Beber Metropolitan, representing their contemporary performing style

The fact that they were the ones who provided additional activities in this seminar—a performance and workshop—shows their respected position as mediators bringing this tradition closer to young people and confirms their holistic approach in public performances, which including discussions, sharing knowledge about wayang beber, and making new artistic creations with the audience, especially children.





Figure 18. Sari leading a workshop at the Wayang Museum, 2016.

Even though the group is aware of the rarity of wayang beber in the public nowadays, they did not perceive their work as something focused only on reviving an old forgotten tradition. Wayang Beber is a part of their culture and is a logical form of artistic expression; a medium that can bring together artists of different backgrounds and styles to create a like-minded community with a story to tell. For them, it is a living tradition and a way to express themselves artistically.

In that sense, the purpose of wayang beber has not changed much. The purifying transformation happens within us, through an introspective journey presented by Wayang Beber Metropolitan's stories of (dis)harmony and reaching peace with ourselves, with each other, with nature. The way the audience detects right from wrong, how the audience laughs and sympathizes with the hero and other characters, is painted throughout the old Panji stories, and in similar ways reaches the audience in Wayang Beber Metropolitan's stories. Their stories are placed in modern times but serve as reminders of the local history, their ancestors, and their cultural roots, in order to understand the present better.

"Every culture has its values, so we made this work based on the social reality that we experienced. It not only tells about the romanticism of Panji's journey but how our nation is like a Panji figure that is looking for its love, his Dewi Sekartaji. By opening up the topic and reminding people who might have forgotten that Indonesia was built from an agrarian and maritime space, they will be reminded again." (Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo, p.c., September 18, 2016)

Observing all these important elements, we wanted to contribute to the understanding of picture-scroll theatre performances through sharing the insights about contemporary wayang beber with a wider audience outside of Indonesia. Our insights developed after numerous discussions with the members of Wayang Beber Metropolitan. This very vibrant and layered art group uses tradition as an inspiration for raising awareness, not only about wayang beber, but also about different issues which are present in contemporary Jakarta and Indonesia; they are proving to be key agents for bringing wayang beber into the 21st century.



Figure 19. Sari leading a workshop at the Wayang Museum, 2016.

### Suggestions for further research

Future research in wayang beber might examine audience reception and audience inclusion, interaction and collaboration between governmental actors and civil society groups in their efforts to preserve an intangible cultural heritage, and the mutual interests that bring together different generations in creating or watching performances. Paying further attention to new trends, possibilities, and potential limitations of an ancient tradition on digital platforms could also give further insight into the art form and a deeper understanding of its social and cultural values.

During the pandemic of 2020, Wayang Beber Metropolitan, as well as other groups mentioned here, organized online wayang beber performances themselves or participated in larger online cultural events on sites such as Instagram, FaceBook, or YouTube. These young artists quickly adapted to performing wayang beber in changing circumstances. Analyzing how people consume and accept these types of performances, which have a significant social and interactive aspects, would reveal more about the social functions of contemporary wayang beber. Did this shift to the digital world contribute to the availability of wayang beber related content and result in a wider, international recognition of this art form?

Our initial perception of a vanishing tradition that we got from reading available literature—which guided our first preparations for the fieldwork—was quickly refuted. Wayang Beber proved to be both complex and fluid, reflecting the fast-paced changes, as well as the persistence of its core elements—conveying messages about important values in the society, creating a sense of community as well as a space for catharsis, entertainment, and gathering. ■

### About the Authors

**Tea Škrinjarić** (Croatia, b. 1990). A graduate in Social and Cultural Anthropology, during her formal and non-formal education Tea gained a theoretical and practical knowledge of ethnographic research and visual anthropology. She spent six months studying traditional dance and music at the Institute for Indonesian Art in



Figure 20. The event at the National Museum in Jakarta that included a discussion on preserving wayang beber.

Surakarta (ISI), which gave her insight into Indonesian art and culture and opened the door to the topic of wayang beber. She describes an encounter in 2013 with Wayang Beber Welingan, “[This group] inspired my curiosity to peek deeper into wayang beber, to look at its history, and to wander around Java in a search for stories, people, and meanings. From this our Wayang Beber Project was born.”

**Marina Pretković** (Croatia, b. 1988). Along with her formal education—an M.A. in Art History, Ethnology, and Cultural Anthropology—Marina participated in workshops and projects focusing on cultural heritage protection and revitalization, one of her main interests. Her first visit to Indonesia was in 2015 on an Arts and Culture Scholarship in Surakarta, where she started learning about Indonesian culture. Besides doing ethnographic research, Marina enjoys illustration and travelling. She recounts, “My first visit to Indonesia was an exciting journey that inspired me on a personal and professional level. The town of Surakarta in Central Java is the place of my dearest memories, and one of them stands out the most. A small event in 2015 brought together two contemporary wayang beber groups—the local Wayang Beber Welingan and the Jakarta-based Wayang Beber Metropolitan—who performed in an intimate atmosphere and created a playful celebration of this old storytelling tradition. This sparked my desire to research all the fascinating layers of wayang beber.”

### Methodology

Inspired by our first interaction with contemporary wayang beber groups, we conducted field research on Java during 2016, 2017 and 2018, each of the visits lasting around three months. Besides engaging in participant-observation, we conducted interviews with people having a wide range of experiences related to wayang beber: families who keep the scrolls, storytellers, painters and musicians, paper-makers, UNESCO officials, local government and museum representatives, as well as scholars researching wayang beber and other forms of Javanese heritage. Learning about so many groups gave us a better understanding of what wayang beber represents to different generations. Although

everything we learned was valuable, we focused on one of the most active groups: Wayang Beber Metropolitan.

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### Groups mentioned in the article

See "Selected Groups and Museums" for more information. [LINK](#)

Wayang Beber Kota (Surakarta)

Wayang Beber Mahesa Sura, Wayang Beber Panji Cemeng (Mojokerto)

Wayang Beber Metropolitan (Depok)

Wayang Beber Sakbendino (Pacitan)

Wayang Beber Tani (Pracimantoro)

Wayang Beber Welingan (Surakarta)

Wayang Sampah / WANGSA (Surakarta)

### Wayang Beber Project

The Wayang Beber Project is managed by the NGO AngArt, an open platform for engaged cultural and art practices in Zagreb, Croatia.

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## DIRECTORY

# Wayang Beber: Selected Groups and Museums

compiled by Daniel Smither



“Urashima Taro” by Dani Iswardana

*“Friendship with a turtle leads a young man on a time-travel adventure. A play inspired by the Japanese tale “Urashima Taro,” adapted into Javanese theater. A memory of Tantri mythology and the legend of the turtle as the savior of the Earth and a symbol of immortality.*

### Introduction

Classic and contemporary wayang beber performances can be found in varied contexts and configurations throughout Java: independent groups, professional groups, educational programs in schools, museum programs, pedhalangan departments at ISI, etc. While every group has its own character and intentions, they all have at least two things in common: a large fabric scroll painted with images of characters and communities, and a storyteller who narrates the scrolls.

Ki Samuel Santoso Adi Prasetyo of Wayang Beber Metropolitan states that the most important thing is to be able to create your own wayang beber, including stories and plays. “For modern wayang beber groups, there is no stipulation on the number of members.” Membership of the groups themselves is quite fluid. Performers and parts are interchangeable with musicians, instruments, and even behind-the-scenes painters dipping in and out of projects as needed.

It’s less important that a group be a static, defined entity and more important that the connections within the community be maintained. Faris Wibisono of Wayang Beber Tani says, “For us, this is a collective movement. We are always supported by the community. . . . We will group together if needed to adjust to the situation. Whatever it’s called, [a group or something else,] this is a space to raise awareness and inform.”

While most groups do employ music in their performances, it is not strictly necessary, and the instrumentation used can vary widely. Some performances consist of only minimalist gamelan ensembles—gong, kenong, kendang—while others approach full gamelan

instrumentation. Some employ bamboo instruments, or more modern or Western instruments, such as keyboards or guitars—or mix all of them together.

According to Faris, the musical accompaniment is merely an introduction to the atmosphere of the story; something that sets the mood for the dhalang’s performance. The message is ultimately carried by the visuals and the dhalang’s narration. Music, however, has contributed greatly to the spread and preservation of wayang beber, especially for audiences more inclined to seek flashier, modernized performances.

This is a list of active wayang beber groups in Java as of 2023. Information about many of these groups was originally collected by Marina Pretković and Tea Škrinjarčić for their article on Wayang Beber Metropolitan.

This list includes the major groups that frequently perform, a few lesser-known groups, schools where wayang beber is taught and/or performed (SMAN, SMPN, SDN), and some wayang museums with Wayang Beber collections.

— Daniel Smither

### GROUPS

#### Wayang Beber Kota (Surakarta, Central Java)

Formed in 2005, and led by painter Dani Iswardana, one of the first groups to focus on contemporary performance. Their stories tackle current social issues using traditional Panji characters.

While they initially focused on performances aimed at revitalizing and preserving wayang beber for modern audiences, they later shifted to more educational activities. Often, their performances will be held in community spaces,

schools and museums. They intend to raise awareness of wayang beber as well as highlight issues brought about by changes in society.

- [facebook.com/wayang.beberkota](https://facebook.com/wayang.beberkota)
- [instagram.com/daniiswardana/](https://instagram.com/daniiswardana/)

#### **Wayang Beber Tani (Pracimantoro, Wonogiri, Central Java)**

Led by Faris Wibisono, it was formed in 2014 as a response to the anxiety arising from the increasingly uncertain situation in rural areas of Java. The economic, political, agricultural, and social problems brought on by creeping modernity began to cause shifts away from traditional values. Wayang Beber Tani sought to become a means for young people to reconnect with the culture, art, and values of their ancestors.

Faris considers the art of Wayang Beber Tani to be a “national art rooted in Javanese culture.” Additionally, they seek to raise awareness about global problems and discuss environmental issues that affect us all. They engage with communities by offering workshops and performances, providing village assistance, and organizing discussions. With these activities, they hope to combat the anxiety of change with works of art and creativity.

- [facebook.com/variise.punggawaart](https://facebook.com/variise.punggawaart)
- [instagram.com/faris\\_wibisono/](https://instagram.com/faris_wibisono/)

#### **Wayang Beber Welingan (Surakarta, Central Java)**

This group focuses on contemporary socio-environmental educational themes. It was founded by artists concerned with the preservation of the tradition of wayang beber who also wanted to create a medium to deliver criticism about social-cultural changes and environmental issues in Indonesia. The Javanese word *welingan* means to convey the message, to inform, or to talk on moral subjects. Welingan is also an abbreviation of *Wayang Edukasi Lingkungan* (Environmental Education Theater).

- [facebook.com/groups/387886297905975/](https://facebook.com/groups/387886297905975/)
- [youtube.com/@beberwelingan3895/](https://youtube.com/@beberwelingan3895/)

#### **Wayang Beber Sakbendino (Pacitan, East Java)**

Led by Tri Ganjar Wicaksono, who is also a member of Wayang Beber Kota. The group was formed in 2015 to foster collaboration between traditional Indonesian and global art forms, with a special focus on the revitalization of wayang beber. Their art is informed and inspired by artists from multiple backgrounds, ranging from punk rock groups and performing artists to teachers and academics. They have collaborated internationally during residencies in Croatia, Germany, and Japan.

- [facebook.com/WBS-Brotherhood-Panji-228081021467970/](https://facebook.com/WBS-Brotherhood-Panji-228081021467970/)
- [instagram.com/wbs.brotherhood/](https://instagram.com/wbs.brotherhood/)

#### **Wayang Beber Metropolitan (Depok, Jakarta, West Java)**

The most active of the contemporary groups, they are actively engaged in educational activities, performances, and public discussions. Their aim is to expose the youthful

urban population of Indonesia to this traditional art form while raising awareness of modern issues—environmental degradation, globalization, and the need to preserve traditional Javanese culture and values.

- [open.spotify.com/show/44qIL4WMMOYw1Xi0eJRYhU?si=c8071b5084884fce](https://open.spotify.com/show/44qIL4WMMOYw1Xi0eJRYhU?si=c8071b5084884fce) (podcast)
- [facebook.com/waybemetrio](https://facebook.com/waybemetrio)
- [instagram.com/wayangbebermetropolitan/](https://instagram.com/wayangbebermetropolitan/)
- [youtube.com/user/waybemetrio](https://youtube.com/user/waybemetrio)

#### **Wayang Beber Mahesa Sura (Desa Kembang Belor, Mojokerto, East Java)**

This group grew out of the Bantengan art group from Dusun Paras. The members began to develop the group in 2019 after a *ruwatan*, a ceremony for the purification of the village; it further coalesced after a workshop on wayang beber at ISI Surakarta and a wayang beber performance in Dusun Paras. They routinely perform in residents’ homes for occasions like weddings and circumcisions.

They typically focus on more traditional stories, without a stated mission to raise awareness of socio-cultural issues like many other wayang beber groups. They have participated in significant events: the 5th World Puppet Day Performance at ISI Surakarta (2019), the Panji Nusantara Festival in Malang (2019), and the Chaitra Majapahit Festival (2019).

- [instagram.com/bantengan.mahesasura](https://instagram.com/bantengan.mahesasura)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=3jEL5zL9yUI](https://youtube.com/watch?v=3jEL5zL9yUI) (wedding performance)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=qVIWIGZ2pK0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=qVIWIGZ2pK0) (stage performance)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=q7\\_CS\\_J8DFY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=q7_CS_J8DFY) (performing lakon “Keong Mas” with Panji Cemeng)

#### **Wayang Beber Gremeng Tuter Bengawan Solo (Karanganyar, Central Java)**

This group was established after a collaboration between Ki Jaka Rianto (director and dhalang) and dhalang Ki Anom Sukatno for a performance of the traditional story “Panji Jaka Kembang Kuning” at an ISI Surakarta anniversary event in 2017. The result was a performance rooted in tradition, with the addition of wayang kulit and arrangements of songs that featured the vocal parts more intensely. Members consist of university professors and students. They have given a few performances combining wayang beber and wayang kulit, as well as performances mixing wayang beber with wayang golek. They sometimes add modern instruments in arrangements for gamelan and keyboards. A description of one of their performance is included in this catalog:

- [repository.isi-ska.ac.id/4697/2/Katalog Pergelaran Wayang Beber.pdf](https://repository.isi-ska.ac.id/4697/2/Katalog%20Pergelaran%20Wayang%20Beber.pdf)

#### **Sanggar Pedhalangan Pengalasan Yogyakarta (Yogya, Central Java)**

Led by Dhalang Ki Slamet Haryadi and founded in 2000, their goal is to educate students about wayang beber and wayang purwa while preserving these aspects of Javanese culture.



- [facebook.com/WayangPengalasan/](https://facebook.com/WayangPengalasan/)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=n4OMrFEI600](https://youtube.com/watch?v=n4OMrFEI600) (Performance of Lakon Gajah Gurito Lena as part of Panji International Festival 2018, with dhalang Ki Slamet Haryadi.)

### Komunitas Wayang Beber Sambang Panji (Mojokerto)

The group's performance at the 727-year celebration of Majapahit included paintings by Dani Iswardana.

- [youtube.com/watch?v=UYfpe2xqISM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=UYfpe2xqISM) (performance excerpt)
- [kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/bpcbjatim/pagelaran-wayang-beber-di-gaung-sakala-bhumi-majapahit-ke-727/](https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/bpcbjatim/pagelaran-wayang-beber-di-gaung-sakala-bhumi-majapahit-ke-727/) (article about the performance)

### Wayang Beber Panji Cemeng/Sanggar Panji Cemeng (Mojokerto)

A music and arts studio for children that teaches and performs wayang beber. They often collaborate with Wayang Beber Mahesa Sura, using guitars to accompany the story.

- [youtube.com/watch?v=ML8\\_VwMaQOY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ML8_VwMaQOY) (rehearsal)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=PmBWtyMMbYg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=PmBWtyMMbYg) (performance)

## MUSEUMS

### Museum Radya Pustaka (Surakarta, Java)

One of the oldest museums in Indonesia, it dates back to 1890, and was once the residence of the Dutchman Johannes Busselaar. It houses collections from various Indonesian kingdoms, including writings in Sanskrit and Palawa script, as well as relics such as sculptures, statues, gamelan, and wayang beber scrolls.

- [indonesiakaya.com/pustaka-indonesia/museum-radya-pustaka-museum-tertua-di-indonesia/](https://indonesiakaya.com/pustaka-indonesia/museum-radya-pustaka-museum-tertua-di-indonesia/) (website)
- [instagram.com/museumradyapustakasurakarta/](https://instagram.com/museumradyapustakasurakarta/)

### Museum Wayang Beber Sekartaji (Yogyakarta, Java)

A museum in the Yogyakarta region dedicated to the preservation of and education about wayang beber.

- [wayangbeber.org/](https://wayangbeber.org/)
- [instagram.com/museumwayangbebersekartaji](https://instagram.com/museumwayangbebersekartaji)

### Museum Wayang Indonesia Wonogiri (Wonogiri, Java)

This museum collects wayang figures and art from throughout Java and Bali, as well as from outside of Indonesia. The collection includes wayang kulit, wayang golek, wayang purwa, and wayang beber.

- [instagram.com/museumwayangwonogiri](https://instagram.com/museumwayangwonogiri)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=QB7iJU2hQK4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=QB7iJU2hQK4) (museum overview)

### Museum Gubug Wayang (Mojokerto, Java)

Founded in 2015, this museum aims to educate and promote traditional arts and wayang in Java. Its collection includes gamelan, artifacts from the Majapahit era, and batik, as well as examples of wayang kulit, wayang golek, wayang potehi, and wayang beber.

- [gubug-wayang.com/](https://gubug-wayang.com/)
- [instagram.com/museumgubugwayang/](https://instagram.com/museumgubugwayang/)

## RESOURCES

### Articles

"Catalog Pergelaran Wayang Beber 4 '-karta'." Detailed description of groups and performances in four cities whose names end with "-karta." (PDF download)

- [repository.isi-ska.ac.id/4697/2/Katalog%20Pergelaran%20Wayang%20Beber.pdf](https://repository.isi-ska.ac.id/4697/2/Katalog%20Pergelaran%20Wayang%20Beber.pdf)

"Joko Sri Yono: A Preserver of Wayang Beber in Solo"

- [surakarta.go.id/?p=4428](https://surakarta.go.id/?p=4428)

Places to see wayang beber in Solo

- [travel.kompas.com/read/2023/05/14/220413527/3-tempat-melihat-wayang-beber-di-kota-solo-cerita-bergambar-kuno-nusantara?page=all](https://travel.kompas.com/read/2023/05/14/220413527/3-tempat-melihat-wayang-beber-di-kota-solo-cerita-bergambar-kuno-nusantara?page=all)

Article from ISI Yogya on the Semiotics of Wayang Beber Remeng Mangujaya

- [journal.isi.ac.id/index.php/TNL/article/download/4354/1888](https://journal.isi.ac.id/index.php/TNL/article/download/4354/1888)

### Videos

A performance of a lakon at Bejiharjo Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta, with Wayang Remeng Mangujaya. Indonesian and English subtitles.

- [youtube.com/watch?v=0gMn3XBsJ3Q&t](https://youtube.com/watch?v=0gMn3XBsJ3Q&t)

Discussion of this performance.

- [youtube.com/watch?v=ayqPLjoIZ08](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ayqPLjoIZ08)

Performance VICOLMING (Video Conference and Live Streaming) Solo

- [youtube.com/watch?v=tDh2QCYt\\_18](https://youtube.com/watch?v=tDh2QCYt_18) [youtube.com/watch?v=Xwn4Yx1g3tE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Xwn4Yx1g3tE)

Seminar Nasional "Imaji Wayang Beber" | FSRD ISI Surakarta:

- [youtube.com/watch?v=DxyjwdkF-B0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=DxyjwdkF-B0)

Seminar on the Panji story in wayang beber of Pacitan:

- [youtube.com/watch?v=NRM77oYet0I](https://youtube.com/watch?v=NRM77oYet0I)



From the scroll for *Teror di Teror*, by Samuel S. Adi Prasetyo.



## Gamelan in Canada: An Overview

by Laurent Bellemare

### Editor's Introduction

The bulk of the following article was adapted from the author's 2021 MA thesis, *"La dissémination du Gamelan Indonésien au Canada: Perspectives historiques et caractéristiques régionales à Montréal, Vancouver et Toronto."* Some changes were made to update the text as well as streamline it for this abridged English-language version. Accompanying this article is an updated directory of Canadian gamelan ensembles both past and present. (For more information, detailed case studies of three groups—Giri Kedaton, Vancouver Community Gamelan, and Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan—in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the original thesis, which is available online through the Université de Montréal.)

In a perhaps unsurprising parallel to the USA, gamelan activity in Canada is concentrated in coastal (or at least, waterway-adjacent) urban centers—Vancouver to the west, Montreal and Toronto to the east. Likewise, the historical development of gamelan in Canada is inseparable from both evolving diplomatic relations with Indonesia and the growth of ethnomusicology in the latter half of the 20th century. Beyond these general observations, however, the respective trajectories of American and Canadian gamelan are indeed distinct. Readers will note the comparatively strong presence of Balinese gamelan in Canada, including long-standing gender wayang, semar pegulingan, and gamelan semaradana ensembles. Furthermore, the dissemination of gamelan in Canada owes much to the interests of contemporary composers rather than institutional or community ensembles dedicated to performing traditional repertoire.

Despite significant and ongoing exchanges between Canadian, American, and Indonesian gamelan communities, the author notes that "awareness of gamelan in a specifically Canadian context remains limited." It is hoped that this article, along with its accompanying directory, will help improve that awareness by shedding light on the unique history of gamelan in Canada.

—Ethan Schwartz, editor

### THE EARLY HISTORY OF GAMELAN IN CANADA First Encounters

Prior to the institutionalization of gamelan at Canadian universities beginning in the 1980s, the traditional arts of Indonesia were represented only sparingly in Canada. With the exception of Toronto's Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan (ECCG, est. 1983), all performances of Indonesian arts during this early period were imports rather than local initiatives. These various one-off events highlighted traditional artistic forms within either a tour or festival framework. It was not until the opening of gamelan classes in 1987 at the Université de Montréal (UdeM) that there was an opportunity for Canadians to engage with gamelan on a regular basis.

In 1957, three nights of Balinese performing arts were presented at the Théâtre Saint-Denis in Montreal with the title *"Danseurs de Bali."* This troupe of artists from the village of Tabanan was organized by Hungarian impresario Paul Szilard and featured famous dancer I Ketut Marya. The same production reappeared on a subsequent tour in 1962, this time on Canada's west coast. *"Danseurs de Bali"* was presented twice in Vancouver and once in Victoria during April of that year with the support of the Indonesian government (Devries 2021). This form of cultural deployment was in line with then-president Sukarno's diplomatic vision for promoting Indonesia. Coverage of the Montreal event appeared in a *Le Devoir* article along with a note that "UNESCO has determined this year's [1957] objective to be cultural exchanges between the East and the West."<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of the harrowing events of 1965–66, General Suharto became the second president of Indonesia (Margolin 2001). As a result of the political situation in Indonesia, gamelan performances in Canada were nonexistent during the late 1960s, and no Indonesia pavilion was organized for the 1967 Expo in Montreal. Gamelan did not resurface in Canada until the 1970s, when a Balinese sanggar from Sebatu toured North America in 1973 and 1977.<sup>2</sup> On both occasions, the group

1. See Pierre (1957). Thanks to Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre for providing this reference.

2. Andrew Timar (pers. comm.) recalls attending a Javanese gamelan performance circa 1970/1971 led by Dutch musician Bernard Suryabrata. However, this author could not retrieve any information confirming the details of such a performance.

stopped in Montreal to perform at the prestigious Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier.

The opening of the Darmasiswa scholarship in 1974 demonstrated the Indonesian government's renewed interest in having the outside world become directly involved in learning about their nation's arts and culture. It was during this same decade that a contingent of Quebec composers—Gilles Tremblay, Claude Vivier, John Rea, and José Evangelista—completed their trips to Indonesia, funded primarily through grants from the Canada Council for the Arts.<sup>3</sup> Representing more than a diplomatic exercise, the involvement of these foreign actors in the dissemination of Indonesian arts contributed to training a generation of cultural ambassadors.

After their trip to Indonesia in the summer of 1976, Evangelista and his wife Matilde Asencio wasted no time in promoting Indonesian arts by co-programming nights of Javanese and Balinese wayang kulit in 1979 and 1982 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>4</sup> These events were part of the couple's "*Traditions musicales du monde*" [Musical Traditions of the World] program. As a professor of composition at the University of Montreal, Evangelista taught the course "*Panorama des musiques du monde*" [Survey of World Music] for several decades, in which he introduced his students to a great variety of musical cultures, including those of Indonesia.

### Expo '86

Prior to the 1986 World Exposition on Transportation and Communication in Vancouver, the few gamelan brought to Canada from Indonesia—in particular, those housed in the Indonesian consulates in Toronto and Vancouver—were rarely used and never showcased in public performance.<sup>5</sup> In 1978, California's Berkeley Gamelan, directed by Daniel Schmidt, came to Vancouver and gave a performance of contemporary works at the independent art gallery Western Front. The 1985 Asia Pacific Festival in Vancouver, in which dozens of countries were represented through the performing arts, featured Balinese puppeteer I Wayan Wija as a guest artist. He performed a wayang tantri show adapted for North American audiences and accompanied by musicians from Sukawati village.<sup>6</sup> This performance

3. Serge Garant, belonging to an older generation of composers, also visited Bali and Indonesia prior to the aforementioned individuals. However, he concluded that despite being fascinating, gamelan had no relevance for Western contemporary music.

4. The 1979 Javanese wayang event featured Sumarsam as dhalang, accompanied by the Wesleyan University gamelan group led by RM Sukanto, S. Darsono, and S. Ngaliman. The 1982 Balinese wayang event featured CL Reed as dhalang with musicians John Badanes and Andrew Toth.

5. This information is taken from page 5 of a document titled "Indonesian Gamelan at Simon Fraser University – History, present uses, and future projects," written in 1989 by Martin Bartlett for RB Brown (Dean of Arts). This document is part of the Martin Bartlett archive of the Special Collections at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver.

6. Wayang tantri is a subgenre of Balinese wayang kulit created

was emblematic of the cultural policies of Suharto's New Order that were on full display the following year at Expo '86's Indonesia pavilion. Despite their small number, these gamelan performances in the 1970s and early 1980s reveal a shift in Indonesia's attitude toward the promotion of its arts overseas. The earlier North American tours, in which the Indonesian government was only passively involved, gave way to a more aggressive promotion of arts for economic gain within the Canadian "mega-events" scene.<sup>7</sup>

Indonesian performing arts have long been a customary part of world expos, serving various interests depending on the era and balance of power in Indonesia. The first Canadian exhibition to showcase Indonesian arts, Expo '86, was no exception to this trend. It brought together more than 40 countries with the aim of promoting the city of Vancouver as a strategic trans-Pacific exchange hub. Indonesia maintained its own pavilion where a troupe of artists specially formed for the event presented daily concerts from May 2nd to October 13th. For this purpose, the Indonesian government brought over two Balinese and one Javanese gamelan with which the troupe performed a mixed repertoire as an overview of Indonesian music and dance.<sup>8</sup>

In conjunction with their artistic residency at the Expo, Javanese choreographer Sardono W. Kusumo and artistic director Amna S. Kusumo organized an international gamelan festival. This event brought together ensembles from Indonesia, the United States,<sup>9</sup> Japan, and Europe, and featured Sumarsam, Sudarsono, Hardja Susilo, Rustopo, Shin Nakagawa, I Made Bandem, Rahayu Suppangah, Dieter Mack, Alex Roth, Jody Diamond, Michael Tenzer, Vincent McDermott, Barbara Benary, Daniel Schmidt, José Evangelista, and Martin Bartlett as speakers. The resulting First International Gamelan Festival and Symposium took place from August 18th to 21st and focused on the contemporary reality of gamelan in Indonesia and around the world. A day devoted entirely to lectures stimulated exchanges and reflections on new composition for gamelan as well as the legitimacy of Western involvement in these traditions. The concerts presented within the framework of the festival highlighted contemporary composition in Indonesia, with the marginal portion devoted to traditional repertoire performed by the Expo's resident troupe.<sup>10</sup>

in the early 1980s by Wija. It notably features pelog-tuned gender wayang. One of the performers in this production was I Nyoman Wenten, who would teach the following year at Simon Fraser University's summer workshop for gamelan and dance.

7. To borrow a term from Roche (2000).

8. Dancers from the ad hoc troupe Pesta Nusantara showcased styles from regions as diverse as Sulawesi and Sumatra in addition to performing Balinese and Javanese dances. Individual dancers are unfortunately not credited in official programs and source documents.

9. The US ensembles in attendance were Sekar Jaya, Berkeley Gamelan, Boston Village Gamelan, Gamelan Son of Lion, Bay Area New Gamelan, Gamelan Si Betty, Gamelan Pacifica, and Kyai Guntur Sari/Portland Gamelan Ensemble.

10. The Indonesia Group Expo '86 featured the following artists:



While many important Indonesian and American members of the international gamelan community participated in the festival, Canadian presence was quite limited. Indeed, the only local participants of the festival were José Evangelista<sup>11</sup> and Martin Bartlett, composers teaching at UdeM and Vancouver's Simon Fraser University, respectively. Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan,<sup>12</sup> representing the emerging Toronto gamelan community, had intended on participating in the festival but canceled due to lack of funds. It was only as speakers that Evangelista and Bartlett took part in the festival, meaning that they were not representing any performance ensemble. Evangelista presented an analysis of his gamelan-inspired work *Motionless Move* (1980), whereas Bartlett offered a critique of the appropriation of gamelan within Western composition. In particular, Bartlett argued that the main interest of learning gamelan in-depth lies in the unprecedented access it offers to a more communal dimension of music, an aspect not always emphasized in Western traditions.

The First International Gamelan Festival and Symposium was significant in several respects. In addition to being the first large-scale event in Canada devoted entirely to gamelan, it was also the first major event for promoting exchanges and reflections on gamelan from a transnational perspective. It also offered a platform for several Indonesian composers to present their works, some of which were radically experimental. This event had a singular role in raising awareness of Indonesian contemporary music among the North American community (Cohen 2020:264–265). It was a key element in the promotion of Indonesian artists as creators and not just teachers of tradition, a dynamic that has since become well-integrated into North American gamelan circles.<sup>13</sup> Pragmatically, this event provided a pretext for many experts scattered around the world to meet and develop long-term ties.<sup>14</sup> For Canada, the involvement of Evangelista and Bartlett gave rise to the Montreal and Vancouver gamelan communities, which subsequently flourished.

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Sardono W. Kusumo (director), Rahayu Supanggah, I Pande Made Sukerta, I Wayan Sadra, Blacius Subono, Nano Suratno, Karjono, Roesdiantoro, Hadi Budiono, Supardi, Bambang Ginting, Sri Nartutik, I Wayan Sudana, I Ketut Partha, I Nyoman Catra, I Ketut Sudhana, Barlen Sutrisna, Rian Syafarina, Tri Nardono, Trustho, Sarjiwo, Sumaryono, I Ketut Saba, I Wayan Beratha, Bambang Sunarto, Suroto, Sukamso, Prasadiyanto, Mahdi Bahar, Siradjuddin, Andy Tiar Bachtiar, and Sukasman (puppet designer).

11. Evangelista's wife Matilde Asencio (personal communication) has explained that Ed Herbst played an important role in the networking that facilitated the composer's participation at Expo '86.

12. At this time, the ensemble was known as Evergreen Club Gamelan Ensemble (Andrew Timar, personal communication, 6 June 2023). For the sake of consistency, this article uses their current name throughout, abbreviated ECCG.

13. These thoughts were also shared by Jody Diamond as part of the Gamelan Seminar given at the University of Montreal on 27 February 2020.

14. Testimony of Michael Tenzer from an interview conducted by Jonathan Goldman and Jeremy Stachan in 2019.

## GAMELAN IN CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS

### Gamelan as curriculum

Behind the scenes of Expo '86, a process of cultural diplomacy was underway between Indonesia and Canada. I Made Bandem, former rector of the Balinese arts academy ASTI Denpasar<sup>15</sup> and government official, was tasked with forming the Expo's resident gamelan troupe. In his welcome address, he shared a history of contact between Indonesian music and the Western world. Furthermore, as part of the Suharto regime's established practice of gifting gamelan to overseas institutions in order to spread knowledge about Indonesian culture (Cohen 2019:269), the three gamelan present at Expo '86 were donated to Canadian universities the day after the event ended, on the condition that the instruments would be used in perpetuity. This diplomatic gesture on the part of the Indonesian authorities was ultimately made possible thanks to the efforts of Bartlett and Evangelista.

Looking to enrich the music departments of their respective universities, Bartlett and Evangelista saw an opportunity to expedite the otherwise complex process of acquiring a gamelan, effectively bypassing some of the administrative negotiations normally required to secure such an investment. While both Bartlett and Evangelista were keen to obtain the Javanese instruments, the Indonesian ambassador to Canada, HE Adiwoso Abubakar, ultimately chose to give those instruments to Simon Fraser University (SFU), a gesture that recognized the institution's involvement in the creation of a Javanese music workshop (described below) during Expo '86.<sup>16</sup> Thus, SFU inherited the Expo's Javanese gamelan, whereas UdeM obtained the Balinese gong kebyar and gamelan angklung. While it was already customary for the Indonesian government to bequeath gamelan to host countries of diplomatic events, such a gift was not self-evident. The relocation of these gamelan to SFU and UdeM, and their continued use ever since, can be attributed to the efforts and expertise of individual professors rather than university administrations. In this way, Expo '86 had a major impact on the subsequent development of the Canadian gamelan scene.

Although SFU's Arts Center had no formal affiliation with the Expo's Indonesia pavilion, they took advantage of the daily performances and the presence of gamelan experts to set up a workshop through the university's Summer Institute that would enable participants to develop practical knowledge of gamelan, thus broadening their appreciation. This four-week intensive workshop took place in June, coinciding with the Expo but preceding

15. Today, Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Denpasar.

16. In fact, Evangelista had already submitted a proposal for the purchase of a Javanese gamelan in the Faculty of Music's 1981–1982 budget. In 1985 he had numerous exchanges with Dean Pierre Rolland on the subject, and planned to take advantage of his sabbatical in Java that same year to network and settle a number of logistical issues. The events of Expo 1986 preempted the outcome of these proceedings.



Figure 1. I Wayan Suweca teaching the *Atelier de gamelan* in the winter of 1988. Photo courtesy of Giri Kedaton.

the International Gamelan Festival and Symposium that August. Welcoming twenty musicians and ten dancers, the workshop focused primarily on learning the Central Javanese repertoire. Participants played on instruments lent to SFU by the Indonesian Consulate General and were taught by master musician K.R.T. Wasitodipuro.<sup>17</sup> Several types of Balinese performing arts were also taught, such as gender wayang, kecak, and dance. The latter was present alongside Javanese dance thanks to the joint presence of teachers I Nyoman Wenten and his wife Nanik Wenten, daughter of Wasitodipuro.

While the program relied primarily on these guest teachers, musicians from the Expo's Indonesia pavilion nevertheless contributed by visiting workshop sessions and joining in a special closing event. Utilizing the Consulate General's gamelan, this four-hour performance of Javanese wayang kulit at Western Front was attended by a well-informed audience who had been practicing Javanese gamelan for a month.<sup>18</sup> After the four-week workshop, some students who wished to continue learning gamelan were able to study with a few of the Expo's resident musicians for the remainder of the summer.<sup>19</sup> A resounding success, this workshop set a precedent for learning gamelan at SFU even before the institution had officially established a practical

course in Javanese music as part of its curriculum. These summer workshops were held annually at SFU until 1997.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after the Expo, a community group unofficially located at SFU formed under Bartlett's tutelage. The first gamelan course for academic credit was offered in the fall of 1987 as a special subject, taught by Bartlett and his assistant Kenneth Newby, an experienced gamelan student. Having proven successful, a regular gamelan course was implemented at the frequency of one semester per academic year. However, according to a 1992 report by Bartlett, only two visiting professors were funded in the first six years of the course. At that time, the summer workshops remained the most reliable platform for studying gamelan with Indonesian teachers. This reality hindered the continuous learning of Javanese music in Vancouver. Nevertheless, a core group of musicians had formed what is now known as the **Vancouver Community Gamelan Society (VCG)**. By 1989, this group of students and summer workshop participants, many of them composers, had achieved a level of ability that enabled them to perform both traditional repertoire and contemporary works.<sup>21</sup>

Following the acquisition of its gong kebyar and gamelan angklung, in the fall of 1987, UdeM became the first and only French-speaking university in North America to offer a gamelan course, the "*Atelier de gamelan*." In that first year, Professor I Wayan Suweca, a virtuoso musician and teacher at ASTI (later ISI) Denpasar, took on the role of lecturer for the *Atelier de gamelan* under the

17. Named KPH Notoprojo or familiarly, Pak Cokro.

18. Led by dhalang Blacius Subono and featuring a sub-group of the Indonesia Group Expo '86 musicians. In this case, mainly students were attending. An informal student performance of Indonesian music and dance occurred earlier that same day, as reported by Martin Bartlett in a 1990 report.

19. This information is taken from a report written by Bartlett in May 1990, in which he describes the first two years of the gamelan's existence at SFU. For instance, Michael O'Neill remembers taking one Balinese rebab lesson from Pande Made Sukerta (e-mail exchange with the author, January 2024).

20. From 1994–1997, Western Front acted as the official host of these workshops.

21. A 1989 report written by Bartlett for composer Rudolph Komorous notes that the group gave a concert of traditional music at the Vancouver Board of Trade Indonesia Night and a series of ten performances of Alec Roth's contemporary work *The Tempest*.



supervision of Evangelista. The success of this arrangement prompted Evangelista to establish a formal agreement with ASTI. UdeM's Faculty of Music thus benefited from the residencies of various Balinese gamelan teachers between 1987 and 1995. In addition, it became the practice for such teachers to travel to Montreal with their wives and daughters, many of whom were skilled dancers.<sup>22</sup> Taking advantage of their presence, the Faculty of Music developed a partnership with the physical education department at their home university and the dance department at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) to offer a unique training program in Balinese dance. With good institutional support and strong media interest, gamelan at UdeM enjoyed great popularity in its early years.<sup>23</sup>

Following the model of music departments in the USA, the University of Montreal and Simon Fraser University began introducing cohorts of students to Indonesian music in 1987. By including gamelan among their course offerings, these institutions provided many students a window into Indonesian music. Additionally, the practical, performance-based dimension of these courses enabled a sustained representation of Indonesian culture within Canadian academic communities, notably through end-of-year concerts.

### An Academic Asset

At UdeM the *Atelier de gamelan* [Gamelan Workshop] proved a great success from the moment it entered the music program. It was the first large ensemble performance course to be offered outside the classical and jazz curricula, as well as the only opportunity to learn a non-Western musical form. Over time, a core group of students formed Sekar Giri Kedaton.<sup>24</sup> This advanced division of the Atelier de gamelan began to give concerts outside the institutional framework of the course, greatly increasing the representation of Balinese culture within the Montreal music scene. Shortening its name to **Giri Kedaton**, the group gained the status of ensemble-in-residence at the Faculty of Music in 2002, alongside the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne. While Giri Kedaton's personnel has changed over the years, many musicians active during this early period have retained close ties with gamelan, even if they no longer frequent the ensemble or its parent institution.

22. I Nyoman Astita with Ni Putu Lastini and Ni Wulan Tisandi (1988–1989); I Wayan Suweca (Batubulan) with Ni Ketut Mariatni (1989–1992); I Wayan Suweca with Ni Ketut Suryatini (1992–1993); I Ketut Gedé Asnawa with Ni Putu Oka Mardiani (1993–1994); I Wayan Berata with Ni Luh Putu Kartika (1994–1995).

23. Information taken from a report entitled "Organization of the gamelan workshop," written by Evangelista in the autumn of 1988. This report is part of the private archives of José Evangelista and Matilde Asencio.

24. Balinese for "flower of the royal mountain," a name given by Professor I Wayan Suweca (from Denpasar) during his second teaching contract in 1992–1993. It references Montreal's Mount Royal, at the foot of which the university is located.

In Vancouver, the Vancouver Community Gamelan developed along similar lines, with Bartlett initially developing gamelan classes and workshops as an alternative to Western music at Simon Fraser. This group of gamelan students began giving off-campus performances in 1989. At that time, the ensemble went by both **Simon Fraser University Gamelan** and **Kyai Madu Sari**, the name of its instruments. The collective also incorporated other instruments acquired by some of its members, such as a smaller gamelan gadhon bought by Bartlett in 1990 and a set of gender wayang owned by Michael O'Neill.<sup>25</sup> The latter's **Beledrone** and **Turtle Bliss** are just two examples of projects started by students who fell in love with gamelan through SFU's classes. With the proliferation of gamelan ensembles in Vancouver and their cross-fertilizations, the VCG network has rapidly outgrown its original institutional framework.

Several other universities followed a similar path, often thanks to the initiative of a teacher versed in Indonesian music. Upon moving to Canada from the United Kingdom, where she had previously taught gamelan for five years, ethnomusicologist Annette Sanger was hired in 1990 by University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. Her expertise in the study and teaching of Balinese music encouraged the university to purchase a semar pegulingan in 1993, which Sanger used for performance courses as well as the student group **Gamelan Dharma Santi**.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Sanger taught gender wayang privately to interested students. In 2007, she formed the gender wayang quartet **Sekat Rat Nati** with her husband James Kippen and musicians John Carnes and Albert Wong, performing regularly around Toronto. That year, additional instruments were also purchased in Bali so that Gamelan Dharma Santi could learn angklung repertoire.<sup>27</sup> With financial support from the university, Sanger was able to bring guest artists on three occasions to teach and perform with her students. I Wayan Sinti and Cokorda Istri Nilawati were visiting artists in 2006 and 2008, followed by Vaughan Hatch and Putu Evie Suyadnyani of **Mekar Bhuana**. After a 25-year career at the University of Toronto, Sanger retired in 2018.

Michael Tenzer, a specialist in Balinese music, has been in charge of the gamelan course at Vancouver's University

25. Michael O'Neill owns this set, which he uses in his ensemble Turtle Bliss. He also founded the Beledrone ensemble, which uses some of the instruments of Kyai Madu Sari. In 1990, Martin Bartlett acquired a second gamelan in order to have more extracurricular freedom.

26. The semar pegulingan gamelan ensemble course was inaugurated in the fall of 1993. That launched the first Balinese music course in Canada west of Montreal, one which she led for a remarkable 25 years.

27. Although Gamelan Dharma Shanti primarily performed semar pegulingan repertoire, gong kebyar pieces were also studied. With the purchase of two small kendang, a kempur, and a gentorag in 2007, angklung pieces were incorporated in the group's programs. Gambuh and older semar pegulingan repertoire was taught during the Mekar Bhuana residency in 2013. The group also performed a Balinese arrangement of a Javanese piece with Toronto-based artists Wiryawan Padmonojati and Ita Dwi Lestari on several occasions.

of British Columbia since beginning his teaching position in 1996. This course laid the groundwork for **Gamelan Gita Asmara**, an ensemble focusing on the gong kebyar and semaradana repertoire that split off from the university in 2005. Gita Asmara has hosted several resident Balinese teachers and artists over the years, including Dewa Ketut Alit (2001–2004), I Wayan Sudirana (2004–2013), I Putu Gede Sukaryana “Balot” (2017–2021), and I Putu Swaryandana Ichi Oka “Ryan” (2022–2025). In 2003 and again in 2006, Tenzer brought members from Gita Asmara to Pengosekan village to create contemporary pieces with Gamelan Çudamani.<sup>28</sup> The ensemble completed yet another tour of Bali in 2013 under the direction of Sudirana in the final year of his teaching residency. In addition to performing a variety of Balinese repertoire (owing to its tonally-expanded Semaradana instruments), Gita Asmara often commissions contemporary works from its visiting artists. **Gamelan Bike-Bike**, founded by George Rahi, stems from this lineage of Balinese music-making in Vancouver. Complete with Balinese gongs and kendang, Gamelan Bike-Bike uses instruments made of recycled bicycle parts and features current and former Gita Asmara members. The group performs contemporary works, including several composed by I Putu Gede Sukaryana, also known as Balot, during his residency at the University of British Columbia.

In 1999, Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan (ECCG) founder Jon Siddall, who had moved to British Columbia to work for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as a radio music producer, re-acquired his gamelan degung, **Si Pawit**.<sup>29</sup> Since then, Siddall has used this gamelan to teach a studio music course at Vancouver Community College. Siddall often has his students learn his compositions as well as other contemporary and experimental works.<sup>30</sup> This penchant for new works echoes Siddall’s initial motivation for acquiring a gamelan when forming ECCG in 1983. Moreover, the presence of an active gamelan degung at the Vancouver Community College adds a Sundanese flavor to the array of gamelan in the city today.

Many more instructional programs have since been opened up around the country, whether in an academic context or otherwise. One notable example is the Javanese group spearheaded by Sutrisno Hartana at the University of Victoria during his doctoral studies in 2009–2017. The **Busy Island Gamelan** (dubbed The Victoria B.I.G. Band) played on a slendro gamelan borrowed from the Consulate General. Busy Island Gamelan performed its Yogyakarta-

28. Eleven musicians from Vancouver participated in the project, some of whom played western instruments. The result of this collaboration is the experimental piece *Underleaf* (2006).

29. ECCG then ordered a new bronze degung set from Tentrem Sarwanto in Surakarta. Uniquely, this gamelan degung was designed with an additional sorog tone in the melodic instruments. ECCG musicians Andrew Timar, Mark Duggan, and Paul Ormandy traveled to Pak Tentrem’s workshop to negotiate details of the new degung’s range and tuning.

30. Notably, a performance with a hip-hop dancer at the event “Gamelan at the Roundhouse” (26–27 April 2018).

style repertoire at SFU for a 2012 diplomatic event celebrating 60 years of Indonesia–Canada relations.

Percussionists Ken Shorley and Bill Brennan both opened up classes in Sundanese music at the University of Acadia (Wolfville, Nova Scotia, 2009–) and Memorial University (St. John’s, Newfoundland, 2013–), respectively. They both use degung instruments manufactured by Tentrem Sarwanto (who also built ECCG’s current gamelan) and are informed by their experiences as former members of ECCG. These cases reinforce the pedagogical potential that all styles and types of gamelan embody while affirming higher education’s role in supporting the existence of these traditions outside of Indonesia.

## IN DIALOGUE WITH INDONESIA

### Gamelan as Influence

Gamelan has long been a source of inspiration for Western composers, including those hailing from Canada. The 1970s in particular were rich with trips to Java and Bali that informed new musical works. Since gamelan’s implantation in the country’s musical networks in the 1980s, engagement with Indonesian music has flourished. Over the course of four decades, such proximity has spawned various interactions with gamelan, ranging from the use of gamelan instruments as a novel sound source to the formation of deep bonds with Indonesian teachers. This section examines the different ways in which Canadian students and artists have engaged with Indonesian music.

Similar to the aftermath of Claude Debussy encountering gamelan during the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris,<sup>31</sup> the works of several Canadian composers are also marked by the influence of gamelan. First among this group is undoubtedly Colin McPhee, a Montrealer by birth who lived in New York and composed within the modernist movement. His interest in Asian musical traditions—and more specifically, his curiosity for the music of Bali—led him to live on the island for extended periods between 1931 and 1939. His activities there, which were mainly concerned with the documentation and preservation of endangered forms of gamelan, largely kept him away from composing.<sup>32</sup> However, he left behind one symphonic work from these years, *Tabuh-Tabuhan* (1936), that makes direct homage to Balinese gamelan. In this piece, McPhee imitates Balinese gamelan through the use of ornamentation techniques and pentatonic modes. This influence is also reflected in his transcriptions of Balinese gamelan pieces for two pianos,

31. Much has been written about the problem of identifying the type of gamelan Debussy witnessed at the Exposition. In all likelihood, what Debussy witnessed was a performance of Sundanese gamelan, on which an unusual mixture of Sundanese and Javanese repertoires was played, along with arrangements of American tunes. In this show, four dancers from the court of Mangkunegaran in Surakarta joined a troupe of musicians from West Java. For more details on this group, see Sumarsam (2013:92–106).

32. See the testimonies of those close to him in Michael Blackwood’s 1985 documentary *Colin McPhee: The Lure of Asian Music*.



grouped under the title *Balinese Ceremonial Music* (1934). These works by McPhee were pioneering, exemplifying the active study of gamelan in conjunction with its use as a compositional resource, thereby paving the way for subsequent generations of composers.<sup>33</sup>

In 1973, composer Gilles Tremblay traveled through Asia and recorded various musical excerpts that would later be published as part of Radio-Québec's *Musique Sacrée: Coup D'Oeil Sur Les Expressions Du Religieux* (1977), an educational LP box set. Notably, it includes recordings of various types of Balinese and Javanese gamelan. Tremblay subsequently gave several lectures and made radio appearances to educate the public about these musical traditions. Among his compositions, gamelan manifests itself abstractly in the chamber work *Oralléluiants* (1975)<sup>34</sup> and explicitly in *L'Arbre de Borobudur* (1994), a work for chamber ensemble and gamelan degung performed by ECCG.

In 1976, composers John Rea and José Evangelista traveled together with their spouses to Bali, followed by Claude Vivier. The three composers were friends and part of the collective responsible for "*Les Événements du neuf*," a series of thematic concerts held between 1978 and 1990 that featured a diverse array of contemporary music. Early among these concerts was a tribute to Colin McPhee, presented during the premier season on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1979. Balinese music, in addition to being showcased through

33. This author acknowledges the work of earlier Eurasian composers Paul Seelig and Constant van de Wall, although their contribution goes beyond the scope of this article. See Wibisono (2012).

34. For a detailed analysis of *Oralléluiants*, see Goldman (2018).

artwork and audiovisual projections, was later integrated into Vivier's and Evangelista's respective compositional languages. For Vivier, this influence is most evident in *Pulau Dewata* (1977), a work for open instrumentation that borrows many orchestration techniques, ornamentations, and rhythmic articulations from Balinese music.<sup>35</sup> His *Cinq chansons* (1980) for solo percussionist also highlights this influence through its use of gamelan instruments. The tragic death of Vivier in 1983 coincided with the peak of his cultural and compositional interest for Indonesia and its music. An iconic figure in Quebec composition, his work remains emblematic of contact between Western and Asian musical traditions.

A common feature of musical traditions around the world, heterophony describes musical textures in which several variations of the same melody occur simultaneously, producing interactions lying somewhere between monophony and polyphony. Passionate about a wide range of musical traditions, José Evangelista adopted heterophony as the main element of his compositional language. In addition to founding the Balinese gamelan course at UdeM in 1987, Evangelista composed orchestral works referencing gamelan, such as *Ô Bali* (1989) and *Ô Java* (1993). His involvement with the university's Balinese gamelan culminated in 1998 with the premiere of *Concerto Kebyar*, a work for gong kebyar and *ondes Martenot*.<sup>36</sup>

35. For a detailed analysis of *Pulau Dewata*, see Marandola (2008).

36. From 2002 to 2006 José Evangelista gave a course on Balinese music theory as a complement to the Atelier de gamelan. In 2004 he composed a work for gong kebyar and orchestra in collaboration with I Nyoman Windha and Gamelan Sekar Jaya in California.



Figure 2. Busy Island Gamelan at the "Inspired by Java" earthquake relief concert in 2012. Photo courtesy of Timothy Gosley.



Figure 3. ECCG performing with Trichy Sankaran in December of 1984. Photo courtesy of Andrew Timar.

Returning to Debussy's exposure to gamelan, Nicholas Cook (2013) clarifies the nature of this influence on the composer's work and challenges some common assumptions. Cook explains that Debussy's knowledge of Western composition functioned as a cognitive filter, allowing him to interpret the gamelan's orchestration as similar to the counterpoint of European classical music. It is from this same angle that Jonathan Goldman (2018) approaches the analysis of Tremblay's *Oralléluiants*, in which the gamelan is likewise "recomposed" according to the personal background of the composer. These approximate incorporations of the musical language specific to gamelan are similar to the notion of "creative mishearings," as theorized by Andrew McGraw.<sup>37</sup> Such creative mishearings occur when concepts are borrowed from the music of another culture and transformed into new creative ideas that do not belong exclusively to either tradition (McGraw 2009:12–22). Whether understood as cognitive filters or creative mishearings, these misinterpretations are generators of innovative ideas rather than pale imitations. It is this type of interaction between Western composition and gamelan that took place in Quebec starting in the 1970s. In this way, gamelan has left an impression on academic composition circles in Quebec, just as it has elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Evangelista expressed a similar conviction in stating that "All modern composers have been interested in the music of Indonesia because it is one of the most beautiful in the world. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

### Gamelan as a Resource

Contemporary works incorporating gamelan within more conventional formations have led many percussionists to become technically proficient at playing such instruments without necessarily becoming gamelan specialists. This

37. The concept of creative mishearings is itself adapted from creative misreadings, a concept theorized by literary critic Harold Bloom.

38. Several Canadian composers have experimented with parameters from the gamelan, such as its pentatonic modes and timbres. Note the vocal piece *Gamelan* (1976) by Raymond Murray Schafer, the piece *Kebyar* (1976) by Robert Aitken, as well as the piece *Galungan* (2010) by electroacoustic composer David Berezan. These examples are still in line with the gamelan as material and source of inspiration.

39. This quote comes from an interview with Evangelista following a gamelan master class organized by the Faculty of Music in 1987. This interview, the media of which is not identified, is part of the private archives of Evangelista and Matile Asencio.

addition of bronze percussion to the arsenal of sounds available to Western contemporary music can also be observed in the activities of certain Canadian ensembles.

ECCG, the majority of whose musicians began as percussionists with little prior knowledge of gamelan, illustrates this dynamic. With over 200 commissioned works, according to Blair Mackay's estimate, ECCG provides unprecedented access to gamelan for composers in Canada. An overview of the ensemble's discography reveals works by Walter Boudreau, Linda Caitlin Smith, James Tenney, Ana Sokolović, Alain Thibault, Gilles Tremblay, Lou Harrison, James Tenney, and John Cage, among others. Over time, ECCG has also strengthened its commitment to traditional gamelan. In order to explore Sundanese culture and music firsthand, Siddall studied in Bandung and Yogyakarta for nine months in 1987–1988 with the support of the Indonesian government's Darmasiswa program and the Canada Council for the Arts. Siddall's return to Toronto was quickly followed by his appointment as the Council's Music Officer in Ottawa. That year, composer and performer Andrew Timar, who had already served as ECCG's suling player for four years, traveled to Indonesia and received "two quite brief lessons on Sundanese suling" in Bandung (Ages 2009). Timar then served as ECCG's Artistic Director for over four years, after which he passed the torch to group member and percussionist Blair Mackay, who still leads the ensemble.

For its tenth anniversary concert season in 1993, ECCG organized a six-week degung teaching residency in Toronto for Sundanese master suling soloist Burhan Sukarma, holding rehearsals nearly every day. At the end of that period, they jointly performed a concert at the Glenn Gould Studio of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation which was later replayed on national radio. Followed by individual study trips by ensemble members as well as a group tour to Indonesia in 2002, the 1993 workshop with Sukarma infused the group's members with a core knowledge of degung repertoire and technique.<sup>40, 41</sup>

The Nexus ensemble, whose commissioning network intersects with that of ECCG, owes its affinity with gamelan to the interests of its founding members. John Wyre, a seasoned percussionist, has long organized World Drums events, which blend percussive traditions from around the globe. The 1986 edition of this event presented

40. That knowledge was further increased in 2000 with a recording residency at the Banff School for the Arts in Alberta, Canada with Sukarma, as well as a Toronto artist residency in 2008 with renowned Sundanese composer and songsmith Nano Suratno and two subsequent residencies with Bandung musician-composer Ade Suparman in 2016 and 2018. These residencies focused on new Sundanese repertoire acquisition, adding singers to the group (a feature of Nano Suratno's residency), culminating in public concerts and studio recordings.

41. ECCG has done significant community outreach by lending its gamelan degung to community groups and workshops, most initiated and directed by Andrew Timar. For example, see the video *A Story From Clinton Street Public School* (Toronto: Inner City Angels and Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan).



at the Expo featured several musicians playing Sundanese drums. Wyre has also composed for ECCG. Bob Becker, another founding member of Nexus, owns Javanese gamelan instruments and formerly taught gamelan at Wesleyan University in the USA.

The Sixtrum ensemble, in residence at UdeM since 2007, uses several Balinese gongs and regularly borrows additional gongs or metallophone keys from university's Atelier de gamelan. Sixtrum's activities overlap with those of several other concert organizations and contemporary music ensembles, such as the Société de Musique Contemporaine du Québec and the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne. Also at UdeM, composer and professor Ana Sokolović established an annual competition in which a select student composes a work to be performed by the Atelier de gamelan. This initiative also contributes to the inclusion of gamelan as a reference ensemble in composition circles.

### **Gamelan as a Cultural Bridge**

The bilateral relationship between UdeM and STSI Denpasar that formed when the Atelier de gamelan first opened enabled a number of students to further develop their gamelan and dance skills in Bali. Among them, Francine Aubry, Alain Kourie, and Sandra Wong were in Bali at the same time in the fall of 1989. It was through STSI that they developed their artistic networks, which included such notable figures as I Wayan Suweca from Kayumas and I Wayan Suweca from Batubulan, as well as Ni Ketut Suryatini and Ni Ketut Mariatni. Aubry is an important link in the transmission of Balinese dance in Montreal, having taught through the bachelor's program in contemporary dance at UQAM.<sup>42</sup> Wong, who developed her skills between 1986 and 1995, likely represents Montreal's first virtuoso of Balinese music and dance. Her repeated stays in Bali led to her giving gender wayang performances alongside Balinese masters, notably during a 1995 North American tour.<sup>43</sup> More recently, Giri Kedaton's long-term collaborations with I Made Dewa Suparta and I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara have strengthened Montreal's connection with Bali and its network of musicians.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Balinese dancer Ni Komang Swijani, her relocation to Montreal in the 1990s was independent of any artistic pursuit. She quickly found in Giri Kedaton an opportunity to keep her artistry close,

42. In turn, some of Aubry's students then went on to study in Bali, like dancer Annick Brault, who was active for many years with Giri Kedaton and the Atelier de gamelan. Information taken from a semi-directed interview with Annick Brault in Montreal, 24 January 2021.

43. The tour was facilitated by Éric Da Silva and led by dhalang I Wayan Wija and his musicians: I Ketut Agus Partha, I Ketut Buda Astra, I Komang Ariawan, and Sandra Wong.

44. I Dewa Made Suparta is a former member of Çudamani from Pengosekan village, whereas I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara leads Naradha Gita, an ensemble he founded in his home village or Kerobokan.

and she has been dancing with the group and training new dancers for over thirty years.

For Canadian artists who may enjoy only passing contact with artists-in-residence, the training trip to Indonesia represents a logical, even inevitable, step in the development of the aspiring gamelan or dance specialist. While gamelan communities in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto benefited from the knowledge of Indonesian experts relatively early in their development, overseas travel contributed greatly to diversifying the knowledge and raising the overall skill level within these ensembles. It is these contacts and cultural exchanges that have steered Canadian gamelan ensembles through the years, in some cases exerting a decisive influence on the evolution of their repertoires.

Gamelan communities in Canada, while not a direct product of the Indonesian diaspora, nevertheless represent privileged spaces for cultural exchange between Canadian and Indonesian artists. The number of Indonesian artists whose international careers were launched or enhanced by a stay in Canada speaks for itself. Sutrisno Hartana, hired over 25 years ago by the Indonesian Consulate General in Vancouver to teach Javanese gamelan, remains a central figure in the promotion, teaching, and dissemination of this artistic culture. Hartana's presence and sustained involvement in the Vancouver community has enabled the latter to benefit from the expertise of a Javanese artist and scholar on a regular basis.

The opening of the Atelier de gamelan at the University of Montreal in 1987 led to five Balinese master musicians coming to teach over an eight-year period. Often accompanied by their wives and children, these artists both shaped the city's understanding of Balinese gamelan and developed the international side of their careers. The residency of I Wayan Suweca "Kecil" from 1989 to 1992 is significant, as it gave him the opportunity to teach while obtaining a master's degree in percussion. From 2009 to 2013, I Dewa Made Suparta's position as a lecturer for the Atelier de gamelan was the cornerstone of his immigration to Canada. After moving to Waterloo in 2013 and assisting his wife Maisie Sum in the development of a gamelan course at the University of Waterloo, he was officially hired by the institution in September 2015. The presence of gamelan at UdeM prompted I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara to pursue a graduate degree in composition while remaining artistically involved with Giri Kedaton. Also on the institutional side, Annette Sanger was able to secure funding to bring Balinese artists to Toronto on three occasions, including virtuoso I Wayan Sinti and his wife Cokorda Istri Nilawati, who stayed for a full university term in 2008.

As for Sundanese music, its most influential ambassador has been Burhan Sukarma via ECCG. The suling virtuoso settled in the United States in 1988 and has since been invited on numerous occasions by ECCG to teach and perform works with the ensemble. In 1993, Sukarma

served as the group's mentor for a six-week teaching residency. In addition, several of his compositions and arrangements feature among the recordings of Sundanese music produced by ECCG. The group also invited Nano Suratno for a shorter ten-day period to produce a concert of Sundanese folk music in 2008. More recently, ECCG organized artistic residencies for I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara and Iwan Gunawan.<sup>45</sup>

This review of Indonesian participation in the Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto gamelan communities provides only a rough sketch of the concrete impact such relationships have had on the careers of Indonesian artists. While some of these artists eventually emigrated to North America, others who taught on a temporary or periodic basis would later return to their homeland, their artistic practices having been nourished by these exchanges. This dynamic has also led some Canadian gamelan ensembles to travel to Indonesia. For some of these trips, presenting concerts was the primary objective, such as Gita Asmara's 2013 Balinese tour. Other trips have focused more on intercultural collaboration. Michael Tenzer's 2002 and 2006 projects with Çudamani and musicians from Vancouver are of this type. Even more emblematic of this trend is the long-term project *Semar in Lila Maya*, which artistically united VCG with the Javanese group Wargo Laras for over two years (2006–2007). This production, developed through a series of collaborative workshops, was presented in both Java and Canada.

These interactions clearly demonstrate how gamelan today functions as an international cultural network that enables artists from distant countries such as Canada and Indonesia to interact and exert a mutual influence on their respective environments. Although the nature and magnitude of such exchanges often depend on external constraints such as institutional support or grants, gamelan in Canada goes beyond the representation of Indonesian arts. Rather, it acts as a vehicle for artistic and cultural exchange around a tradition in perpetual development.

## THE MISSION AND CULTURAL POLITICS OF GAMELAN IN CANADA

### Converging Interests

With the First International Gamelan Festival and Symposium at Expo '86 as its catalyst, the institutionalization of gamelan in Canada found itself at the heart of a global debate on the place of gamelan outside Indonesia. Removed from its original cultural context, gamelan as practiced in North America, whatever its style and repertoire, inevitably distinguishes itself from traditional practice. Canada offers several models for the use and creative reappropriation of gamelan that go beyond the ethnomusicological objective of bi-musicality promoted by Mantle Hood beginning in the late 1950s. The

45. In Bandung, Iwan Gunawan founded the group Kyai Fatahillah, a leading ensemble in contemporary music for gamelan and in Sundanese music more generally.

present section will attempt to show how the three major gamelan communities that emerged in Canada from the 1980s onward negotiate these interests in different ways to create distinct places for themselves in the Canadian musical landscape.

From the outset, ECCG manifested as a new music ensemble with a modest connection to Sundanese musical repertoire and Indonesian culture. While half of the ensemble's inaugural concert in 1984 consisted of Sundanese pieces, Andrew Timar estimates that 90% of ECCG's overall repertoire today is made up of new works (Ages 2009). ECCG founder Jon Siddall first encountered gamelan when studying with Lou Harrison at Mills College in Oakland, California. While Siddall did not go as far as Harrison in terms of building instruments from scratch (just constructing the wooden frames with his father), the ensemble ultimately followed the model established by Harrison and William Colvig, who were more interested in composition, alternative tunings, and instrumental invention than reproducing traditional repertoire.<sup>46</sup> Lacking affiliation with any teaching establishment, ECCG was free from the pedagogical or scholarly pressures affecting other gamelan ensembles. Although ECCG's path has been to increase its expertise in traditional repertoire over time, the group's career is built around commissioned works by composers not necessarily versed in gamelan. Perhaps most importantly, ECCG developed before there were any resources in Canada to learn gamelan and was thus on its own in terms of finding and cultivating a sustainable model. Its inception occurred within a context differing greatly from that of the Vancouver and Montreal ensembles appearing in the aftermath of Expo '86.

For the Vancouver Community Gamelan, compositional motivations also played a part in the group's genesis. In his lecture at the Gamelan Festival in 1986, Bartlett expressed his skepticism about the motivations that lead Westerners to learn gamelan, explaining that interest in gamelan was above all pedagogical and that gamelan should not be the object of superficial appropriation for purposes of musical creation (Bartlett 1986). Bartlett did not compose for gamelan until 1993, shortly before his passing, and avoided any deliberate gamelan influence in his music. The early years of Gamelan Madu Sari, VCG's first constituent ensemble, were largely devoted to learning traditional Javanese gamelan with few exceptions (Miller 2005). Made up primarily of students who attended summer workshops at SFU, in which gamelan was presented as an alternative to Western forms of music (Bartlett 1986), the group's activities were nonetheless at least partially oriented toward the interests of composers.

46. Siddall was also influenced by the Steve Reich and Musicians ensemble in having his own percussion ensemble with which to compose and create new works (from an interview between Siddall and Goldman in 2013).



Indeed, the summer workshops of 1988 culminated in the production of a contemporary work composed by Kenneth Newby and choreographed by Linda Rabin. The ensemble continued to perform new works the following year, giving ten performances of *The Gamelan Tempest*, with music by British composer Alec Roth. According to former VCG member Christopher Miller, most of the ensemble's musicians waited around seven years before venturing into gamelan composition, in the meantime acquiring a good knowledge of the Javanese idiom. This negotiation between Javanese tradition and contemporary creativity enabled the ensemble to avoid the schism between purism and new composition. VCG also remained virtually impervious to the influence of Lou Harrison and other American gamelan proponents, distinguishing it from Toronto's ECCG (Miller 2005).

In Montreal, one of José Evangelista's main concerns was to expand the ethnomusicology course offerings by providing access to practical learning in the music of another culture. Critiquing the state of the program at UdeM at the time, Evangelista wrote a letter in 1985 to faculty dean Pierre Rolland in which he invoked the bi-musical learning that prevailed in many American ethnomusicology departments. In particular, he highlighted the varying levels of difficulty offered by a Javanese gamelan ensemble and underlined the popularity of his own theory course, "*Panorama des musiques du monde*." It was with this desire to make the gamelan accessible that Evangelista opened a course at the Faculty of Music, the Atelier de gamelan.

As with VCG, there was a restrained approach to the use of gamelan instruments for composition at UdeM. While most of the Balinese teachers invited through the STSI-UdeM partnership were accomplished composers, the focus of the Atelier de gamelan was on deepening

knowledge of the traditional Balinese repertoire, not on composition.<sup>47</sup> A 1992 report reveals the popularity of the course among the various music programs offered at UdeM at that time. Students majoring in composition made up a considerable share of participants, whereas musicology students were relatively few in number despite the fact that the primary motivation for opening the course was to enhance ethnomusicological studies at the university.<sup>48</sup> 1992 also saw the release of *Bali à Montréal*, a collaborative CD featuring a selection of original compositions and traditional pieces for gamelan, as well as gamelan-inspired pieces for Western ensembles.<sup>49</sup> This portrait of Montreal's gamelan community in the early 1990s shows that new composition for Balinese gamelan was already a growing phenomenon at that time.

These three communities reveal quite different attitudes and approaches to gamelan. If there is one thing that ECCG, VCG, and UdeM's Atelier de gamelan have in common, it's that their establishment stemmed from compositional interests. It is no coincidence that all the people who first oversaw these burgeoning networks were indeed composers. However, these compositional interests have manifested differently between the three ensembles in accordance with their respective degrees of attachment

47. *Kresni Baru* by I Wayan Suweca (from Batubulan), premiered in 1990, was one of the few pieces composed for the Atelier de gamelan by a guest teacher. Entirely in the Balinese musical idiom, this work is not particularly radical. In comparison, Professor I Nyoman Astita, who taught in Montreal in 1988–1989, created several experimental works for the gamelan at the University of California in Los Angeles.

48. In terms of academic programs, UdeM does not distinguish between musicology and ethnomusicology.

49. These include McPhee's *Balinese Ceremonial Music* (1934), Vivier's *Pulau Dewata* (1977), and Evangelista's *Ô Bali* (1989). The compositions for Balinese gamelan are *Sasih Kapat* (1990) by I Wayan Suweca and *Tat Tvam Asi* (1990) by Robert Valin.



Figure 4. Vancouver Community Gamelan / Gamelan Madu Sari in rehearsal. Photo courtesy of Kenneth Newby.



Figure 5. *Gamelan Semara Winangun* circa 2004–2005. Photo courtesy of GSW.

to tradition. In Montreal, the pedagogical dimension and the academic benefits of disseminating non-Western music prevailed. In Vancouver, it was the offer of an “alternative” musical practice for students that was valued. In contrast, Jon Siddall and ECCG were in search of a unique identity within Canada’s contemporary music scene. Far from being pigeonholed into one or another American model, Canadian gamelan ensembles sought early on to authenticate themselves through distinct trajectories and ideologies. Thus, the identity negotiations that began to take place within these ensembles in the 1990s obscured their position on the spectrum between ethnomusicology and composition.

### Negotiating Representation and Individuality

It may be said that the learning and performance of a musical tradition by a group of cultural outsiders constitutes a leisure activity that does not always fit in well in North American urban societies. In an ecosystem where art is standardized, compartmentalized, and commodified, much of the spiritual, communal, and ritual content integral to gamelan risks being lost or misappropriated. Moreover, the pace of urban life leaves little room for long-term investment in community projects, which partly explains the membership drain experienced by Canadian gamelan groups. ECCG has found a formula adapted to this context by establishing itself as a professional ensemble. For Giri Kedaton and VCG, which remain essentially volunteer projects, strict immersion in Javanese or Balinese music becomes an issue. Indeed, it is reasonable to wonder about the significance of a purely performance-oriented course in traditional music from Indonesia when the Canadian artistic milieu has so few reference points for these musical genres. As Mark Parlett put bluntly to this author: “People say idiosyncratic, but there’s a beauty in that too . . . I’m pointing at you as a Balinese [gamelan] musician: How long does one keep playing *Baris*? What does that mean to you?”<sup>50</sup>

50. From an interview with Mark Parlett on 19 February 2021. Parlett is a puppeteer, musician, and interdisciplinary artist who

This reality has led many gamelan practitioners to reappropriate tradition in order to create original works and projects. With firm roots in Southeast Asian heritage and culture, however, gamelan nonetheless encourages a certain balance to be maintained between the presentation of new works and those drawn from traditional repertoires. In academic terms, this translates to the choice between compositional and ethnomusicological priorities. Canadian gamelan ensembles, which historically have not received the same level of support as ensembles in the US, do not necessarily have the luxury of confining themselves to a single orientation. As such, most Canadian ensembles fall somewhere between these two approaches. The nature of their activities fluctuates according to the resources available and the interests of their respective members.

In Vancouver, the performance of traditional repertoire has declined over the years. VCG projects have increasingly focused on original creations, as evidenced by the collective’s recordings and interdisciplinary projects. For Giri Kedaton, the traditional Balinese repertoire still occupies the lion’s share of concert programs, but creative projects are becoming more frequent. The personnel and artistic direction of a given period influence the space given to new works. At the time of this writing, the collaborative work between composer I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara and Giri Kedaton has produced numerous projects mixing Balinese instruments and electronics. Maintaining its emphasis on commissioned works, ECCG chose to expand its repertoire to include more traditional Sundanese pieces from 1993 onwards.

### An Expanding Scope in the Cultural Fabric

With almost four decades of activity under their belts, the first Canadian gamelan ensembles have had a profound impact on their local artistic networks and on the national cultural scene. Indeed, many of the newer gamelan groups are closely related to those discussed earlier, making it has been involved in the Vancouver gamelan community since its inception.



possible to trace a gamelan genealogy in Canada. This can be seen both in the proliferation of active gamelan in the cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and in the creation of new, related ensembles in other regions (see Canadian Gamelan Directory).

ECCG has had a major impact on the integration of gamelan into educational programs in Toronto through the work of Andrew Timar, one of the ensemble's founding members. From 1999 to 2003, Timar oversaw a Javanese gamelan performance course at York University. A lease agreement between York and the Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto allowed the university to use the Consulate's gamelan slendro for the course.<sup>51</sup> It was also Timar who founded and coordinated the activities of Gamelan Toronto, a community group active from 1995 to 2007. After Timar's departure, the York gamelan course was taught for a few terms by Nur Intan Murtadza.<sup>52</sup>

Timar launched another gamelan music program in early 2000, geared toward Toronto elementary and high school students. The project has an interesting origin story, featuring a surprising gamelan-centered partnership between the public and private sectors. At the invitation of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Dufferin Shopping Mall, Timar developed the Gamelan Program, borrowing instruments made by puppeteer David Powell. The Program's pilot having proven quite successful, Timar designed and ordered two large Javanese gamelan for the TDSB from the innovative Yogyakarta gamelan maker Suhirdjan.<sup>53</sup> By later splitting the gamelan slendro into two sets, adding some instruments, and frequently rotating the resulting three gamelan among host TDSB schools, the program reached tens of thousands of students across over a hundred Toronto schools. Timar continuously developed and supervised the Gamelan Program for its first seven years. Since then, David Powell has served as its instructor, even experimenting with online lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>54</sup>

51. Some of the gamelan instrument stands had to be repaired and repainted. In addition Timar traveled to Java to oversee the order of missing instruments. The instruments were given the Javanese honorific Nyai Mirah Kencana (Lady Brilliant Vermilion).

52. York University no longer offers a gamelan course and the instruments are currently in storage.

53. Suhirdjan made one pelog gamelan and one slendro gamelan. For elementary and middle school music education purposes, Timar did not include the more difficult to play gamelan instruments such as rebab, gender, or gambang in his TDSB gamelan. Instead, he ordered an additional number of saron, demung, and a lower-octave bonang panembung to accommodate more learners.

54. Powell thus rented out his homemade gamelan to the TDSB for the pilot phase of Timar's Gamelan Program before their Javanese instruments arrived in 2001. This full Javanese gamelan, named Anak Enak, was pieced together between 1983 and 1997 from a combination of sheet aluminum, cooking pots, Orff instruments, and other materials. The pelog half of the gamelan was later re-tuned to slendro in order to accommodate larger

Even more remarkable are the links between ensembles in Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, and those that have developed in other cities. Gamelan Semara Winangun, in residence at the Indonesian Embassy in Ottawa, is the result of Éric Da Silva purchasing a semar pegulingan in the early 1990s.<sup>55</sup> Active for several years with the *Atelier de gamelan* in Montreal, Da Silva had tried, with mixed success, to found his own ensemble in Montreal.<sup>56</sup> He eventually moved his project to Ottawa, as the embassy was ready to offer him the necessary space to hold regular rehearsals. In 2005, Da Silva sold his instruments to Gamelan Semara Winangun's members, who still perform as a collective. The University of Waterloo's gamelan ensemble also shares a connection with Montreal. Its founder, ethnomusicologist Maisie Sum, had joined Giri Kedaton as a musician during the years when the ensemble was under the direction of her husband, I Dewa Made Suparta. In 2013, Sum was asked to open and lead a gamelan class at the University of Waterloo, with Suparta acting as a guest artist and teacher. The couple settled in the city, and in 2015, I Dewa Made Suparta was formally hired by the university.

Although never quite reaching UdeM despite Evangelista's best efforts, Javanese gamelan did eventually make its entrance into the Montreal gamelan scene. John Gilbert, who had discovered gamelan through recordings, traveled to Java in 1998 as an English teacher in hopes of discovering the local culture. While in Semarang, he was invited to try out a few instruments. This direct contact with gamelan sparked an interest in learning to play Javanese music. Upon returning to Montreal, Gilbert joined Giri Kedaton for some years while researching about Javanese gamelan on the side. Over the course of

groups of students. Some of Powell's instruments were later purchased by the TDSB when the Gamelan Program expanded to include three full gamelan.

55. This gamelan is a replica of the set used by I Madé Grindem in Teges and featured on the 1972 Nonesuch album *Gamelan Semar Pegulingan/Gamelan of the Love God*.

56. The group did manage to organize a few educational workshops and perform sporadically, including at Andrew Timar's 1997 Gamelan Summit in Toronto.



Figure 6. Bill Brennan plays Gamelan Sagara Asih's bonang. Photo courtesy of Bill Brennan.

several trips to Java, he brought back enough knowledge and instruments to start his own ensemble, **Sanggar Larasati**.<sup>57</sup> Although its line-up frequently changes, Larasati performs sporadically in and around Montreal. As a fluent player of difficult instruments such as gender, suling, rebab and kendhang, Gilbert remains Montreal's primary exponent of Javanese music.

In Eastern Canada, two former members of ECCG followed in the ensemble's footsteps by purchasing Sundanese instruments and founding groups of their own. In 2009, percussionist Ken Shorley opened a Sundanese gamelan course at the University of Acadia in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. He also founded the group's community affiliate, **Acadia Gamelan Ensemble**, which he runs with musicologist Jeff Hennessey. Using these same instruments, Shorley launched a professional gamelan ensemble called **OMBAK** in 2021. In St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, musician Bill Brennan founded a similar ensemble in 2013. With private funding, he purchased a gamelan degung on behalf of Memorial University to found the student group **Gamelan Segara Asih**, which has since received instruction from Sundanese musician Adi Suparman on a number of occasions. Ken Shorley and Mark Duggan have also been invited to Gamelan Segara Asih as resident artists, reinforcing the link between the Wolfville, St. John's, and ECCG gamelan. With the activities of Jon Siddall and Si Pawit at Vancouver Community College, ECCG's influence on the Canadian musical landscape extends from one coast to the other.

Nevertheless, it's important to highlight a few cases where the presence of gamelan on Canadian soil has had virtually no connection with the communities in Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver. The **Balinese Gender Wayang Ensemble** of Calgary, Alberta, has been active since 1999. It was founded by Brita Renée Heimarck, an American ethnomusicologist specializing in gender wayang and music from Sukawati, who was working at the time for the University of Calgary. Heimarck introduced Balinese music as part of the university's World Music Ensemble. Despite Heimarck's departure in 2005, gender wayang is still practiced in this context under the tutelage of her former student, Rod Thomas Squance.

Until a few years ago, **Gamelan Gong Sabrang**, a community group which formed in 2001, rehearsed on the Consulate General of Toronto's Javanese gamelan. They performed mostly traditional pieces under the guidance of Wiryawan Padmonoati.<sup>58</sup> Playing on the same gamelan and similarly led by Padmonoati, **Gedhong Maple** (2007–2018) held weekly rehearsals for members of the KJRI staff and the local Indonesian community. Also in Toronto, Keiko Ninomiya, a

professional dancer who has played with **Gamelan Dharma Santi** and **Gamelan Toronto**, established the gong kebyar group **Gamelan Kayonan** in 2011 following a study trip to Bali.<sup>59</sup>

Located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Jim Hiscott and Andrew Ratuski's gender wayang practice has little connection with Vancouver's gamelan scene, although the couple have often formed a complete quartet with Michael O'Neill and Ann Hepper (of VCG) on various occasions. More recently, Dustin D. Wiebe built a reduced gong kebyar ensemble in collaboration with the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture. These instruments were used to collaborate with a troupe of Balinese artists in 2018 and give a series of concerts in Winnipeg. These isolated cases all resulted from individual efforts and not from the presence of this music elsewhere in Canada.

## CONCLUSION

Gamelan has gone from being an object of curiosity to an integral, if marginal, part of Canada's cultural scene in just a few decades. It first took root in three cities, then flowered into diverse communities across the country. Operating with varying degrees of autonomy, these communities have generated unique projects and repertoires that could not have emerged from any other context, thereby making significant contributions to the Canadian musical landscape and broadening the international network of Indonesian arts.

For composers like Tremblay, Vivier, and Evangelista, gamelan served primarily as a source of inspiration or compositional material for a style ultimately rooted in the European classical tradition. While it is well known today that gamelan is practiced in universities, many within the artistic community remain unaware of the stylistic diversity of such ensembles or the creative projects they give rise to. The fact that Canadian artists are now treating gamelan as a vocation and means of achieving artistic fulfillment represents a new, participatory mode of engagement, an approach that goes far beyond treating gamelan as compositional material or a musicological case study.

The access gamelan grants to intercultural artistic spaces is a phenomenon perhaps difficult to grasp from the outside. While the globalization of gamelan is well documented, awareness of gamelan in a specifically Canadian context remains limited. In comparison with the United States, gamelan is scarce north of the border. Groups exist mainly in large cities, which are themselves few and far between. Gamelan's four decades of presence in the country includes only a few dozen ensembles, not all of which remain active today. With limited resources, gamelan in Canada has had to negotiate between individual motivations and institutional support based on vastly different contexts from one city to another.

59. Information from an e-mail exchange between the author and Keiko Ninomiya.

57. Some of John Gilbert's instruments were lent to him by the Indonesian Embassy in Ottawa.

58. They also occasionally performed compositions by non-Indonesian composers, such as Lou Harrison's *A Cornish Lancaran*.



Sustaining Indonesian performing arts in Canada has almost always depended on the passions of a few individuals. Beyond diplomatic and academic initiatives, it is really grassroots involvement and community spirit that fuel such a rich history. Despite the great geographic distances separating the various gamelan networks in Canada, practitioners remain connected via their shared enthusiasm. The 1997 Gamelan Summit in Toronto was the first event celebrating this pan-Canadian community. With the support of the Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto, this series of performances and lectures was spearheaded by Andrew Timar and presented by ECCG, then in its 15th year. Many groups from across the country traveled to Toronto to perform at the festival, strengthening existing ties as well as creating new ones. One can almost see the Gamelan Summit 1997 as the spiritual successor to the events at Expo '86, but this time with full Canadian participation.

It is worth noting that while Canadian gamelan ensembles have continuously reached out to native practitioners, their existence has never stemmed directly from the Indonesian diaspora in Canada. The complicated logistics of transporting a gamelan overseas is but one of the factors explaining why Indonesian performing arts tend to be established through domestic institutions rather than the international movement of practitioners. Rather, the presence of gamelan in Canadian cities has facilitated the visit or even relocation of Indonesian artists who came specifically to teach music and/or dance. Sutrisno Hartana and I Dewa Made Suparta are notable examples of this phenomenon. Participation in gamelan also allows members of the Indonesian diaspora in Canada to connect or reconnect with an aspect of their national heritage.

Nevertheless, Indonesian performing arts have found a place in the Canadian cultural landscape, just as they have across the globe. At the time of Expo '86 in Vancouver, cultural dialogue between Canada and Indonesia occurred primarily at the diplomatic level. But over decades of Canadian engagement with Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese music, this dialogue moved into a more personal arena. While interactions between Canadian and Indonesian practitioners have never been free from geopolitical forces, there is no doubt such interactions have contributed positively to the vitality and diversity of the art form as a whole. Whatever challenges practitioners, ensembles, and institutions may face now and in the future, all evidence suggests that gamelan will continue to thrive in Canada. ■

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# DIRECTORY

## Gamelan Groups in Canada

compiled by Laurent Bellemare

This directory gives the following information for each group (with a few exceptions). No ending date indicates a group that was still active as of 2024.

### PROVINCE

#### City

1. name of group
2. years of operation
3. instruments
4. repertoire
5. affiliation (institutional or independent)
6. contact (person or website)
7. narrative

### ALBERTA

#### Calgary

##### Balinese Gender Wayang Ensemble of Calgary

1999–

Balinese Gender Wayang

Traditional (Sukawati, Bali)

University of Calgary

This group was developed by Brita Renée Heimarck for the World Music Ensemble course at the University of Calgary that she taught from 1999 to 2005. Since her departure, former student and percussionist Rod Squance has been teaching Balinese gender as part of that same course.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

#### Vancouver

##### Gamelan Madu Sari/Vancouver Community Gamelan (Kyai Madu Sari, The Venerable Essence of Honey)

1986–

Central Javanese

Traditional and new works

Simon Fraser University

[gamelanmadusari.com](http://gamelanmadusari.com)

Initially led by the late Martin Bartlett, The Vancouver Community Gamelan is the group formed after Expo '86, when Simon Fraser University received the event's Javanese gamelan. Using those instruments, the group often performed as Gamelan Madu Sari and released two CDs under that name. In the 80s and 90s, a *gender batel* group was formed out of the collective, using Kenneth Newby

and Lorraine Thompson's gender wayang quartet. Kyai Madu Sari has continued to be used to teach Javanese music courses at Simon Fraser University, its longest-term teacher being Sutrisno Hartana.

##### Gamelan Alligator Joy

(Vancouver Community Gamelan)

1991–

Javanese *gadhon* [chamber ensemble]

New works

Western Front

Gamelan Alligator Joy is an extension of the Vancouver Community Gamelan. Performing on a Javanese gamelan *gadhon* purchased by Martin Bartlett in 1990, the group has pursued activities independently of Simon Fraser University where Kyai Madu Sari is housed. For a long time the gamelan was housed at the Western Front.

##### Cymbali

1987–1989

Balinese gender wayang, electronics

Traditional and new works

Independent

Kenneth Newby

Cymbali was founded by Kenneth Newby, Michael O'Neill, Lorraine Thompson, Trish Halsey and Andreas Kahre. In addition to performing traditional gender wayang repertoire, the group also created new works including other instruments, such as three home-made MIDI instruments called "Flying Bonangs."

##### Gamelan Gita Asmara

1996–

Balinese Gamelan Semaradana

Traditional and new works

University of British Columbia

<https://sites.google.com/view/gamelangitaasmara>

Gita Asmara is a student and community group formed by Michael Tenzer in 1996 after he had moved to Vancouver. Based at the University of British Columbia, the group performs traditional and contemporary Balinese repertoires, and toured Bali in 2013.



### **Gamelan Si Pawit**

1999–

Sundanese Degung (*Si Pawit*)

New works

Vancouver Community College

[jonsiddall.com](http://jonsiddall.com)

Gamelan Si Pawit is the name of the degung instruments bought by Jon Siddall in 1983 for Evergreen Club Gamelan, his former ensemble. In 1999 he had the gamelan shipped to Vancouver to use for a studio music course at Vancouver Community College. His student groups have performed several new works, including those by Siddall.

### **Gamelan Bike-Bike**

2013–

Balinese-inspired instruments built in Canada

New works

Independent

**Contact:** [publiksecrets.com/gamelanbikebike/](http://publiksecrets.com/gamelanbikebike/)

Gamelan Bike-Bike was founded by George Rahi, who built the instruments from recycled materials such as scrap bicycle parts and canisters, adding Balinese gongs and drums. The ensemble is heavily indebted to Balinese gamelan and features mostly current and previous Gita Asmara members.

### **Beledrone**

2011–

Javanese pencon, Balinese ceng-ceng, kendang, gongs, bagpipes, various other instruments

New works

Independent

Beledrone is an eclectic ensemble formed by Michael O'Neill that combines two different kinds of loud processional musics: Balinese beleganjur and Scottish bagpipes. In his compositions for the ensemble, O'Neill has also included other instruments such as voice and viola.

### **Turtle Bliss**

2018–

Gender wayang

New works

Independent

Turtle Bliss is a quartet performing on Michael O'Neill's pelog-tuned gender wayang instruments, whose design and repertoire is based on the wayang tantri style developed by I Wayan Wija and his musicians, and have been used for various projects over the years. With Turtle Bliss, Michael O'Neill has produced mostly new works.

### *Victoria*

#### **Busy Island Gamelan**

(The Victoria B.I.G. Band)

2009–2017

Javanese slendro gamelan

Traditional

University of Victoria

[gamelan.tumblr.com](http://gamelan.tumblr.com)

Busy Island Gamelan was founded by Sutrisno Hartana during his doctoral studies at the University of Victoria, when he borrowed a gamelan from the Indonesian Consulate. The group performed several times in Vancouver Island and Vancouver City. Activities stopped with Hartana's graduation in 2017.

### **MANITOBA**

#### *Winnipeg*

#### **Maja Gender**

1994–

Gender wayang

Traditional Balinese and new works

Independent

Jim Hiscott

Jim Hiscott and Andrea Ratuski have been playing Balinese gender wayang together since their first trip to Bali in 1991. When working with Vancouver-based musicians Michael O'Neill and Ann Hepper, the duo becomes the Maja Gender quartet, performing traditional pieces as well as new works.

#### **Mini-kebyar**

2018–

Gong kebyar style built in Canada

Traditional Balinese

Canadian Mennonite University

Dustin D. Wiebe

In 2018, Dustin D. Wiebe built a small set of gong kebyar instruments in collaboration with the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. Later that year, he invited 8 artists from Bali to perform on these instruments. The *ad hoc* group notably presented the rare repertoire of Balinese Protestant music.

## NEWFOUNDLAND

*Saint John's*

### **Gamelan Sagara Asih**

2013–

Sundanese Degung (modeled on Evergreen Club)

Traditional and new works

Memorial University

Bill Brennan

The group consists of students in classes taught by Bill Brennan, a former member of the Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan, who ordered a gamelan degung from Tentrem Sarwanto in 2013.

## NOVA SCOTIA

*Wolfville*

### **Acadia Gamelan Ensemble**

2009–

Sundanese Degung (*Puspa Galih*)

Traditional and new works

University of Acadia

kenshorley.com

In 2009, Ken Shorley began teaching an introductory course in gamelan degung at Acadia University. With Jeff Hennessy, he also formed the Acadia Gamelan Ensemble, a community group performing on the same instruments. Shorley's degung was roughly modeled after the instruments of the Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan.

## OMBAK

2021–

Sundanese Degung (*Puspa Galih*)

Traditional and new works

Independent

[ombakgamelan.com](http://ombakgamelan.com)

Ken Shorley launched a professional degung group in 2021, using the same set of instruments as those at Acadia. Ombak functions independent of the university.

## ONTARIO

*Ottawa*

### **Gamelan Semara Winangun**

2002–

Balinese Semar Pegulingan (pelegongan, Teges replica)

Traditional pieces from Teges and Binoh

Embassy of Indonesia in Ottawa

[ottawagamelan.org](http://ottawagamelan.org)

Gamelan Semara Winangun was formed in 2002 by Éric Da Silva when he found permanent housing for his semar pegulingan/pelegongan at the Embassy of Indonesia in Ottawa. His instruments are replicas of the famous gamelan of Teges, Peliatan. Da Silva left in 2005, after which the gamelan was collectively purchased by the ensemble.

*Toronto*

### **Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan**

(previously Evergreen Club Gamelan)

1983–

Sundanese Degung

Traditional and new works

Independent

[evergreenclubgamelan.ca](http://evergreenclubgamelan.ca)

Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan is Canada's first active gamelan. From its inception, the ensemble adopted the model of a professional contemporary music ensemble. It has commissioned hundreds of works, toured internationally, and produced a dozen recordings. Although the ensemble does arrange and perform traditional Sundanese music, Evergreen Club's focus has always been the performance of new music.

### **Gamelan York**

(*Nyai Mirah Kencana*, Lady Brilliant Vermilion)

2000–2005

Central Javanese slendro gamelan

Traditional and new works

York University

[Andrew Timar](http://AndrewTimar.com)

In 2000, Andrew Timar inaugurated a Javanese gamelan course at York University, with a leased set of instruments owned by the Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto. New parts and instruments were purchased by Timar to restore the gamelan. After Timar, the course was briefly taught by Nur Intan Murtadza until the mid-2000s. York University no longer offers gamelan classes.

### **Gamelan Gong Sabrang**

2001–2018

Central Javanese gamelan (pelog and slendro)

Traditional and new works

Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto (KJRI)

[www.kemlu.go.id/toronto](http://www.kemlu.go.id/toronto)

Gamelan Gong Sabrang was a community group that rehearsed and performed on the instruments at the Indonesian Consulate. Like other groups using those instruments, its teachers have been musicians employed by the Consulate, such as Wiryawan Padmonoaji.

### **Gamelan Toronto (GamTor)**

1995–2007

Central Javanese gamelan

Traditional

Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto (KJRI)

Independent

Gamelan Toronto was a community group founded by Andrew Timar that used the Javanese gamelan at the Consulate. During its existence, the group was taught by Ono Eko Priyanto and Wiryawan Padmonoaji, musicians employed by the Consulate.



**Gamelan Gedhong Maple**

2007–2018

Central Javanese gamelan (pelog and slendro)

Traditional

Consulate General of Indonesia in Toronto (KJRI)

Gamelan Gedhong Maple was formed by KJRI staff members who rehearsed weekly under the guidance of Wiryawan Padmonojati.

**Gamelan Dharma Santi**

1993–2018

Balinese Semar Pegulingan

Traditional and new works

University of Toronto

Annette Sanger

This group was formed for classes in Balinese music taught by ethnomusicologist Annette Sanger. Pieces from the repertoires of angklung, gambuh, semar pegulingan, and Java were also taught and performed.

**Nada Rasa**

1997, 2002

Various

New works

Independent

Andrew Timar

Nada Rasa was founded by musicians Trichy Sankaran, Andrew Timar, Mark Duggan, Ernie Tollar, and Ravi Naimpally. Its first iteration performed at Gamelan Summit '97 in Toronto, presenting new works combining influences from Indian, Indonesian and Western musics, using gamelan instruments like kendhang, gong, suling, kecap and gender. Nada Rasa's 2002 group featured a different line-up of musicians, still including Timar and Sankaran.

**Toronto District School Board****Gamelan Venerable Son of the Rising Mist**

2000–

Central Javanese gamelan

Traditional

Toronto District School Board (TDSB)

[tdsb.on.ca](http://tdsb.on.ca)

A gamelan program offered throughout Toronto's public schools and inaugurated by Andrew Timar, who designed and ordered large sets of Javanese instruments from Javanese artist Suhirdjan which have been in rotation in schools around the region. Timar taught these courses until 2007, when puppeteer David Powell took over. Powell's own gamelan set, which he built during the 80s and 90s, was used for the TDSB program, including its pilot project.

**Sekat Rat Nati**

2007–

Balinese gender wayang

Traditional

Independent

Annette Sanger

Sekat Rat Nati is a gender wayang quartet formed in 2007 by Annette Sanger, her husband Jim Kippen, and musicians John Carnes and Albert Wong. They perform Balinese music in Toronto.

**Kayonan Gamelan**

2011–

Gong Kebyar

Traditional

Independent

Keiko Ninomiya

Professional dancer Keiko Ninomiya, who had previously collaborated with Gamelan Toronto and Gamelan Dharma Santi, established her own studio in Toronto in 2011. Using a gong kebyar she bought in Bali, she invites people to gather and "eat, dance and play gamelan".

*London***Aeolian Hall Gamelan**

2010–2012

Central Javanese

Traditional

Western University

Nur Intan Murtadza

A short-lived community group led by musician Nur Intan Murtadza during her PhD studies at Western University.

*Waterloo***Warga Santi, University of Waterloo Balinese Gamelan****Ensemble/Grebel Community Gamelan**

2013–

Balinese semara dana

University of Waterloo; Conrad Grebel University College

[uwaterloo.ca/music/community-engagement/community-gamelan](http://uwaterloo.ca/music/community-engagement/community-gamelan)

The gamelan housed at University of Waterloo's Conrad Grebel building is used by a student group and a community group, both led by musicians Maisie Sum and I Made Dewa Suparta.

## QUÉBEC

### Montréal

#### **L'Atelier de gamelan (student group)**

1987–

Balinese gong kebyar, angklung

Traditional and new works

Université de Montréal

[musique.umontreal.ca/etudier/ensembles-facultaires/atelier-de-gamelan/](http://musique.umontreal.ca/etudier/ensembles-facultaires/atelier-de-gamelan/)

Founded by professor José Evangelista in the fall of 1987, the *Atelier de gamelan* is an introductory course for students to learn various Balinese music repertoires. The course was first developed through eight consecutive years of instruction by Balinese guest teachers, and later taught by later taught by Sylvain Mathieu, Éric Vandal, I Dewa Made Suparta, Alexandre David and Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara, among others. It is currently taught by Laurent Bellemare.

#### **Giri Kedaton**

(previously Sekar Giri Kedaton)

1995–

Balinese gong kebyar, angklung, gender wayang, selonding, gambuh, gambang

Traditional and new works

Université de Montréal

[girikedaton.com/sitetemp](http://girikedaton.com/sitetemp)

Giri Kedaton is a community group developed by the *Atelier de gamelan's* most diligent students. By 1995 it became a distinct entity and obtained its Ensemble-in-Residence status in 2002. The group performs various Balinese repertoires and new works.

#### **Montreal Semar Pegulingan Ensemble**

1993–2002

Balinese semar pegulingan (pelegongan, Teges replica)

Traditional

Independent

The Montreal Semar Pegulingan Ensemble existed for a few years on an ad hoc basis, occasionally performing or producing events. It was founded by Éric Da Silva, who had purchased a semar pegulingan/pelegongan replica of the one in Teges, Peliatan. Lacking a permanent space for the instruments in Montreal, Da Silva moved them to the Indonesian Embassy in Ottawa and founded Gamelan Semara Winangun. Despite its short history, the MSPE participated in the Gamelan Summit 1997 in Toronto and in 1995 produced a North American tour featuring dalang I Wayan Wija, musician Sandra Wong, and musicians from Sukawati.

#### **Sanggar Larasati**

2002–

Central Javanese gamelan

Independent

Traditional

John Gilbert

Sanggar Larasati was founded by John Gilbert, who owns a partial Javanese gamelan. He has been recruiting members and teaching them Javanese music since 2002. Although the line-up of musicians has often changed over the years, Sanggar Larasati has performed many times around and outside of Montreal.

#### **Daun Getar**

2016–2017

Javanese gamelan, Balinese gender wayang, angklung

Traditional and new works

Independent

Daun Getar was a short lived collective founded by Pierre Emmanuel-Lévesque and John Gilbert. In April of 2017, they presented a joint concert with Gamelan Giri Kedaton and Atelier de gamelan, performing a Javanese piece and an angklung arrangement of Steve Reich's "Music for Pieces of Wood."



## PanGamelan: upcycling pans into collective musical instruments

by Martí Ruiz

*Synopsis: We build unusual instruments. We love gamelan. We love playing together. Not everyone has access to a gamelan. It is good to upcycle used materials. We found that playing modified pans in a group can feel somewhat like gamelan. We have identified two kinds of pans, with different ways to tune, hang, and play them. Now everyone can try it!*

### Background

The PanGamelan project was an evolution of several interests shared by members of two groups: the Baschet Soundsculpture Workshop at the University of Barcelona and the Gamelan Forja de Trons, founded by Jordi Casadevall in 2013.

We were all interested in other forms of music, and in other approaches to sound. Both worlds—Baschet and gamelan—had been converging since the beginning of our work together. We were all involved in the instruments developed by brothers François Baschet (1920–2014) and Bernard Baschet (1917–2015), and we were all members of a Balinese gamelan group.

We were always searching for new strategies for sound experiments that would be widely accessible. We found that our passion for gamelan was very compatible with the original Baschet sounds.

The Baschet tradition emphasizes not only sound, but social interaction: participative sound activities, applied acoustics dissemination, and an opening of ears to new sounds. The Baschet brothers were aware of gamelan, and got ideas from Bali for forms of clamped-plates tuned-percussion. They also referenced Javanese sounds, like that of the bonang.

We played kotekan on the original Baschet structures, inviting audiences to play in interlocking patterns of growing complexity.

Later we began using Balinese or Javanese scales to tune our new instruments based on Baschet principles, including the classical Cristal Baschet, clamped-plates threaded-rod multitimbral percussion, and massive directional tuning forks (freezing forks or *kouri-no-sen* in Japanese). We also tried Daniel Schmidt's style of aluminium discs designed for bonang, but made ours with higher rounder bosses for fast Balinese-style kotekan.

These experiments and experiences inspired us to develop new instrumental, compositional, and performance ideas.



Figure 1. A PanGamelan instrument made for the Javanese gamelan at the University of Performing Arts in Graz, Austria. Photo by Sarah Weiss.

### Building Gamelan-Style Instruments

Since our gamelan group at the Museum of Music in Barcelona rehearsed only once a week, we built gangsa-like instruments with iron keys—and later lightweight aluminum keys for easier transportation—so the members of our gamelan ensemble could have instruments for practicing at home. Since we were always looking for low-cost alternatives, we came up with the idea of using pans. (When teaching applied acoustics I always challenge students to explore the sounds of found objects, such as flower pots or ceramic bowls as a way to get started with empirical experimentation, playing and retuning, creating pitch sets and so on.)

Making single instruments and ensembles from “upcycled” pans was a discovery that resonated with our interests in community music making and environmental resourcefulness. The PanGamelan project makes it possible to share music making and instrument building, while encouraging creative use of found and pre-used materials.

### Inspired by Indonesian gamelan

Inspired by our experience with Balinese gamelan—although the first PanGamelan we made for an actual gamelan was for a Javanese gamelan (Figure 1)—we found ways to make music in groups and help people play



Figure 3. An array of PanGamelan instruments: ring mode (left) and membrane mode (right).

together, introducing damping techniques, interlocking parts, and gong structures. This approach can be applied to other instruments, of course, but in this post-industrial global-warming era, we feel the upcycling of used frying pans also has an ecological value. We have to consider how much we spend and what we spend it on, as well as make durable sound objects that escape the programmed obsolescence of a materialistic society.

Gamelan in Indonesia can feature different tunings, with subtle differences from one to the other, differences that are appreciated as the personal character of each set of instruments. Listening to recordings of gamelan does not fully convey the magnificent magnitude of the actual sound, with its beatings and tonal intervals. We feel that direct involvement with sound-making is what best creates enthusiasm for music.

We have found that the process of constructing a PanGamelan—listening to found pans, sorting them out, making modifications, and grouping the resulting instruments according to timbres and possible musical scales—is itself a valuable sonic experience. Choosing the tunings can be done in many ways, including just following pure personal taste. The process can be cumulative, and a PanGamelan ensemble can grow its instrumentation incrementally.

Accumulating PanGamelan instruments allows for more players, more music, more people in the community who know about this new kind of orchestra, and more chances for people to repurpose old pans instead of throwing them away. With this extensive palette of sounds, a group of people may experience communal music making, which we feel is the essential joy that comes from playing gamelan.

## MAKING PANGAMELAN INSTRUMENTS

We have discovered two basic ways of modifying pans that allow for different sonorities and playing techniques. We call them *ring mode* and *membrane mode* (Figure 3).

In ring mode we treat the pan like a bell, meaning the main vibrating area is around the outer edge of the pan. We

hear this sound as analogous to gamelan instruments with keys suspended over resonators (gangs, slenthem, etc.).

In membrane mode we treat the pan (or pot) as a metal membranophone, in which the bottom vibrates. This method creates sounds we find analogous to horizontally suspended knobbed gongs (reyong, bonang, etc.). Sounds that might represent drums can also be made this way, or by using plastic buckets or other containers.

## RING MODE

### Removing the Handle

When the outer rim of the pan is struck, it rings like a bell. The handle, however, stops the pan's vibrations, so we need to remove it.

To liberate the vibrations around the outer circle of the pan, we unscrew or cut the handle off. Sometimes a hacksaw or a grinding wheel is needed to cut off riveted handles or difficult screws. Some pans have a bracket where the handle is connected. Although this does not stop the vibrations, its position can affect the pitch. The bracket can be removed with a grinder, but this is a matter of personal preference (Figure 4).

Once we remove the handle, we can hear the pan's sound by holding it on our hands or laying it on a cloth and striking the edge; the bottom membrane does not vibrate much when the outer ring is struck.

A pan that is too thin will not really sing out, and a bent rim muffles the sound. But when the pitch is clear and the tone is loud enough, we can decide if the pan works for us or not.

### Ring Mode Tuning

A pan can be retuned a maximum of one and a half tones from its original pitch. To raise the pitch, shorten the ring edge by grinding or cutting out a full circle. An alternative is to make the ring edge lighter by drilling holes all along the circumference, evenly spaced to maintain the symmetry.

The pitch is lowered by grinding evenly where the bottom of the pan curves to meet the sides. If a grinder is not available, a series of evenly spaced holes drilled in that area can produce the same effect (Figure 5). Both methods reduce rigidity to loosen tension on the ring and therefore drop the pitch.

To emulate gamelan instruments with several keys—like demung, saron or gangs—many pans will be needed. The ring mode tuning will be required to build an instrument with specific pitches, or a large ensemble of matched-pitch instruments.

### Mounting Ring Mode “Bells”

Pans without handles have a nodal point in the center of the bottom that does not vibrate, so drilling a hole in the center of the pan will not affect the pitch or resonance. This point allows us to drill a hole in the center (Figure 6) and stack them. A threaded rod with nuts is ideal





Figure 4. Steps to remove pan handles: 1) Identify how the handle is attached. 2) Unscrew or cut the handle off. 3) Grind off brackets if needed.

to keep them in position without rattles or vibration interference (Figure 7).

We prefer to arrange them horizontally (Figure 8). This way we can hold several of them closer in a row, allowing a playing-muting action similar to playing keyed gamelan instruments like gangsa. It is also possible to hang them vertically on a rope, separating each pan between knots (Figure 9). This may not be as comfortable for quick musical articulations, but it is visually pleasing and easy to set up by hanging on a tree branch or other structure.

### MEMBRANE MODE

The bottom of a pan or a pot struck with the hand or a mallet of some kind can vibrate as a membrane. ["Pan" can mean a pot or a pan.] Pans can be placed on a padded surface, cushions, fabrics, horizontal strings, etc. so the vibration will last longer. (Making gamelan instruments from pots was used by Indonesian prisoners in Australia to make the Gamelan Digul.<sup>1</sup>)

### Membrane Tuning

A membrane-mode pan can be tuned by hammering a boss (a projected bump) in the center. This was used for the Drescher / Schmidt aluminum discs.<sup>2</sup> The more pronounced the boss, the higher the pitch, but only within a certain

range. (Bart Hopkin has two very interesting articles about these techniques.<sup>3</sup>)

Tuning the membrane pans is an unpredictable and variable situation, since pans have different kinds of bottoms. Some of them can be too thick, or double layered for induction cooking, making it extremely difficult to hammer out a boss. But other strategies can be tried, like drilling in specific regions to reduce rigidity and loosen tension to maybe lower the pitch.

While some pans can be useless in the ring mode, because they are too thin and low, almost every pan can be used in the membrane mode, without tuning, for gong instruments like trompong, reyong, and bonang. It is just a matter of finding pans or pots with the right pitch.

Pans with thin bottoms can be retuned by hitting them, although they can get out of tune if played too hard, and may break or lose their sound if that process is done too many times. (This offers an interesting performance possibility, if you are willing to hear your tuning change in real time!) On the other hand, this kind of soft bottom pans provide an excellent stable sound if played very gently, and one can be quite precise when retuning them for a specific purpose.

There is also the possibility of using pan lids.<sup>4</sup> These tend to work more like flat bells, closer to the ring mode described here, but with much less resonance than the pans.



Figure 5. Raise the pitch by removing a slice from the rim. Lower the pitch by grinding on the curve where the side meets the bottom, or by drilling holes around the outside edge.



Figure 6. Preparing pans for horizontal or vertical mounting by drilling a hole in the center.



Figure 7. Vertically-mounted pans on a threaded rod, separated by nuts and washers. (In a finished instrument, the nuts will be tightened all the way down.)

### Mounting Membrane Mode Pans

The modified pans can rest on horizontal strings in wooden frames, as in reyong, bonang, or kenong. By using many pans, we can create modular sets that allow various explorations, from making musical pieces to group improvisations. Several pans lying on a cloth on the floor or on a table can be played by one person, or can be fun for a group to play if there are enough pans.

Sounds that might be likened to kendang can be achieved with some membrane pans. Some of them can sound even like modern snare drums, making it possible to explore other sonorities. Buckets and similar plastic containers can produce more rounded sounds that might work for kendang.

The “found tunings” of these ensembles can be very inspiring and liberating, offering experiences of a range of tonalities and timbres.

The processes we describe here can create sound-making opportunities for a single player, small groups, and even large gatherings with lively crowds. In each case, different building and tuning possibilities can be considered. When we work with used pans, each piece comes to us with a random tone; this can be used as is, or changed to create ensembles of instruments with the same tuning.

### CREATING ENSEMBLES

Playing a newborn instrument for the first time is always a thrill, but the full potential of a PanGamelan instrument is revealed only when played by at least two people. This allows a dialogue, where the sound is an element to be contemplated and played with, and can become a tool for the joy of group music making.

Since beginning this project, we have created a few sets of instruments and organized some group activities. We

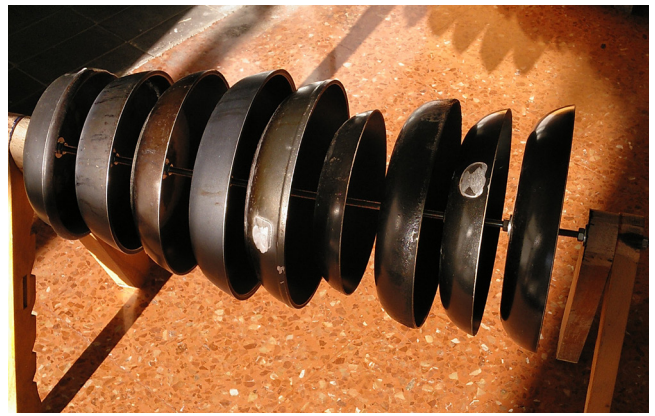


Figure 8. Horizontally-mounted pans on a threaded rod, separated by nuts and washers.

would like to continue to help establish more groups that will be able to make their own instruments and discover new approaches.

We have had the opportunity to start PanGamelan groups in several countries. Here are a few:

*Barcelona, Spain.* Several activities at the University of Barcelona in 2017 revealed the enormous potential of frying pans’ beautiful bell-like sounds.

*Mexico City, Mexico.* I was invited in 2019 by UNAM (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* [National Independent University of Mexico]) to offer their first PanGamelan workshop. The group continued to be active after I left, and added local musical elements. We exchange information and experiences regularly, as we share ideas and ways to find more players (Figure 10).

*Graz, Austria.* In January of 2020 I accepted an invitation from Professor Rafa Caro Reppeto, Ph.D., a former member of our gamelan in Barcelona, to offer a PanGamelan workshop at the Institute of Ethnomusicology at Kunst University of Graz, Austria for a group of enthusiastic students, as well as professors already experienced with gamelan, including Sarah Weiss and Kendra Stepputat. Participants were instructed in the basic elements and techniques of PanGamelan, and enjoyed a session of group music making on the first evening. The next day we decided to organize the gamut by choosing and constructing the first instrument, which could be a guide for future construction. The scale we chose was compatible with the Javanese slendro gamelan at the Ethnomusicology Institute, so the PanGamelan instrument could be used in ensembles for musicians to explore possible connections with gamelan (Figure 11).

### Plans and Possibilities

We dream of a future in which many people can learn, enjoy, and participate in a global network of PanGamelan ensembles. In addition to musical ideas inspired by gamelan, the PanGamelan can also be used in other not so “gamelanous” ways to create amazing musical experiences. We have also found that it is very possible to combine PanGamelan pans with other instruments to make different ensembles.





Figure 11. The author playing a PanGamelan instrument in the gamelan room in Graz, Austria.

The PanGamelan basics presented here can be expanded in many ways. We have used materials with different acoustic properties to make other kinds of instruments: aluminum for portable gangsa (called Gamelinus), PVC pipes for suling, wood to make keys for xylophones, like gambang. There are possibilities using auto-resonant pieces: PVC pipe for bass percussion, bamboo tubes for rindik and/or jegog, stringed instruments and so on.

We want to try larger pans—the traditional Paella pans from Valencia might serve for a low pitched gong ageng. We are also looking for low-cost ways to make a gong kemodhong, and are open to any ideas that can enrich the ensembles. We would like this project to encourage creativity, recycling, and up-cycling, all with a DIY attitude.

All of our information is shared on the principles of Creative Commons. It is not just about the sound, or making gamelan-type instruments, it is about being generous, giving away what we love and acknowledging every cultural and technical source we learn from. We believe our contemporary world needs spaces for people to meet and discover the joy



Figure 9. Vertically-mounted pans separated by knots.

of diversity, spaces not related to consumerism, but to different ways of spending time together, building instruments and making music.

Intercultural exchange and awareness can deactivate xenophobic, fascist, or totalitarian attitudes. No one needs to agree with us at this political level—everyone can use the PanGamelan resources—but we think that making music in groups may open people's hearts to become more respectful and patient, while at the same time making them feel empowered to make their own contributions to the community.

We have learned from our experiments that there are many possibilities for these endeavors. We are planning to expand opportunities for building and playing in Barcelona, including building a larger ensemble. As our activities develop, we will share them on the website for this project at [pangamelan.org](http://pangamelan.org)



Figure 10. Community music group in Mexico City testing out their new instruments.

This is the nature of the project— it can grow, change, be enriched by everyone’s experiences. We believe there are beautiful prospects for this project, because of the enthusiasm we perceive every time we use PanGamelan instruments, and the experience we have in collective soundsculpture making and “kotekaning” with people from many backgrounds.

We are glad to have the opportunity to share our ideas, and hope that others will be inspired to look around their own world and discover sound-making objects that can be used to create music making communities. We thank *Balungan* for the opportunity to describe our experiences, and we look forward to having more people join our family! If we can make it possible for people to share moments of joy such as we have had, our mission will be accomplished. ▶

#### Endnotes

1. Kartomi, Margaret J. *The Gamelan Digul and the Prison-Camp Musician Who Built It: An Australian Link with the Indonesian Revolution*. Eastman Studies in Music 16, University of Rochester Press, 2002.
2. “[Aluminum Bonangs](#).” Paul Dresher. *EAR Magazine*, Barbary Benary, ed. Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 24–25. New Wilderness Foundation, New York.
3. See “[Aluminum Disk Gongs \(Articles #1 and #2\)](#).”
4. [Terry Berlier’s Pan-Lid Gamelan](#)

**Martí Ruiz i Carulla** is head of the Sound Art Laboratory and the Baschet Sound Sculpture Workshop at the University of Barcelona, where he works in acoustics applied to the creation of objects and interactive sound sculpture for inclusive participation. He is an experimental multi-instrumentalist driven by love and curiosity for everything that sounds. His interests concern interdisciplinary intersections between educational, cultural, and museological policies and practices, and he has led numerous international workshops on instrument invention. He is a co-founding member of Gamelan Penempatan Guntur (currently Gamelan Barasvara) in Barcelona.

*All photos were taken by the author unless otherwise noted.*

#### Resources

This video by the author is an introduction to PanGamelan and explains building, mounting, and playing PanGamelan instruments.



#### Websites

[pangamelan.org](http://pangamelan.org)  
[Instagram](#)



# SCORE

# KANTAKA

by Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun

*Melihat keadaan sekitar mengalami  
kemerosotan di segala bidang,  
Sang Pujangga diliputi kedukaan  
Bangkit kesedihan dari lubuk hatinya  
Gundah merajam jiwa*

Seeing the surrounding world  
deteriorating in every aspect,  
The poet is filled with sorrow.  
From the depth of his heart, sadness rises,  
Anguish overwhelms the soul.

— Serat Kalatidha

(Translation from Javanese to Indonesian by  
the composer; translation from the Indonesian by Sean Hayward.)

*Kantaka* is the second movement of the suite *Kalatidha*,  
composed in 2018. The five movements, each a separate  
composition, are based on the philosophy of the *Serat*  
*Kalatidha*, written circa 1860 by the Javanese philosopher  
and poet Raden Ngabehi Ranga Warsita.

*Kantaka* (Sanskrit for obstacle) was inspired by the  
message of the second part of the *Serat Kalatidha*: One may  
experience sorrow when confronted with challenges, yet it  
is essential to swiftly regain composure and accept that such  
hardships are predestined.

## Instrumentation, Tuning, and Notation

The instruments used in *Kantaka* are: three rebab tuned to  
the normal 6 and 2, a slendro Javanese gender barung, and  
a Sundanese kecapa tuned in madenda. Pitch 6 on the kecapa  
should match the 6 on the gender.

The gamut of *Kantaka* is achieved by combining the  
Javanese slendro scale and the Sundanese madenda scale.  
The resulting composite scale closely resembles the minor  
scale of Western classical music. The gender is only slendro  
and the kecapa is only in madenda, while the three rebab  
move fluidly between the two.

The scale of the piece is an adapted “slendro miring.”  
Miring, meaning deviation or slant, is a tuning variable in

Central Javanese gamelan music in which an altered tone is  
shown with a slash through the number.

This notation uses miring slashes to indicate that a pitch  
should be lowered. When miring is applied to pitch 2 or 5,  
those should be lowered to match the tones of madenda.  
Miring applied to 6 means lower that pitch a half step.

The chart in Figure 1 shows how these various scale  
systems and their corresponding notation align. Each  
column represents a single tone.

The first performance of *Kantaka* used a 20-string kecapa  
with madenda tuning, shown here in “slendro miring.”

6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5 6 1 2 3 5

## Performance Notes

There are 5 parts: A, B, C, D, E, and F.

**Part A** may be played in two different ways.

Method 1: play without a pulse or fixed tempo, maintaining  
the order of notes and parts as indicated. Rb.A begins,  
followed by Rb.B, then Rb.C. When Rb.A goes to the next  
note, the other two follow in order. This method allows  
for more interaction between the players.

Method 2: play with a pulse, following the notation.

In **Part C**, substantial rhythmic and melodic variations are  
acceptable and encouraged. The recording demonstrates  
some possibilities.

In **Part E**, the gender player will use traditional gantungan  
cengkok for repeated notes. A player proficient in traditional  
gender playing is free to improvise personal cengkok.  
Gantungan cengkok from palaran may also be used.

This [video of a performance of Kantaka](#) contains much  
information not represented in the notation, and should be  
viewed before performing *Kantaka*. —Sean Hayward

Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun is an Indonesian composer and  
musician on the faculty at ISI Surakarta.

Kantaka Slendro (used in score)	6	1	2	2	3	5	5	6
Minor Scale	1	2	b3	4	5	b6	b7	7
Javanese Slendro	6	1	—	2	3	—	5	—
Sundanese Madenda	5	4	3	—	2	1	—	—

Figure 1. The relationship between the various tunings in the piece, shown with an implied Western minor scale.

# KANTAKA

(2018) Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun

## Part A (~90 bpm)

	3	4	6	4	5	6	3	4	6	5	6
Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ...	6...	ḡ...	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.... i.....
Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ...	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.... i....
Rb.B	.6.	.i...	.6....	.6...	.ḡ...	.3.....	.6.	.i...	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ.... .3....
Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ...	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.... i....
Rb.B	.6.	.i...	.6....	.6...	.ḡ...	.3.....	.6.	.i...	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ.... .3....
Rb.C	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..ḡ.	..ḡ.	..ḡ....	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..ḡ.	..ḡ.... .3....
Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ...	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.... i....
Rb.B	.6.	.i...	.6....	.6...	.ḡ...	.3.....	.6.	.i...	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ.... .3....
Rb.C	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..ḡ.	..ḡ.	..ḡ....	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..ḡ.	..ḡ.... .3....
Kec	...	...	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

The kecapi plays in free rhythm, beginning with basic patterns that gradually become more complex, starting with 6 and ending with 6.



	3	4	6	4	5	6	3	4	6	4	5	6
Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.....	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.....	i....
Rb.B	.6.	.i..	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ....	.3....	.6.	.i..	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ....	.3...
Rb.C	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..6.	..ḡ.	..ḡ....	..ḡ.	..ḡ.	..1...	..6.	..ḡ.	..3..
Kec	.....											

Rb.A	6..	i...	ḡ.....	6...	ḡ.....	i.....	6..	i...	ḡ.....
Rb.B	.6.	.i..	.6.....	.6...	.ḡ....	.3....	.6.	.i..	.6.....
Rb.C	..ḡ	..ḡ.	..1...	..6.	..ḡ.	..ḡ....	..ḡ.	..ḡ.	..1...
Kec	<u> 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ2ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ1ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ6ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ6ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ2ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ1ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ6ḡ 3ḡ3ḡ3ḡ6ḡ </u>								

(fade out)

The kecapi plays in its own tempo of around 110 bpm, not with the rebab tempo (90 bpm).

**Part B (~110 bpm)**

Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣
Rb.A	....	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ø	...6	...3	...2	...3
Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣
Rb.A	....	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ø	...6	...3	...2	...3
Rb.B	....	...6	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ẓ	...6	...5	...6
Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣
Rb.A	....	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ø	...6	...3	...2	...3
Rb.B	....	...6	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ẓ	...6	...5	...6
Rb.C	....	...Ẓ	...1	...1	...6	...3	...6	...6
Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣
Rb.A	....	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ø	...6	...3	...2	...3
Rb.B	....	...6	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ẓ	...6	...5	...6
Rb.C	....	...Ẓ	...1	...1	...6	...3	...6	...6
Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣
Rb.A	....	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ø	...6	...3	...2	...3
Rb.B	....	...6	...Ẓ	...ị	...Ẓ	...6	...5	...6
Rb.C	....	...Ẓ	...1	...1	...6	...3	...6	...6
Gd	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	...6
Kec	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣ẒẒ	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣1̣1̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣	3̣3̣3̣	3̣3̣6̣6̣

# **Part C** (~170 bpm)

Gd	6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣
Kec	. 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2

RbA	. . . . . ị . 2̣ . 6 . 3 . . . . . 1 . 3 . 1 . 2 . . . . 6̣
Gd	6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣
Kec	6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2

RbA	. . . . . ị . 2̣ . 6 . 3 . . . . . 1 . 3 . 1 . 2 . . . . 6̣
Rb.B	. . . . . . . . . . . 3 . . . . . 6̣ . 1 . 2 . 3 . 6 . . . . 6̣
Gd	6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣ 6 6̣
Kec	6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2 6 6̣26 6̣2



[illegible]

Rb.A	. . . . .	i . ž	6 . 3	. . . . .	1 . 3	. 1 . 2	. . . . 6
Rb.B	. . . . .	. . . . .	3 . 3	. . . . .	6 . 1 . 2	. 3 . 6	. . . . 6
Rb.C	1 . 2	. 2 . 3	. . . . .	6 . 2 . 6	. 1 . . . .	. . . . .	. 1 . 6
Gd	<u>. 5 . 35 3</u>	<u>. 5 . 35 35 6</u>	. . . . 3	. . 5 3	<u>. 5 . 32 12 3</u>	. . . . 3	<u>. 5 . 35 6</u>
	5 1 5 3	5 1 5 6	. . . . .	. . 12 3 3 3 3	. . . . .	. . 653	5 1 5 6
Kec	. . . . .	<u>66 2662381</u>	6 8 6 3	. . . . .	<u>11 3113862</u>	<u>1 6 1 22 3811236</u>	<u>. 1 . 6</u>
		6 . . . .	. . . . 6		1 . . . .	. . . . 2	. 1 . 6

**Part D (~170 bpm)**

Gd	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$
Kec	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$

(kecapi doubled in lower octave)

Gd	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$
Kec	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$

gradually slow down from 170 bpm to 100 bpm

Gd	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$
Kec	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{1}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$	$\frac{\dot{1} \ \dot{2} \ \dot{3}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{3}}$	$\frac{\dot{2} \ \dot{1} \ \dot{2}}{\cdot \cdot \dot{2}}$	$\frac{5 \ \dot{1} \ 6}{\cdot \cdot \dot{6}}$

slow down from 100 bpm to 80 bpm

Delay the last note as if it were the final gong of a traditional gendhing (piece).

[illegible]



Rb.A	Ø	6	i	ž	i	ž	i	ž	i	ž	2	3	.	ž	.	.	3
Rb.B	ž	i	6	i	6	Ø	.	2	.	.	3	.	.	.	.	3	
Rb.C	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	6	.	.	6	.	.	.	.	2	
Gd	22	26	26	22	22	22	35	66	66	63	63	66	66	66	53	22	
Kec	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	6	6	6	6	.	6	6	6	2	
	36ž636ž636ž636ž6	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	36ž636ž636ž6i3i1	

Rb.A	Ø	6	i	ž	.	i	.	3	Ø	6	i	ž	.	ž	.	3
Rb.B	Ø	6	i	ž	ž	3	.	3	ž	ž	ž	i	.	.	.	i
Rb.C	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	3	.	.	.	3	.	.	.	2
Gd	22	26	26	22	22	26	26	33	33	36	36	33	33	36	36	22
Kec	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	.	3	3	2
	35i535i535i535i5	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6	35i535i535i556ž6

Rb.A	5	6	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{3}$	.	$\dot{2}$	.	$\dot{2}$	.	$\dot{1}$	.	6
Rb.B	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	6	$\dot{1}$	6	$\dot{2}$	.	.	.	.	3	.	1	.	6
Rb.C	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	6	.	.	.	.	.	.	6
Gd	22	26	26	22	22	22	35	66	66	66	.	35	65	15	61
Kec	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	6	6	6	6	65	3	53	56
	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515	351535153515

slow down from 85 bpm to 70 bpm

Delay the last note as if it were a gong in the merong section of a traditional gending.

### Part E (~170 bpm)

Gd	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	
Kec	.	2	.	1	.	2	.	3	.	2	.	1	6	1	2	6	
	.	2	.	1	.	2	.	3	.	2	.	3	2	.	1	6	
Gd	$\dot{1}$	6	5	$\dot{3}$	35	3	5	6	5	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{1}$	5	6	
Kec	$\dot{1}$	6	5	$\dot{3}$	5	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{3}$	5	6	1	6	1	6	1	6	1	6
	$\dot{5}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{5}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{1}$	5	6	
	$\dot{5}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{5}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{3}$	$\dot{2}$	$\dot{1}$	$\dot{6}$	$\dot{1}$	5	6	

slow down from 170 bpm to 90 bpm

**Part F** (~150 bpm)

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 . 8	. 6 . i	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 6 . i	. 2 . 8
Gd	. . i 6	. i . 6 i 6	. . . . .	. . . i	. . 2 i	. 2 . i 6 5 6	1 . . . .	. . . . .
	. . . 2 1	6 6 6 5 6	. . . . .	. . 3 2 1	. . . 3 2	1 1 1 1	. . . . .	. . . . .
Kec	3 6 6 3 8 6 2	i 6 8 6 6	3 6 6 3 6 6	. 8 6 i i	2 i i i 2 i 3 i	2 i i i 6 i i i	3 i i 3 5 6 i	. 2 i 6 8 8
	. . . . .	. . . . 6	. . . . 6	. 8 6 1	. . . . .	. . . . 1	. . . . 1	. . . . 8

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . 3	. . . . 2	. . . . 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2 . i	. 8 . 6
Gd	2 3 5 3	6 5 6 i	. 6 . 5 6 i	. 6 . 5 6 5 6	i i 2 i	6 . 5 6 i	. . . . .	. . . . 6
	. 5 3 . 3 .	6 5 3 .	3 5 6 3	1 3 2 1	. . . . .	. 3 2 1	. . . . .	. . 3 5 6
Kec	2 5 5 2 3 8 6	8 6 8 3 3	i 3 3 5 6 i 2	. 3 2 i i	2 3 8 6 i 2 3	5 6 2 i	. . . 2	. i . 6
	. . . . 6	5 6 5 3	. . . . 2	. 3 2 1	. . . . .	. . . . 1	. . . . 2	. 1 . 6



Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 . 𐄂	. 6 . 1̇	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 6 . 1̇	. 𐄂 . 𐄂	. 𐄂 . 𐄂
Rb.B	. . . 𐄂	. . . . 3	. . . . 𐄂	. . . . 1	. . . . 𐄂	. . . . 1	. . . . 6̇	. . . . 2	. . . . 2
Gd	. . 1̇ 6	. 1̇.6̇1̇ 6	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2̇ 1̇	. 2̇.1̇6̇ 56̇	1̇ . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .
Kec	. . . 21̇ 6̇ 6̇ 6̇ 56̇	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . 321̇	. . . . 32̇	1̇ 1̇ 1̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2̇1̇6̇ 𐄂𐄂
	3̇6̇6̇3̇𐄂6̇2̇	1̇ 6̇ 𐄂 6̇ 6̇ 6̇	3̇6̇6̇3̇6̇ 6̇	. 𐄂 6̇ 1̇1̇	2̇1̇1̇1̇2̇1̇3̇1̇	2̇1̇1̇1̇6̇1̇1̇1̇	3̇1̇1̇3̇5̇6̇1̇	. 2̇1̇6̇ 𐄂𐄂	. . . . 𐄂
	. . . . .	. . . . 6̇	. . . . 6̇	. 𐄂 6̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. . . . 1̇	. . . . 1̇	. . . . 1̇	. . . . 𐄂

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . 3	. . . . 𐄂	. . . . 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 𐄂 . 1̇	. 𐄂 . 6̇	. . . . 6̇
Rb.B	. . . . .	. 6̇ . 2̇	. . . . 6̇	. . . . 3	. . . . .	. . . . 1̇	. . . . 𐄂	. . . . 3	. . . . 3
Gd	2̇ 3̇ 5̇ 3̇	6̇ 5̇ 6̇ 1̇	. 6̇.5̇6̇ 1̇	. 6̇.5̇6̇ 5̇6̇	1̇ 1̇ 2̇ 1̇	6̇ .5̇6̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. . . . 6̇	. . . . 6̇
Kec	. 5̇3̇.3̇.	6̇ 5̇ 3̇ .	3̇ 5̇ 6̇ 3̇	1̇ 3̇ 2̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. 3̇ 2̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. . 3̇5̇6̇	. . 3̇5̇6̇
	2̇5̇5̇2̇3̇𐄂6̇	𐄂 6̇ 𐄂 3̇ 3̇	1̇3̇3̇5̇6̇1̇2̇	. 3̇ 2̇ 1̇1̇	2̇3̇𐄂6̇1̇2̇3̇	5̇ 6̇ 2̇ 1̇	. . . . 2̇	. 1̇ . 6̇	. 1̇ . 6̇
	. . . . 6̇	5̇ 6̇ 5̇ 3̇	. . . . 𐄂	. 3̇ 2̇ 1̇	. . . . .	. . . . 1̇	. . . . 𐄂	. 1̇ . 6̇	. 1̇ . 6̇

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 . 3	. 6 . 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 6 . 1	. 2 . 3
Rb.B	. . . 2	. . . 3	. . . 2	. . . 1	. . . 2	. . . 1	. . . 6	. . . 2
Rb.C	3 6 3 6	3 3 1 6	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2 3 2 1	. 6 1 2 1	. . . 6	. . . 1
Gd	. . . 1 6	. 1.6 1 6	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2 1	. 2.16 56	. . . . .	. . . . .
Kec	. . . 21	. 6 6 656	. . . . .	. . . 321	. . . 32	. 1 1 1 1	. . . . .	. 216 33
	3663362	1 6 3 66	36636 6	. 3 6 11	21112131	21116111	3113561	. 216 33
	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 6 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 . 2	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 2 . 1	. 3 . 6
Rb.B	. . . . .	. 6 . 2	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .
Rb.C	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .
Gd	2 3 5 3	6 5 6 1	. 6.56 1	. 6.56 56	. 1 2 1	. 6.56 1	. . . . .	. . . . .
Kec	. 53.3	6 5 3 .	3 5 6 3	1 3 2 1	. . . . .	. 3 2 1	. . . . .	. 356
	2552336	3 6 3 33	1335612	. 3 2 11	2336123	5 6 2 1	. . . . .	. 1 . 6
	. . . . .	. 6 5 3 .	. . . . .	. 3 2 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 1 . 6

(~ 160 bpm)

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 3 . 𐄂	. 6 . 𐄂	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 6 . 𐄂	. 𐄂 . 𐄂 . 𐄂 . 𐄂
Rb.B	. . . 𐄂	. . . 3	. . . 𐄂	. . . 1	. . . 𐄂	. . . 1	. . . 6 .	. . . 2
Rb.C	𐄂 6 𐄂 6	𐄂 3 1 6 .	. . . . .	. . . 𐄂	. 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	6 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	. . . 6	. . . 𐄂
Gd	. . 𐄂 6	. 𐄂 6 𐄂 6	. . . . .	. . . 𐄂	. . . 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	. 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	1 . . . .	. . . . .
Kec	3 6 6 3 𐄂 6 𐄂	𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 6 6	3 6 6 3 6 6	. 𐄂 6 𐄂 𐄂	𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	3 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	. 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂
	. . . . .	. . . 6 .	. . . 6 .	. 𐄂 6 .	. . . . .	. . . 1	. . . 1	. . . 𐄂 .

Rb.A	. . . . .	. . . 3	. . . 𐄂	. . . 1	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 𐄂 . 𐄂 . 𐄂 . 6
Rb.B	. . . . .	. 6 . 𐄂	. . . 6 .	. . . 3	. . . . .	1 . . . .	. . . 6 .
Rb.C	. . . 6	. . . 𐄂	. . . 6	. . . 3	. . . . .	. . . . .	. 𐄂 . 𐄂 . 3
Gd	2 3 5 3	6 5 6 𐄂	. 6. 56 𐄂	. 6. 56 56	𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	6 . 56 𐄂	. . . . .
	. 53.3.	6 5 3 .	3 5 6 3 .	1 3 2 1 .	. . . . .	. 3 2 1	. . 356
Kec	𐄂 5 5 𐄂 3 𐄂 6	𐄂 6 𐄂 𐄂 33	𐄂 3 3 5 6 𐄂 𐄂	. 3 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	𐄂 3 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂 𐄂	5 6 𐄂 𐄂	. 𐄂 . 6
	. . . 6 .	5 6 5 3 .	. . . 𐄂	. 3 𐄂 1 .	. . . . .	. . . 1 .	. 1 . 6 .

slow down from 160 bpm to 90 bpm

Delay the last note as if it were the final gong of a traditional gending.



# Lholands

arranged by Larry Polansky

for gender, voice(s), and gamelan instruments

1990-1991

Hanover NH

performed and recorded at a Town Hall Concert in Sheffield, Vermont

with Jody Diamond, voice

## Balungan and gender cengkok

(arr. L. Polansky, 1991)

*for gender, voice(s), kenong, slenthem, gong*

6        3        2        1 )

I. 1/2 tum 3    1/2 kk1

II. kk1

III. DB1 or tum5 kpy.

6        3        5        1 )

1/2 tum3        1/2 kk1

kk1

DB1 or tum5 kpy

6        3        2        3 )

I. tum3

II. kk3 (high) or DK3

III. Putut semedi

1        1        6        6

gt1

gt6

gt1

gt6

gt1

gt6

2 )    6        5        ( 3 )

I. 1/2 jk6        tum3

II. tum3

III. tum3

(Note: cengkok names are from my book on beginning gender playing, "Lessons with Sukamso," available from the American Gamelan Institute Library at [www.gamelan.org](http://www.gamelan.org).)

<b>LESSONS WITH SUKAMSO</b> transcriptions by Larry Polansky
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## **Gender introduction: mbalung**

1. There was a mighty ship, and she sailed upon the sea  
And she went by the name, of the Golden Vanity  
And she feared she would be taken, by the spanish enemy  
And they'd sink her in the lowlands, in the lowlands  
They'd sink her in the lowlands, low

**gender mbalung freely**

**all other instruments tacet**

2. Then up jumped the cabin boy, and boldly up spake he  
And said to the captain, what will you give to me  
If I swim alongside, the spanish enemy  
And sink her in the lowlands, in the lowlands  
And sink her in the lowlands, low.

**gender: irama tanggung**

**add slenthem**

3. He said I will give you silver, and I will give you gold  
And my fair young daughter, will be yours to hold  
If you swim alongside, the spanish enemy  
And you sink her in the lowlands,...

**gender: irama dados**

**slenthem, slight variations**

**add gong and kenong**

4. Well up jumped the cabinboy, and overboard went he  
And he swam alongside, the spanish enemy  
and with his pick and auger, he made him(self) holes three  
And he sank her in the lowlands, ...

**gender: irama dados w/variations**

**full gamelan**

**add voices on final lines**



**5. gender solo, wilet, one complete verse... (w/all other instruments)**

6. Well captain, oh captain, please take me back on board

**gender: irama wilet**

For I have been just as good as my word

**(all other instruments in till last verse)**

and I swam alongside, that spanish enemy

And I sank her in the lowlands,...

7. Well this said the captain, to that brave cabinboy

**gender: irama wilet**

Oh never, oh never, will I take you back on board

**gender panerus enters**

And you and my daughter, never will that be

For you'll stay here in the lowlands,...

8. Well up spake the cabinboy, and captain, said he

**gender: irama wilet**

If I didn't love your daughter, just like the enemy

I'd take my pick and auger, and captain you would see

That I'd sink you in the lowlands,...

9. But he turned his back on them, and swam away did he

**gender: mbalung**

He swam far away, from the Golden Vanity

**all other instruments tacet,**

And he sunk himself down, to the bottom of the sea

**except for final gong...**

And he drowned in the lowlands,...

The following is a transcription of the first verse of *Lholands*. As in a traditional sea shanty, the specific rhythms may be adjusted for each verse while following the overall contour of the melody. The singer may also take some liberty with syncopations.

. 6 . 3 . 2 . <sup>^</sup>1 . 6 . 3 . 5 . <sup>^</sup>1  
 . 1 1 6 . 66 5 3 . 1 1 2 . 33 2 1 . 1 3 6 . 6 . 53 . 3 . 35 5 5 2 1  
 Oh there was a mighty ship, and she sailed upon the sea, And she went by the name of the Golden Va-ni-ty,  
 . 6 . 3 . 2 . <sup>^</sup>3 . 1 . 1 . 6 . 6  
 . 1 3 6 . 66 5 31 . . 112 3 3 5 3 . 6 6 1 11 . 2 1 . . . 6 . 3 5 6  
 And she feared she would be taken by the Spanish e-ne-my, And they'd sink her in the low-lands, in the low-  
 . <sup>^</sup>2 . 6 . 5 . (3)  
 . 5 3 7 . <sup>^</sup>1 . 6 6 653 5 . 6 . 3  
 lands, They'd sink her in the low lands, low.

For some slendro gamelan, this tune might be in F# major. The staff notation below is presented in F Major for ease of reading, and does not imply any specific pitches.

Oh there was a migh - ty ship, and she sailed u - pon the sea, And she went by the

name of the Gol - den Va - ni - ty, And she feared she would be

ta ken\_\_ by the Spa - nish e - ne - my, And they'd sink her in\_\_ the low -

- lands, in the low\_\_\_\_\_ lands, They'd sink her in\_\_ the low - lands, low.

## PROFILE

# Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan: Celebrating 40 Years

*Perseverance furthers. Perhaps that is the essential character of living artists—people who do what they do because they can't not. Keeping a gamelan group going for forty years—with an unwavering clarity of purpose, an unbroken commitment to the quality of the music and the skill of the musicians, and a deep respect and connection to the source and to its flowering—is an awesome accomplishment. Congratulations, Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan! —jody diamond*

### Background

Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan is an ensemble of eight highly skilled Canadian musicians who perform and record using an assortment of bronze and wooden instruments from Indonesia. Collectively these instruments are known as a gamelan—a traditional instrumental ensemble that plays an important role in Indonesian culture.

Formed in 1983 and based in Toronto, Canada, Evergreen Club is a unique performing ensemble dedicated to the development and expansion of its repertoire through the commissioning of new works from Canadian and international composers, as well as to presenting new interpretations of traditional and contemporary Indonesian pieces.

*ECCG wishes to thank the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia in Toronto for co-presenting this concert, part of a legacy of four decades of Indonesian-Canadian musical partnership.*

### Celebrating Canadian Gamelan @ 40

co-presented by  
Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan  
& the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia

with guests  
Maxine Heppner dancers, Jennifer Moore (voice),  
Andrew Downing (cello), Russell Hartenberger (shakers),  
Robert W. Stevenson (bass clarinet)

at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia  
129 Jarvis St., Toronto  
7 p.m., Saturday, October 5, 2024

### Concert Program

*North of Java* (1983; rev. 2024) Andrew Timar  
*The Greenhouse Revisited* (2009) Jon Siddall  
*Gamelan Solo* (2000) Mark Duggan, music &  
*Nine Bronze Pieces* (2002) Maxine Heppner, choreography  
*Translating Grace* (2005) Bill Parsons  
*Islands of Silence* (1994) John Wyre  
*Kalangang* (1986) Nano S. (Suratno)

### Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan musicians

Yang Chen, Christopher Hull (Assoc. Artistic Director),  
Mark Duggan, Etienne Levesque, Blair Mackay (Artistic  
Director), Bill Parsons, Jake Parker Scott, Jonny Smith,  
Andrew Timar, Naoko Tsujita



*Bill Parsons (kacapi), Blair Mackay (artistic director), Daniel Morphy, Andrew Timar (suling), Mark Duggan (standing), Adam Campbell, Jonny Smith, Nathan Petitpas.*



### From the Founder

There's the strength of an idea and then there's the strength of conviction. Something worthwhile starts with an idea but thrives with conviction. Over forty years ago I had the idea to start an ensemble devoted primarily to contemporary music written for gamelan. The inspiration for this idea began with American maverick composer Lou Harrison at Mills College. Lou introduced me to gamelan in his class, but more than that he encouraged me to write for gamelan.

When it came time to graduate and leave Mills, I realized I could not live without gamelan and so with the help of Lou, Sundanese ethnomusicologist Enoch Atmadibrata, and crucially that of my father, I acquired my own gamelan.

Then there's the conviction. If you'd told me at its inception that the Evergreen Club would still be a going concern forty years later, well, it never even crossed my mind. There was no timeline, just "do it." Looking back, it's impressive to see what the ensemble has done, and much of it accomplished since I left the group. Since then, Andrew Timar and then Blair Mackay in turn have led the ensemble with passion and a devotion to the creation and performance of wonderful music. The word that comes to mind is legacy. It's a rich legacy of performances, tours, recordings and a large library of commissioned works. A key part of that success has been the conviction held by members of the ensemble over the years all while bringing incredible talent to the music. In the early years of the ensemble when members left, I often replaced them with whoever was the hottest University of Toronto percussion student of Russell Hartenberger. Being a guitarist, it didn't take long till I felt like one of the weakest players in the group! These percussionists were smoking good. I had to pull up my socks and I learned a lot from them. Ever since, the quality of musicianship has been a hallmark of this ensemble.

Along the way, the support of the Indonesian government has been a strength for the Evergreen Club. In many ways the Toronto Consulate and Ottawa Embassy in particular have encouraged the ensemble as they've watched a beautiful element of Indonesian culture take root in Canada and grow into something that never loses sight of its origins while becoming something new.

Not insignificant is the support Evergreen Club has received right from its inception from various levels of Canadian arts funders like the Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Art Council.

Here we are, forty years later. There are many new faces in the ensemble bringing their perspective as they play alongside the most experienced gamelan musicians in Canada. It's beautiful to witness that mingling of the old and new, the transition to the future. One of the newer faces is Christopher Hull. Chris will be the next artistic director of the Evergreen Club. One senses his conviction. Who knows where his spark of imagination will lead the group next?

—Jon Siddall, ECCG Founding Artistic Director

### From the Artistic Director

32 years ago, I took on the role of artistic director and general manager of Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan (ECCG). Before then I was a performer, composer, and producer of predominantly alternative rock jazz and pop music, as well as being an active free-lance percussionist, playing in a wide variety of contexts. My backstory completely shaped how I came to say "yes" and embrace the idea of directing a gamelan. Most importantly, any possible scenario for "yes" demanded an artistically strong approach, and something very not-for-profit in every sense of that idea. It needed to be just about the art. It still is.

What a great time we had, all in the wonderful name of art! The idea was to build a body of work that would attempt to bring or move the hybridity inherent in so much contemporary art and music, into some kind of authenticity. Achieving this goal required great amounts of time and tenacity on the part of many talented people, all of whom deserve unreserved thanks.

The ECCG artistic mandate is about artists (composers, choreographers, filmmakers and performers) finding their voice through the sonic landscape of the ECCG instruments, and (perhaps more importantly) embracing to the fullest hybridity in art. Every performer and artist who has worked with ECCG has been affected and influenced by this artistic mandate.

The group was fortunate throughout its long history to be able to maintain a core set of very gifted musicians for many consecutive years. This was achieved through good management, great music, great musicians and some good luck. This scenario, in concert with what in retrospect was a robust cultural funding environment, enabled the group to develop many long-term projects, some requiring several levels of complex national and international collaboration and management.

The result of this fortunate environment was realized in ECCG's 10 critically acclaimed self-produced CDs, and collaborations with artists and arts organizations. We created some 200 new works for gamelan, many tours and projects involving some of Canada's finest instrumentalists, singers, composers, film makers, dancers, choreographers and more.

The works you are hearing tonight are only a small representation of ECCG's journey under my directorship—all works that represent pivotal eras in the ECCG legacy. Together, they represent an homage to the composers within the ensemble, beginning with the group's founder and three of the group's longest standing members. Enjoy.

—Blair Mackay, ECCG Artistic Director

[Evergreen website](#)

[Evergreen on Bandcamp](#)

[Evergreen YouTube channel](#)



