

## Gamelan in Japan

by Barbara Benary and Tomoko Deguchi

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### Introduction

Several years ago we began our informal exploration of the phenomenon of Indonesian gamelan music in Japan. There are, we found, over 50 gamelan groups and "too many to be counted" Indonesian dance groups/schools in the country, which is smaller than California state and is a little bigger than Germany. One can see at least one or two performances of Indonesian performing arts in Tokyo every weekend, by musicians and dancers who are not Indonesian, but Japanese.

In April 2005 we took a two-week tour of Japan, following the trail of the Gamelan map roughed out by our prior correspondence to initiate the AGI Gamelan Directory Japan. What a wonderful idea it would be, we thought, to follow the trail and meet as many of these groups, founders and teachers as we could. In the following essays and interviews we hope to provide snapshots of some of the many enthusiastic ensembles and performers, and their stories of how they came to dedicate themselves to gamelan music.

It was, of course an impossible undertaking to be comprehensive within the limited time frame to meet everyone. Our two weeks of introductory exploration, and Ms. Deguchi's follow-up visit a year later, were of necessity limited to the greater Osaka area in Kansai, and Tokyo in Kanto. But gamelan players are a fraternal community and do a good bit of traveling themselves to teach, take classes and perform. Thus we were very fortunate to be able to meet musicians who often lived far beyond the narrow trail of our travel route, including one who we were able to interview later in New York.

We sincerely thank them and all the players who invited us to listen and offered their experience in both words and sounds. There are so many more groups and leaders we would have loved to meet; our apologies that our schedules did not coincide. Perhaps we will be able to follow up and expand this project some time in the future on a grander scale with grander funding, longer visa and a railway pass.

For a start, our sincere thanks to Akiko Kawaguchi for contributing her essay, taken from her thesis, which gives a good overview of this relatively recent historical event, the flowering of gamelan music in Japan. This is a good place to begin.

— Barbara Benary and Tomoko Deguchi

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*This entire section on gamelan in Japan was researched by Benary and Deguchi. Unless indicated otherwise, all writing and photographs are by these authors.*

# An Overview of the Introduction of Gamelan in Japan

by Akiko Kawaguchi

*Condensed from the article "Gamelan Beyond Cultural Boundaries" published in Otyanomizu Ongaku Ronsyu (research articles and notes), Journal of the Musicological Society of Ochanomizu University, Vol. 4. Heisei 14 April, 2002.*

In the fall of 1999, the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, hosted a special exhibition, "Ethnic Cultures Abroad: People Moving, Culture Mixing." The exhibition included a display on the history of gamelan dissemination in Japan. The following essay draws upon supplementary explanations by the exhibit coordinator Shota Fukuoka, as well as interviews with some Japanese gamelan groups.

The first reported instance of gamelan in Japan is found in 1940. A set of instruments were given as a gift to Ichizo Kobayashi, who was then Minister of Commerce and Industries, during his visit to Java. Kobayashi also owned the Takarazuka Revue Troupe and some of the instruments ended up being used intermittently by that group for theater plays such as *Onnabansen* (1941) and *Dancers of Java* (premiered in 1952, replayed in 1982 and with recorded music in 2004).

In the 1960s Mantle Hood proposed his "challenge of bi-musicality" in ethnomusicology education. This is the concept that through performance study ethnomusicologists should become as fluent in the music culture they are studying as in the one of their birth. When it reached Japan in the 1970s, a few local universities were encouraged to initiate programs in gamelan studies by purchasing instruments.

Professor Fumio Koizumi (1927–1983) of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music is regarded as the inaugurator of gamelan studies in Japan. Koizumi had experienced Javanese gamelan at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut while teaching Japanese music as a visiting Associate Professor from 1967 to 1968. In the wake of the gamelan experience at Wesleyan he flew to Indonesia, purchased Central Javanese gamelan instruments (slendro) in Java in 1973, and launched the gamelan studies group at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1974. A couple of years later, Koizumi invited Saptana, a young player from Java, to lecture as an instructor of Surakarta style and performing techniques at the University, where he remained for five years between 1979 and 1984. [This group evolved into Lambang Sari, one of the first and most active performing gamelan groups in Japan.]

Meanwhile, Balinese gamelan was introduced at Kunitachi College of Music in Tokyo by Professor Gen'ichi

Tsuge, who had also taught at Wesleyan University for some time. This led to an increased amount of exchange of music students between Indonesia and Kunitachi College of Music, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and some other universities.

Osaka University should also be mentioned as a prominent center of gamelan activities. The program at Osaka University grew out of a month long field work project in Yogyakarta in 1977 led by professors from several departments and colleges, including Ko Tanimura, Usaburo Mabuchi, Osamu Yamaguchi and also several master's degree students including Shin Nakagawa and Fumi Tamura, who each subsequently became influential in gamelan in Japan. Subsequent to the field work, the University's Lab of Musicology released a recording, "Javanese Gamelan: Sonic Batik of Yogyakarta" (1978). The Javanese gamelan group Dharma Budaya was formed soon after (1979) at the University. Professor Shin Nakagawa especially encouraged broadening the gamelan activity field by developing new creations such as collaboration with local composers. [New compositions by Nakamura and several others were performed at Expo '86 during the group's tour to Vancouver.]

In the time of the late '80s in Tokyo, many new opportunities arose for more people to approach gamelan music without the intermediary function of universities. These included workshops at National Children's Castle in 1985, and at Otokoba Haneda, which was founded by Fumi Tamura in 1987. Then in the 1990s, lectures and activities began to be offered at other universities which were not specialized in music or performing arts. These took the form of accrediting classes and extracurricular activities. Gamelan study was also offered to non-registered students through the Open College system at Tokyo College of Music, Joetsu University of Education (Niigata Prefecture), and other places. Non-university-affiliated groups also broadened the horizons of their activities by promoting gamelan at recitals, Asian-related events, primary and junior high school concerts and workshops. The new situation attracted the involvement of additional new gamelan players.

Indeed, the process of disseminating gamelan practice in Japan was begun mainly by music major students and graduates with institutional background. The movement then spread beyond the institutional boundaries. The number of gamelan players who receive instruction outside of a university is still growing. In the USA, the mode of study is frequently to host native instructors

from Indonesia. By comparison, Japan has only one case of inviting a native instructor for a long term residency; Saptana, at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. As a result, local players tend to deepen and develop their studies and technique by exchanging knowledge among themselves.

In regard to sponsorship in the USA and other countries besides Indonesia, a large proportion of gamelan groups are owned and sponsored by universities, and others by the Indonesian embassy and consulates or private schools, but in Japan this sponsored percentage is smaller. Unaffiliated groups are supported at the group members' personal expense, as is usually the case with unaffiliated groups in other countries.

With neither institutional sponsorship nor native instructors, Japanese gamelan musicians need to find other ways to upgrade their performance skills. A popular way is to take time off from work, fly to Indonesia, and receive intensive instruction in the gamelan's place of origin. They can then contribute to their group by playing the role of mediator, bringing new knowledge or techniques to their group and passing it on to the other members. This unique instruction-relay system promotes development of a group's performance level.

Some groups also organize group tours for intensive lessons in Indonesia. This offers the members a greater learning experience than individuals could get from one-on-one lessons, and also encourages them to deepen understanding of the culture from which the music came. Such learning tours have been organized by National Children's Castle, Tokyo College of Music, and others. Owing to the difficulties of implementing such study tours annually, since 1999 more groups have been organizing the same type of group lessons at home, inviting guest instructors from Indonesia for short residencies of one week to a couple of months during off school seasons. Various matters, however, have to be solved, such as the cost, the process of selecting instructors and much more. The musical and personal interactions between Indonesia and Japan are still at a beginning level. ■

## References

National Museum of Ethnology, founded for Osaka Expo in 1972. <http://www.minpaku.ac.jp/english/>  
 Takarazuka. <http://kageki.hankyu.co.jp/english/>  
 Fumio Koizumi. <http://www.geidai.ac.jp/labs/koizumi>

# Portraits

## First Gamelan Founders

**Fumio Koizumi** an important figure in the musical history of many of the current generation of gamelan players in Japan. He founded the first Javanese gamelan group in the country at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. His radio broadcasts of world music introduced many young musicians to the music of Bali and Japan.

**Gen'ichi Tsuge** is the ethnomusicologist who first fostered the study of Balinese gamelan music performance at Kunitachi College. He also taught for 25 years in the musicology department of Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. In addition to his involvement with Balinese music, Tsuge has published works on the traditional musics of Japan (Ongaku) and of Iran.

## Current leaders and communicators

*We were able to meet several influential gamelan people during our two-week tour of Gamelan Japan. More detailed information on their groups is in the Gamelan Directory of Japan at <http://www.gamelan.org> under Directories. —BB*

**Ako Mashino** leads an ensemble in Tokyo called **Padma**<sup>1</sup>, and teaches gender wayang at her parents' house in Kyodo. This group of ten regular students call themselves **Banjar Kyodo** and also take classes at Otokoba Haneda, where Ako, as one of the school's team of instructors, also teaches other groups.

**Akiko Kawaguchi** is a scholar, performer, teacher and group leader specializing in Sundanese gamelan. She first trained in piano, which she still plays, and koto, from which she switched over to *kecap*. Her ensemble **PARAGUNA**<sup>2</sup> shares some players with the Javanese gamelan **Lambang Sari**, as well as sharing their studio space. Akiko currently teaches high school, and has been at work for some years at assembling a world music "atlas" which will be a world music textbook for high school level. She has produced two recordings of gamelan *degung* music [from West Java]. They are recorded in Indonesia and distributed in Japan with extensive translations and notes.

**Emi Kobayashi** directs the Balinese gamelan group *Gita Kencana*<sup>3</sup> in Osaka city. Her musical career began with piano, which she studied until her college years at Osaka College of Music. There she became interested in world music and was introduced to Balinese gamelan first through a workshop performance at the college, and later as a member of a local performing group **Jegog Suar Agung**. She studied at ISI [National Arts Institute] in Denpasar for some years subsequently, then purchased her own set of instruments and brought them home to Osaka, where they are now

in use for teaching workshops as well as performances, including collaborations with traditional Japanese dance.

**Tetsuro Koyano** performs Balinese dance and directs the Tokyo-based gamelan and dance group **Sanggar Urotsutenoyako**.<sup>4</sup> The group has toured in Bali and been involved in cinematic productions. Koyano also collaborates in a number of cross-cultural theatre projects.

**Koichi Minagawa** is a specialist in Balinese music and the author of several important books on the subject in Japanese. He has taught both general undergraduates and music specialists at several universities, and currently teaches at Kanda University and Otokoba Haneda. He also leads the ensemble **Sidha Karya**, which plays Balinese *kebyar*, *semar pegulingan*, *gender wayang* and *balaganjur* music.

**Shin Nakagawa** has led, taught, and promoted Javanese and new music gamelan activities in the greater Osaka area for the past several decades. He was for many years director of gamelan **Dharma Budaya**. Currently, he directs the Javanese gamelan **Margasari**<sup>5</sup> located in the country border area between Osaka, Kyoto and Nara. He also leads a number of other ensembles, including **Tirtha Kencana** in Shigaku prefecture north of Osaka and **Fuigo Biyoro Gakudan** in Kitana (Kobe City).

**Shin Sakuma**, together with his Javanese wife **Wiyantari**, performs and teaches central Javanese dance styles. Though based in the Osaka area near gamelan **Marga Sari** and **Dharma Budaya**, the two also perform regularly in Tokyo.

**Motoko Sakurado** directs several Balinese gamelan groups in Yokohama, teaches at Otokoba Haneda, and performs with **Sekar Djepun** and some of the other Tokyo gamelan groups.

**Fumi Tamura** is a founder and leader of numerous Javanese gamelan and dance groups in the Tokyo area. She was an original member of Koizumi's gamelan group at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (from 1974), which evolved into the current group **Lambang Sari**<sup>6</sup>. She founded and organized the gamelan programs at both **Kodomonoshiro**<sup>7</sup> (National Children's Castle) and Otokoba Haneda<sup>8</sup>. She also organizes and directs two Tokyo-based independent groups: **Gamelan Kartika**<sup>9</sup> ("Star") and the associated dance group **Kusuma** ("Flower"). On top of all these activities, she is on the faculty at Chikushi Jogakuen University in Fukuoka prefecture on Kyushu Island, where she leads one gamelan group at the University and coaches a second group at the nearby Kyushu National Museum.

**Makoto Torii** is a gamelan musician whose involvement dates back to his youth when he visited Bali with his step-father, ethnomusicologist Gen'ichi Tsuge. He has since played for many years with different gamelan groups around Tokyo. Today he is an audio and video recording

producer for Japan Victor Foundation for Promotion of Traditional Music. He maintains an important website, **Bali Gamelan Club**,<sup>10</sup> which acts as an online communication center for the various gamelan groups in Japan.

**Teruo Yamasaki** directs gamelan **Dharma Budaya**, based at Osaka University, in a repertoire of both traditional and new music. He is a musicologist and composer as well as teacher. A number of his works for gamelan may be found on Dharma Budaya's recent CD. ■

## Notes

1. <http://www.geocities.jp/genderpadma/>
2. <http://www.geocities.co.jp/MusicStarPercussion/4505/>
3. <http://sound.jp/gitakencana/index.html>
4. <http://megamel.daa.jp/>
5. <http://www.margasari.com>
6. <http://www.lambang Sari.com/>
7. <http://www.kodomo-shiro.or.jp/>
8. <http://sound.jp/otokoba/>
9. <http://sound.jp/kartika>
10. <http://www.kt.rim.or.jp/~maktori/gamelan/>



# The Road to Gamelan: Fumi Tamura



*From Japan to gamelan: how have so many musicians gotten there? Many recurring themes appear in the stories we were told by Japanese gamelan leaders. Fumi Tamura's own story encompasses quite a few. —BB*

Tamura first heard gamelan in a radio broadcast of Balinese music when she was a high school student about 15 years old. She had been a piano student since she was 5. Now she was studying Schumann and began to feel frustrated by the lack of cultural explanation. "I can't understand what this piece wants to explain. What is its culture? At that time music education in education in Japan included nothing about culture, only how to play." She played waltz and mazurka. "My teacher said, 'your waltz is too heavy. You should play more lightly.' But how should I know how to play if I had never danced a waltz?"

At that time, Tamura explains, Japan denied its own culture. Japanese music was said to be for drunks and old people. It was not taught in the university. Music meant Western music. Tamura qualified to enter a high school for western music education in Japan, and later the Tokyo National University for Fine Arts and Music.

In Koizumi's ethnomusicology program she heard many kinds of music and learned how many more there were besides Western, including Javanese gamelan. "I found out that music is an expression of the universe and life. I can hear that feeling from gamelan... I got the answer. So I decided to study ethnomusicology with him." Tamura entered the university in 1971, just after Koizumi's return from Wesleyan. He had brought back a small slendro set from Java; for two years the student group met to rehearse gamelan at his house and eat dinner.

Koizumi knew only a few gending and didn't know the difficult instruments, so Tamura applied to the ASEA

[American Society for Eastern Arts] program offered in Seattle in 1973. Director Bob Brown replied that she had a scholarship for tuition to attend (with travel at her own expense). At the time she had begun studying mridangam, taught by a student of Koizumi's. At the Seattle program she continued studying mridangam with Ranganathan as well as gamelan with Pak Cokro [K.P.H. Nata Supraja], and various other Asian arts offered at the program. She felt lucky and happy to be part of the program, but returned to Japan at the end of the summer. At home she found that Koizumi had bought a big, beautiful gamelan set for the University.

"I wanted to know more about the atmosphere and culture ... so I went to Java in 1974. At the time it was very difficult to get permission from the parents." (She was 24.) "Japanese people did not understand Asian countries... So I worked at a saké place, a bar, after school every day from 5 to 10 o'clock." Her parents perhaps thought she was doing extra studying. When she had enough money, she bought her ticket and got her visa, then asked her father's permission, at which point he couldn't refuse her. The visa was for only 5 weeks. She ended up staying 10 months. First she went to Jogja hoping to continue study with Pak Cokro. She had not yet studied Indonesian, but after three months began to learn. Eventually she would learn Javanese as well.

Upon her return to the University in 1974 she began teaching Koizumi's class, becoming in effect the first qualified Japanese teacher of Javanese music. She gave the group the name Lambang Sari. She was not satisfied and wanted to return for further studies. On her next trip to Java she stayed for three years.

She has been occupied ever since, introducing Javanese music, dance, and culture in Japan. She sees her role as making a bridge which is not just musical, but cultural as well. Part of this bridge activity is also made possible by Saptono, her husband, who is on the faculty of ISI in Jogjakarta. On his visits to Japan he is often invited for residencies and guest teaching at various institutions. At one point Tamura invited a group of 44 Javanese musicians to perform and record in Tokyo, touring under the name of Saptobudoyo and directed by Saptono. This first hand experience with Javanese performers serves to both introduce the culture and provide the depth that would be otherwise lacking for Japanese gamelan students and groups.

Her Tokyo-based ensemble Kartika focuses primarily on traditional repertoire. She doesn't like to ask people to write new pieces for gamelan who don't yet understand Javanese music, although the repertoire and performances have included some new pieces, either by Kusapatsuro, a composer in the group, or by Saptono. Her educational projects in Tokyo are described in our article "Tokyo Gamelan Centers." ▀

# Tokyo Gamelan Centers

*Tokyo is a major center for just about everything in Japan, so it is not too surprising that it is a center for gamelan activity as well. In addition to the numerous music and dance ensembles, the city is home to two major centers for gamelan study. We were fortunate to visit these two centers during our spring 2005 visit: Otokoba Haneda, which provides all manner of gamelan instruction for adults, and Children's Castle, providing classes for youngsters.—BB*

## Otokoba Haneda

*Otokoba translates roughly as "Sound Factory." At the time of our visit it was located in the Haneda district of Tokyo—a formerly industrial area near a domestic airport of the same name. The area was slowly turning residential, and might be said to resemble New York's Soho or Tribeca. Recently the center has grown and divided into two locations: the Javanese center in the Chiyoda-ku district and the Balinese in the Ota-ku district. The center was founded in 1987 by Fumi Tamura in order to give the opportunity for gamelan study to more people outside the university system, and also to popularize music and dance in Japan.*

*Leaving our shoes at the door we enter a large, shoebox-shaped room. Built-in shelves and racks adorn the long walls of the room. On them live the many instruments: Balinese to the right, Javanese to the left. The larger gongs of the Javanese set occupy the floor space in the back. The center space is set up for different music and dance classes as needed. A small kitchen and library complete the homey feeling. Tea and*

*snacks are served before, after, or in between classes.*

*Classes in traditional music and dance are offered at all levels by a rotating staff of perhaps a dozen Japanese instructors. Several individual independent groups in the greater Tokyo area also make use of the space to rehearse. The instructors and advanced students perform in the two resident ensembles: the Balinese group Sari Mekar, and the Cirebon Javanese group Mega Mendung. The overall operation of the activities is overseen by the current administrator, Yukie Miyamoto, who also organizes teaching tours for the Otokoba instructors in distant prefectures.*

*Membership in gamelan in Tokyo, we are told, is a flexible affair. The advanced players and teachers often play in many different groups. Members of Sekar Djepun, for example, which has its own rehearsal space a few blocks away from Otokoba, often stop in to participate in as well as lead other classes. The leadership depends on the speciality of the repertoire, which at Otokoba embraces Central Javanese *karawitan*, Cirebon style, Balinese *Semar Pegulingan* and *Saih Pitu*, as well as *Angklung* and *Kebyar*. By visiting Otokoba three times in the week of our visit, we were able to meet quite a number of the major players in the greater Tokyo gamelan scene, many of whom drop in on each other's classes. Moto Sakurada for example, leads two groups in Kanagawa. Ako Mashina, a specialist in gender wayang, teaches both here and at her home studio.*



*Girls playing bonang. Wheels on the legs make moving easy.*





And Koichi Minagawa, an educator and author of several important books in Japanese about Balinese music, also came to teach an advanced class.

In addition to the Japanese instructors, teachers from Indonesia are always welcome on their visits, and special classes are organized to take advantage of their presence. One such visit occurred in 1999 when Saptono, from ISI in Jogjakarta, brought a group of Javanese musicians to Tokyo under the touring name of Saptobudoyo. Otokoba Haneda sponsored a recording venture (as well as the tour) which resulted in two CDs of traditional repertoire being produced for distribution in Japan. (See final bibliography and discography.)

Instrumental in this tour was Fumi Tamura, who was also the visionary organizer behind both Otokoba Haneda and Children's Castle. Ms. Tamura served as the first director of Otokoba for many years. She was succeeded by Professor Koichi Minagawa, who had gone on to take a position at Kanda University. Ms. Tamura is another far-commuting instructor who currently travels by plane from her home in Tokyo to teach gamelan at in Chikushi Jogakuen University in Kyushu.

### Children's Castle: Kodomo No Shiro

In 1985, a beautiful modern building was erected by the Foundation for Child Well Being in the Shibuya area of Tokyo to commemorate the International Year of the Child (1979). This is known as *Kodomo No Shiro*, or "National Children's Castle."<sup>1</sup> It is an artistic, recreational, and athletic center for children, offering extracurricular activities for the busy lives of Tokyo schoolchildren, as well as being a tourist attraction.

Part of the vision of program director Shigeki Iida was to include music activities for traditional Japanese music (*hogaku*) and representative music from elsewhere in Asia. Fumiko Torii founded a children's gamelan program here with a grant that enabled her to purchase both a full Central Javanese gamelan and a Balinese Gamelan Angklung. The Javanese instruments share a multipurpose room, and are conveniently fitted with wheels—small and large, even the gong stand—for easy clearing of the floor space when shamisen classes or dance classes take place.

The Sunday class we observed had an instructional portion for music and also one for dance. Ms. Tamura, the Executive Supervisor, is accomplished at both, and is assisted by a staff of instructors including Minako Sasaki, Tatsuro Fukuzawa, Taro Natori, Tamio Takemoto and Natsumi Sasoh. Several instructors take part in each class and circulate, assisting students, or leading from within on particular instruments. The groups overlapped in age span; we saw some very small children perform very impressive elaborating parts on bonang side-by-side with teenagers.

One aspect of gamelan playing that Ms. Tamura likes to share with the students is appreciation of the instruments as sound vibrations sources. A portion of the class we visited was devoted to hearing gong vibrations and describing how they feel in parts of one's body.

On another occasion we saw a video documentation of a group of developmentally disabled children who were brought in on a special visit to Children's Castle. In the class, as seen on video, the children hear, touch and feel the vibrations of the instruments, then relax while the musicians play for them. Some were not physically able to play them, but could react favorably to the physical proximity of the vibrations. This group is only brought in a couple of times a year, but Ms. Tamura would like to see more opportunities, and feels that gamelan music is very good for them.

A larger scale endeavor of bringing gamelan to challenged students has been undertaken by Shin Nakagawa through his program in Nara at Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation, including the recent production "Here We Go, Thomas" described in Vincent McDermott's article on his visit to Gamelan Marga Sari. ■

### Notes

1. <http://www.kodomonono-shiro.or.jp>

# Gamelan in Tiny Spaces: Emi Kobayashi and Gita Kencana

"It is really hard to keep gamelan instruments and also to play such loud music in the packed city of Japan. It would have been less difficult to have a rehearsal place outside of the city. But I also needed a convenient location for everyone to come. At first, I kept all the instruments in my residential apartment room in town where I still live now. You can imagine how small apartment rooms could be in Japan.

"When I was asleep and turned my shoulder, I often hit my arm on the jegogan which stood by my bed. During rehearsing with my group members, I had no place to be seated to play kendang, and had to keep playing in a standing position. Now, my group is bigger and has an actual rehearsal place, 'Studio Eggs,' in the heart of Osaka. Originally, the space was not designed as a music studio and is a part of an office building which faces a busy road. We are permitted to play in the studio until 9 p.m., but still, our efforts are continuously required to make things possible and easy. For example, in order to carry reyong in narrow stairways or to play it in a small space, we divide it in two separate parts and cover the cut edges with detachable heads. Instead of a visitor's bell at our studio door, we use a blinking light which informs us of visitors' arrival during rehearsal. "

Ms. Kobayashi's trials in finding an adequate home for instruments and ensemble is very typical of city-based independent ensembles. After leaving the university, Gamelan Lambang Sari in Tokyo eventually found their best studio space in an apartment over a bar, where their noise goes unnoticed. And little "Studio Eggs" in Osaka still relies a good bit on heavy soundproofing, which coincidentally includes a padding of egg cartons along the ceiling. Nor is Ms. Kobayashi the only musician to describe sharing a small living space with a crowd of instruments.

The kebyar instruments of *Gita Kencana* ("Golden Tones") were custom built in Bali with portability factors in mind. Kobayashi brought them back from Bali in order to be able to continue her passion after years of study of Balinese music, both in Osaka and Bali. "I spent most of my money on the instruments there and hardly afforded to go back home."

Emi Kobayashi's road to Bali began, like Fumi Tamura's, with piano, from age three up through college at Osaka College of Music. Then "the second non-western culture boom started. I was also very interested in the different types of music from the other countries. At that same time, the college purchased a Balinese gamelan to display in the music instrument museum of the college.



*Emi Kobayashi playing reyong at Studio Eggs.*

To celebrate the new display, the college organized a gamelan workshop and invited a Balinese instructor. (Shin Nakagawa played there and also taught me Balinese gamelan back then.) There was also a gamelan practicing club in this area, *Jegog Suar Agung*, conducted by I Ketut Suwentra from Suara Agung Foundation in Jembrana. After my graduation, I continued practicing gamelan in the club and also occasionally flew to Bali on vacation in order to get instructed. In order to deepen the study, I became Dharmasiswa with a scholarship from the Indonesia government in 1991 and studied at ISI in Denpasar until 1993. Back in Japan, the set of gamelan was still regarded only as a display in the college museum, and the gamelan club had already been dismissed. I desired more chances to continue the music."

Thus the purchase of the instruments and the founding of the ensemble. "Our way of maintaining our group activities is by membership fees, and also income from three types of weekly workshops. My group is independent, without continuous sponsorships and financial supports from any organizations. We are currently twelve regular members, and no Indonesian instructors. In order to deepen our performance techniques, we have shared some Indonesian instructors with another independent group of Tokyo, *Urotsutenoyako*, which frequently invites musicians, dancers and composers from Bali [see Koyano interview]. We share some of their travel expenses. And occasionally we have a chance to get instructed by Balinese musicians who are visitors or temporary residents in our area."



Gita Kencana has performed at concert halls, often with the dance ensemble Puspa Kencana. It has also ventured into collaborating with traditional Japanese religious arts. One collaboration was with Shinmyo chant of Shingon-shu Buddhist monks. Another took place at a Shinto temple.

It is a great honor for Japanese to contribute their music and dance to temples or shrines. Some of these allow Indonesian performing arts for their gods as well, even though the performers may not be their believers. Gamelan in temples and shrines is not popular yet, but is sometimes arranged, subject to the place's regulations and the owner's understanding.

"One of the temple performances was the collaboration with a Nihon Buyo dancer at a Noh stage inside a Shinto temple." This dancer often visited Peliatan, and was very much interested in his own creation based on the traditional style, with Balinese music. "Without the Nihon-buyo dancer's cooperation, it would have been impossible to go through all the strict regulations" which included no bare feet on the

stage, no non-designated instruments for use, etc. The place was outdoors inside the temple. In the video of the performance you can hear the noise of an airplane flying above the place. "I composed the pieces for the main parts, which were deeply related to transitions of four beautiful seasons in Japan. Additionally, we also performed *Legong*, *Arsa Wijaya*, *Cendrawasih* and some more."

Several other gamelan groups have described contributing performances to temples. *Kartika* (Javanese in Tokyo) and *Otokoba Haneda* (Tokyo) have contributed *Srimpi*, *Gambirsawit* and other dances to Seijo-temple, where they performed on a *Tatami* surrounded by paper sliding doors. You can see pictures of *Kartika*'s HP (as long as it posts them) at <http://sound.jp/kartika/> (in the photo album; click *Srimpi Gambirsawit*).

*Dharma Budaya* of Osaka has also performed in the garden of World Heritage's registered Buddhist temples in Nara. They began their performance in the darkness of sunset, among thousands of candles in a huge garden by *Daibutsu-den* (a building for a big Buddha statue). ▮

## New Music Composing in Japan: Dharma Budaya and Others

*I first heard new gamelan music by Japanese composers in 1986 at the First International Gamelan Festival at Expo '86 in Vancouver, Canada. The performing group was Dharma Budaya. Under the leadership of Shin Nakagawa, they presented a program of pieces by Japanese composers Shigenobu Nakamura and Hiroshi Nanatsuya, choosing to define themselves not by how they could reproduce Indonesia but how they could express Japan through the instruments. In subsequent years the one gamelan group became two; the offshoot ensemble is called Marga Sari. During our 2005 trip we were able to visit both these groups in the Osaka area and update ourselves on their many activities. — BB*

*Gamelan Dharma Budaya* began in 1979 at the music department of Osaka University, and was first known as the Osaka University Gamelan Ensemble. The instruments, a Central Javanese pelog set, had been imported by a wealthy man planning to start an intercultural museum. When the plan was abandoned, the instruments were donated to the University, where Shin Nakagawa became the group's first director.

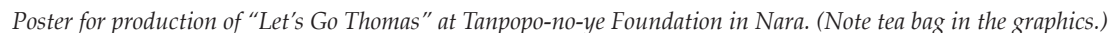
Nakagawa began his own career with a musicology degree in Beethoven. Some time after he took a mind-changing trip to Bali. He also had become quite interested in contemporary composition techniques of the west, the philosophy of John Cage, recordings of environmental sounds, and soundscapes. Under his leadership *Dharma Budaya* commissioned new



*Nagasaki playing kendang in the gamelan closet.*

Dharma Budaya is currently led by Teruo Yamasaki, with the assistance of Kimiko Hayashi. Yamasaki began his gamelan studies at Osaka University. In addition to leading that gamelan, he is Associate Professor of Psychology on

Among the Balinese groups, some new pieces have been written and performed for specific concerts or tours by Sakurada, Kobayashi, and Minagawa. Unfortunately we were not in the country long enough to be able to obtain recordings of these. But, during his visit to New York, Tetsuro Koyano shared with us a recording of his group *Sanggar Urotsutenoyako's* experimental crossovers with musicians of other genres such as dijeridoo, jazz, and rock. (See Koyano interview.) ▶





# New Music Residency with Gamelan Marga Sari

by Vincent McDermott

*Marga Sari* is a gamelan group in Osaka. They play Central Javanese instruments, and most of the players have studied in Yogyakarta. Marga Sari is fully conversant within the traditional repertoire of concert, dance, and wayang, especially Yogya style. They play this music with affection and great strength.

While they play both traditional and new music, their special mission is the latter—the music of today is Marga Sari's joy. They have played many new works from around Europe, America, Japan, and Indonesia, and they regularly invite guest composers for residencies. I was a guest composer with them from April to June in 2005 (co-sponsored by Osaka City University and a Fulbright Senior Specialist grant). It was one of the finest musical experiences of my life.

Marga Sari started in 1997 as an independent group, unaffiliated with any institution. Its members work cooperatively. There is no single leader. Every aspect of their work, large and small, is discussed by all members, whose daytime jobs, by the way, include university lecturer, gamelan teacher, dance teacher, librarian, acoustic engineer, telephone operator, high school teacher, graphic designer, handicraftsman, etc. They own two full gamelan and have

their own rehearsal buildings (with a small performance space) set in rustic converted farm buildings nestled among peaceful rice fields and mountains, an hour's drive outside of hectic Osaka. They work hard. Their aim is to play at a fully professional level. Normal rehearsal schedule is 10 hours per week spread over 3 meetings. Rehearsals are added or extended as needed. Last year they played about 20 concerts: eight of traditional music, twelve of new. Some players are paid small amounts whenever possible.

Financially, they depend on ticket sales and grants. It also turns out that income for concerts of traditional music often outperforms that from new music events. Thus old chestnuts subsidize new adventures! (Is anyone really surprised?)

The force behind the group is Shin Nakagawa, Professor and Head of Department of Asian Culture and Urbanism at Osaka City University, where he teaches "Environmental Urbanology" and "Asian Culture." His great interest is sound environments. He advises the city government and testifies as an expert witness in legal suits on noise pollution. His native language is Japanese, but he also speaks English, German, and Indonesian, and is presently studying Mongolian. He writes romantic



*Vincent Mc Dermott (center) in performance. (Photo provided by Vincent McDermott.)*





*Shin Nakagawa playing kendang.*

crime novels (wherein sounds are described at length, he assured me). He is a trained percussionist. He began to play gamelan in 1979 and now teaches gamelan at three universities, two in Osaka and one in Kyoto. In addition he “takes care of” other gamelan groups in the Kansai area, specifically in Kobe, Shiga, and Nara, (a second group in Kyoto is soon to be added, and another Marga Sari member manages still another group in Gifu.) Nakagawa burns rubber in copious amounts as he zips here and there. Indeed, in Kansai, gamelan is a growth industry, much of it due to his efforts. Some readers may remember him from the Japanese group he brought to the International Gamelan Festival during the World Exposition of 1986 in Vancouver, Canada.

My own invitation came with a curious request. Very curious. Let me present it in story form, as it unfolded (I love stories). Nakagawa, speaking for the group, invited me but also requested me to write nothing before arrival in Japan. Yes, the guest composer, not a note to be jotted down beforehand! I muttered that’s not the way I have done things for 50 years! That got me nowhere. Moreover, I was told, I should not permit myself the luxury of even thinking about what I might write! Imagine that. No thinking, no planning, no writing permitted prior to arrival in Japan! No visa available for ingrained compositional habits. I should experience and open my mind first to the ways of Japan and Marga Sari. Soak them up, as it were, and then dive in. My pre-compositional exercise was simple: to arrive, to feel, and to meet Marga Sari. After that, and only then, should I begin composing. Upon hearing this request, my old mind did a jing-jang-jong. To speak more plainly, I was boggled!

Uncertainly I inquired how much music they wanted. The response was 60–70 minutes for top dog Marga Sari and 10–15 minutes for young Tirta Kencana (a newer

community group in Shiga Prefecture whose hall we would use for our concert several weeks later). I smirked. I’ve been composing professionally for 35 years. In ordinary circumstances, 70–85 minutes of music could take me 6–12 months to compose and write out. But we’d have only 6–7 weeks for composing and rehearsal combined! What was I to do? Quit this farce? It crossed my rapidly aging mind, but in the end, I drew on my deep penchant for the bizarre. I sucked wind and took the plunge. (However I admit to a cagey ploy—all right, not to mince words, I cheated—but just a little! Surreptitiously, just in case, I slipped a couple of older pieces in my back pocket. Yes, naughty. But in all other ways I agreed to the curious request. I am, after all, mostly, an honorable person.) And off I went.

I wandered freely in Osaka for a couple of days taking in city sights and temples. And then there was Marga Sari’s farmhouse rehearsal room, a wondrous place. Have we (Westerners) not read of the special quality of “nature” in the Japanese tradition? Well here it is, their farm building, a powerful space in a serene location dominated by nature, and indeed part and parcel of the Marga Sari experience. Next I began to work with the players, who proved focused, skilled, imaginative, and ever ready to plant new flowers along old paths. They could ably play whatever was written. In fact they told me not to worry about technically difficult passages, they’d eat them for breakfast. And they did! But how they thrived on opportunities to let their own creative juices surge!

#### **A different concert with the handicapped**

They showed me that in a concert they played soon after I arrived in Osaka. It was a fascinating event developed by Marga Sari in conjunction with a center for people with severe disabilities, Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation in the nearby city of Nara. Many of the latter persons performed alongside of Marga Sari members, playing, singing, speaking, and even dancing.

The concert was presented in a warehouse with an art installation made specifically for the event. There were also costumes, video projections, lighting, props, and movement of players and audience from one room to another. There was no score as such. Rather the players worked within guidelines developed in rehearsal that followed an overarching design. It was a boisterous event, something of a free-for-all. Marga Sari members created their own music and theater, drawing on the compositional and improvisational skills of all of the performers, both those of Marga Sari and those with disabilities. It drew a sizeable and enthusiastic audience.

The title of the event (in English) was “Sir Thomas.” No one offered to explain the title’s relationship to the concert. I was told there was none, said with a Cheshire grin. But let us note that the art installer (Yutaka Moriguchi) hung giant tea bags from the ceiling. These tea bags had an unusual shape, triangular and pyramidal, indeed the shape of the Lipton Tea Company’s chief product in Japan.



Marga Sari performing in costume under their barn roof.

"Ah ha!" says the sleuth. "We've got a connection!" Though what tea had to do with the musical-theatrical event produced by a gamelan group and a center for the disabled remained obscure at best.

*[I visited the show in progress a few weeks before Vincent. I was told that the plot, which, like the music, had evolved through improvisation, centered on a quest for a treasure. One of the children involved was fond of Lipton's and had suggested that the tea bag be the object of the quest. — BB]*

Later it was pointed out to me—I have no idea whether the speaker, Nakagawa, was trying to be helpful or simply wanted to put me out to sea again—that the pronunciation of "sir" by a Japanese speaker resembles "sah." And "Sah Thomas" in Japanese means "Let's Thomas," thus proving to my mind that the Orient is maintaining into the modern world its fabled inscrutability.

Yet the message was coming through. I began to understand the "curious request." On one hand, it was simple: the performers, Nakagawa among them, simply prefer improvisation and accidental music, much as many Western groups might. But in Japan, and with Marga Sari, I believe it was more. It was, in my interpretation, a matter of spontaneity deeply felt inside of long traditions. Perhaps it was a matter of Zen.

### The Making of Blue Forest

Marga Sari has no staff separate from its performers. For each concert, the members select among their own someone to manage one or another aspect of the event. One will take charge of costume and stage design, another, technical matters, another, tickets, food, etc. Prior to my arrival in Japan, the person charged with print materials (Hiromi Sasaki) needed to start work right away. (In other words, the publicity could start, but not the music.) First a "concept" was needed. Hiromi proposed "Blue Forest," and I accepted.

This title did not come off the wall like "Sir Thomas." Instead it correlated to the name of the hall in which we would perform. If ever the starting gun sounded for actual composing, my mind was free to roam. It also struck me as a nice gesture to our host hall. Still there was the problem, the big problem. Only 7 weeks remained for composition and rehearsals.

Bang, the gun sounded. I was off. First I made a scenario in and around the idea of adventures in a blue forest, broke the whole into three movements (or acts) performed without break, and provided a set of moods for each. I then composed set pieces in traditional and new styles, also free-form pieces and transitions to be improvised inside of guidelines I set for each. I also took those two older pieces out of my back pocket. Indeed, they came in very useful. Then I incorporated dance into the second movement and wayang kulit into the third.

There were two dancers, one Javanese, one Japanese: Wiantari and Shin Sakuma. They mixed traditional modern dance, including a touch of *butoh*, to a scenario that I had described. Also there was a new addition to Marga Sari, a young Javanese musician and dhalang named Rofit Ibrahim. Together we sketched out a mini-wayang kulit using traditional wayang organization.

I wrote music for the start and end of the wayang, but asked Marga Sari to compose the *srepegan* and *sampak* type pieces, which they did beautifully. The score also called for a six person chorus (women and men, students from a university of the arts) and four solo voices using four vocal styles: Javanese, Buddhist chant, Japanese folk,



Poster for Blue Forest.



and myself in various sorts of Western styles. Thus it came to pass, Blue Forest was completed, rehearsed, and performed on schedule.

Blue Forest lasted about 65 minutes. Prior to Marga Sari taking the stage, the other gamelan group, Tirta Kencana, directed by Michio Nakamura, opened the concert with the second commission of my residency, a piece titled *A Little Concerto*. It lasted about 15 minutes and was largely through composed and written out in standard cipher notation, which relied upon more traditional Central Javanese patterns. (Tirta Kencana is one of the many groups overseen by Shin Nakagawa.)

By the end of my stay, and assuredly with plenty of ups and downs, “the curious request” led to a wonderful experience, one of the finest of my career. Thank you, Marga Sari. Thank you, Tirta Kencana. Thank you, Japan. And thank you, Fulbright. ▀

### **Books by Shin Nakagawa**

2000 *Musik dan Kosmos: Sebuah Pengantar Etnomusikologi*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia (in Indonesian).

2000 *Kyoto-Klaenge des Kosmos*. Berlin: Merve Verlag (in German).

2003 *Sawa Sawa*. Tokyo: Kyuryuda. (A novel, in Japanese.)

### **Other guest composers**

1997 Jose Maceda (Philippines); Mantle Hood (USA)

1999 Siswadi (Indonesia); Tsuneto Kitaura (Japan)

2000 Makoto Nomura (Japan; he has appeared annually since then)

2003 Michael Asmara (Indonesia); Johanes Subowo (Indonesia)

2005 Vincent McDermott (USA)

2006 Sapto Raharja (Indonesia); Masahiro Miwa (Japan)



Vincent McDermott (in foreground) on his visit to Tanpopo-no-ye Foundation in Nara.



# Dancing Momotaro: The Evolution of a Dance-Theatre Piece With Gamelan Marga Sari

by Shin Sakuma

"Scene V. It starts without any effort to reset the costume. I think it was better to do so. I just walk. I don't dance and act. There is nothing. The atmosphere becomes transparent. I, as an ogre, turn around like a crow's feather cutting the winds and walk away with my ankles rolling freely. I see a rising silver string with my left eye. A cloth falls like a clock revolving in reverse ..."

This is a part of my impression that I wrote on my blog after the performance of "Momotaro with All Scenes" at the Hekisui Hall in Shiga Prefecture on 10th September in 2006. The Momotaro is an old Japanese folk tale. If a mother reads it by the bedside, a child might not be asleep by the end, since it is very short. "The Momotaro" on this day, however, started at 1:00 p.m. and finished at 5:00 p.m. past on Sunday. Two hundred or more people crowded the hall, even though it took more than three hours for them to come from Osaka by train. They attended the performance, which continued more than four hours, as is the custom when one attends the *upacara* (ceremony) in Java or Bali.

This piece consists of five scenes. We created the scenes one by one each year over a period of five years. In 2005 "The Momotaro" was completed. In 2006 we performed the complete version for the first time. To begin with, Shin Nakagawa, the representative of Margasari, had conceived an idea concerning this tale over ten years ago. We began to create this piece seven years ago, and we also asked a composer whose name is Makoto Nomura to be our musical supervisor. In the first one or two years we felt embarrassed to play the gamelan improvisationally, not to speak of the dancing and the acting. Makoto Nomura, who usually composed with children or old people, did not give the group any notation, but gave us the freedom to compose. In short he didn't do anything. It was very difficult for us to create our own music or dance not like traditional gamelan or contemporary music and dance.

Nevertheless, we performed the Momotaro at the campus of Seian College, the precincts of Himuro-shrine, and on the stages of several halls in the early two years. When I acted as a friend of an old man, a bull, and an ogre, I also felt embarrassed to dance and act so much. We struggled to get something. We practiced at our gamelan studio, Space-Ten by name, which is placed in the forest near Osaka. I often rolled about in the rice field, and was hanged from a beech tree; sometimes I was chased by dogs while we kept on doing the performance.

In the process of advancing the creation, such as scene III and scene IV, members began to show their own ideas spontaneously little by little. Then as we attached ourself

to this piece more and more, we could see many ideas which we proposed in scene III. The theme of scene IV is an improvisation of music and dance. We played the gamelan and danced the dance of battle improvisationally for thirty minutes in this scene. I got very tired because I had to dance and fight such as in a real battle field. Finally I noticed the boundary between my dance movement and my movement in the daily life disappeared.

In the last scene of scene V, I, as an ogre just existed there. I felt I may do something and may also do nothing. I was given plain space to begin to create something.

Now I am sitting in my room. Rice fields filled with water for the preparation of planting spread in front of my house. I want to dance as I step into the water which is reflecting blue sky. ▀

ダレマ・ブダヤのガムランPart2



**Dance in Gamelan Square**

2004.3.20(土・祝)  
OPEN / 7:00 START / 7:30  
3.21(日)  
OPEN / 2:30 START / 3:00  
Art Theater dB (フェスティバルゲート3F)  
前売り 2,000円 当日 2,500円  
db会員は各200円引き  
チケット取り扱い  
ダルマ・ブダヤ  
URL <http://www.gamelans.org>  
E-mail [concert@gamelans.org](mailto:concert@gamelans.org)  
DANCE BOX TEL 06-6646-1120 FAX 06-6646-1149  
E-mail [dancebox@rock.sannet.ne.jp](mailto:dancebox@rock.sannet.ne.jp)  
主催：ダルマ・ブダヤ  
後援：在大阪インドネシア総領事館  
協力：NPO法人DANCE BOX  
お問い合わせ：ダルマ・ブダヤ 06-6821-0290 (山崎)  
DANCE BOX 06-6646-1120

Yurabe Masami Photo/Inada Takushi

Concert flyer with inset of Sakuma.

# Conversation with Tetsuro Koyano: “Good music is always good. There is no difference.”

*Tetsuro Koyano is a Balinese dancer and gamelan leader based in Tokyo. His primary ensemble there is Sanggar Urotsutenoyako, which meets and performs at Studio Amrita in Kichijoji district of Tokyo. The group performs Kebyar, Semar Pegulingan and topeng dance. Although we were unable to meet with him during our 2005 visit to Japan, we did meet him in New York in May 2006 and were able to have a visit and interview. Reviews of Teater Cahaya can be found online. —BB*

Koyano was on a three month visit to America under the sponsorship of Asian Cultural Council to research Asian-influenced performing arts in America. He had just come to New York after a month's stay in California to work with Larry Reed's ShadowLight Productions and Gamelan Sekar Jaya, and to observe the Oakland group One People Voice, which specializes in Balinese *kecak*.

Koyano encountered Balinese arts at Tokai University, where he received his B.A. and M.F.A. in musicology, specializing in ethnomusicology and soundscape. His professor in soundscape was the one who invited him to Bali. There he began gamelan study, but was told he had the right body and face for Balinese dance and was encouraged to study dance as well as music. He found it felt very natural for him. Today Koyano is one of very few male practitioners of Balinese dance in Japan, the vast majority of dancers being female.

Studio Amrita was the project of a successful businessman and aficionado of Balinese culture named Nagata Toshiaki. He wanted to make a studio and a restaurant with the theme “a Thai restaurant in Ubud, Bali.” Koyano located an unused set of gamelan instruments belonging to the Ethno Arts Council in Tokyo, and offered to find them a home where they would be played. Studio Amrita is now located in the basement of the building, and a Cafe Amrita, furnished with decorations from Bali, is housed above it. There is room in the studio for performers and audience both, and the gamelan performs in both locations.

Koyano would like to make his gamelan a profitable group. It is not yet, but he believes it will become so. He himself is one of a very few Japanese to make a living through performing Balinese arts.

Looking ahead, he also hopes Balinese music and dance will become integrated into the creative development of Japanese arts in the same way as so many of the traditional art forms developed centuries ago. A thousand to five hundred years ago, some cities were quite international, and outside arts from China, Korea and further away were imported and transformed by Japanese artists into traditional



Japanese forms such as *Noh* and *Gagaku*.

To this end he is open to radical experimentation. A number of performance projects he has done with his group include some very diverse outside musical influences. One such project was a collaboration with the Japanese digeridoo player GOMA. A more recent program combined gamelan with a jazz quartet and a singer of traditional Japanese folk songs. The composer of the new repertoire was the drummer of the jazz group, Niida Kozo, who had played with the popular rock group “RC Succession.” All in all, Sanggar Urotsutenoyako may be the most experimental and contemporary of the many Balinese gamelan groups in Japan.

Asked how the Japanese audience received the group's new repertoire, Koyano says that in general they do not appear to know the difference. “I try to do something not ordinary, but they come expecting Balinese music because of the instruments... I don't feel the need to explain the difference, because pieces in Bali are often new creations too... Not only because Balinese pieces are often new creations, but also even the classical pieces we found



are quite aggressive and are comparable with jazz or rock music... We feel very excited too when we listen to Balinese classical pieces. Actually our members [and I] do not really like Balinese new creation pieces. Only a few pieces are good, remarkable work, as much as when we listen to other kind of music like rock, jazz, punk, Latin, etc. This why I feel I don't need to separately explain Balinese traditional pieces and our contemporary pieces. Good music is always good. There's no difference."

Koyano's deep interest in creating cross-cultural and cross-categorical art forms has led him to involvement with several other groups. A smaller ensemble he performs with is *Potalaka*. Its name means "heavenly island" or "mountain on the South Seas," a Buddhist belief. Potalaka works on more theatrical presentations with dance, mask and theatre, and very few gamelan instruments.

Koyano also became involved with a separate project to revive the art from *gigaku*, an ancient dance theatre genre using large wooden masks, similar to *gagaku* with its roots in Korea and China. The art form was near extinction with masks only to be seen in museums, when a *kyogen* player

named Mannojo Nomura initiated a revival. He made new masks and recreated the performance with his group "Ethonos," using multicultural instrumentation, including gamelan and even African instruments. The aim was to bring *gigaku* back to the countries from which it had developed, which included China, Tibet, India and even Iran. Some touring took place in Korea and China, but unfortunately Nomura died suddenly a few years ago, and the project has since slowed down.

Yet another involvement is a multi-cultural collaborative theatre called *Teater Cahaya* (Theatre of the (both Javanese and Balinese) and Malaysian artists. The group produced a performance of "Siddharta," based on the Hesse novel, co-directed by Koyano and Richard Emmert. "This project is still going on and we plan to perform it in Indonesia, Japan, or Europe and the USA." ▮

## Composing for Gamelan

by Teruo Yamasaki

The purpose of this essay is to express my personal feeling about Gamelan. But before I go into that, I want to explain the background of music in Japan.

Japan had closed the country from the rest of the world for 250 years (17–19th centuries) with the exception of a few countries. When we consider *Gagaku*, which is the oldest remaining music in Japan, that music originally came from China, and likewise a lot of music could have come to Japan from other countries. While the music in Europe was going through its big transitions from Renaissance to Baroque to Classical and Romantic, Japan had nothing to do with it. But then a tremendous amount of European culture rushed into Japan like a waterfall, starting in the middle of 19th century with the *Meiji-Ishin* (the Japanese renewal and revolutionary events that lead the government to re-open the country to the rest of the world).

As a result, Japan came to focus on absorbing Western culture. The Japanese government took the western education system as a model and made western music its main musical focus. Over the course of 150 years this educational system changed the musicality of the Japanese to one based on western music. I can't say that there's no difference between European music as practiced in the West and in Japan, but I can say that Japan is one of

the countries most deeply influenced by European music. One proof is that so many Japanese musicians are making tremendous success in the Western world. And western music of all styles has become familiar and popular in Japan, including J-Pop, which is western style music that has been adjusted to Japanese culture.

On the other hand, how about traditional Japanese music? There are far fewer people who are experienced in playing traditional Japanese instruments such as *shamisen*, *koto* or *shakuhachi*, compared with piano and guitar. Probably there are few people who would listen to traditional Japanese music these days. But more indirectly, we still have the opportunity to be exposed to it, since our music has developed in conjunction with its culture.

Our main and most significant events in social life are birth, marriage, and death. Most cultures in the world conduct ritual ceremonies regarding these events, and Japan is no exception. Since Japan is basically a country of polytheism, people are open to multiple religions. Most people conduct the birth ceremony in a Shinto style, the wedding ceremony in Shinto or Christian style (or both) and a funeral in Buddhist style. The chants used in these ceremonies bear a lot of similarity to other genres of traditional Japanese music. Traditional festivals that



are commonly held by various communities also involve traditional Japanese instruments such as the *Taiko* drum. the countries most deeply influenced by European music. One proof is that so many Japanese musicians are making tremendous success in the Western world. And western music of all styles has become familiar and popular in Japan, including J-Pop, which is western style music that has been adjusted to Japanese culture.

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Then how can you play gamelan music when your background in music is not based on that? One way is to consider the place where gamelan music comes from, and play instruments and compose music according to that style. In Gamelan Dharma Budaya, to which I belong, we've been learning gamelan of Java with that attitude. But it will take time for Japan to be fully influenced by gamelan music, including both performance and composing, as it took more than 100 years for western music to settle in Japan.

On the other hand, when I compose music, what I am aiming at is rather the opposite. In short, my aim is simply to create sounds that give comfortable feeling and joy. When I compose for gamelan, I do not necessarily follow the original Javanese ways, but pursue my personal feeling of what will result in pleasantness and appeal.

Canadian psychologist and aesthetics theoretician Daniel Berlyne proposed the theory of "arousal potential." According to this theory, as arousal potential towards some objects increases, the preference for the objects also increases. But after the preference reaches its peak, it starts

decreasing even if arousal potential keeps increasing. If you draw a graph with arousal potential in a horizontal line, and preference in vertical line, it creates an upside down "U" shape. Arousal potential is high in new and unique objects, and preference is highest in the "middle degree" of arousal potential. Consequently, in music you feel most comfortable when you hear a piece that is not too familiar, but also not very new. In other words, you feel attraction towards the music that you are just getting to know. However, the relationship between preference and objects is not settled but it changes according to the cognitive factors.

For example, if you listen to same music repeatedly, novelty decreases and excitement and attraction changes, how you feel comfort and joy changes depending on whether you hear analytically or not, because your judgment towards the object complexity changes by your listening attitude. If I may say something based on this idea, what I'm trying to do in creating music is to make the music a little different from the one that most Japanese people feel familiar with.

Of course "familiar" music doesn't mean just one kind of music, given the dual music backgrounds in Japan, because various characteristics of music influence familiarity. Even if I try to describe the characteristics of familiar music and unfamiliar music, it may be hard to understand in real sense. I will try to explain by giving some examples from my compositions.

One is *Mukyuka* ["Eternal Flower", or "The Inexhaustible Flowers"; recorded on Dharma Budaya's CD *Overflow*]. In this piece, the two scales, *slendro* and *pelog*, are combined. The harmony is composed for saron, bonang and gender. Kempul is added towards the end of the piece. For those of us familiar with gamelan, the harmony gives us a secure and comfortable feeling. On the other hand, the middle part of the piece may give us a little strange feeling, because the melody is not played by the same instrument continuously but is relayed by different instruments, note by note. In this I would like to express the image that the flowers bloom one after another without stopping.

A second example is *Air Naga*. This music is composed with the *pelog* scale. It consists of a light melody that is easy to relate to. However, a considerably irregular rhythm is used: the main melody is in 4+5+5. In my opinion this familiar melody and unusual rhythm would make it more attractive. In the middle of the piece a little trick is used to make it different from the previous music by putting in a section like traditional gamelan. Actually this is the part the audience in a gamelan concert is waiting for. The sense of uniqueness in the piece comes from the flow of the music up to that point and the contrast in the new section. [The instrumentation list is at the end of the score. —Ed.]

I have explained how I'm trying to create my music to be comfortable and joyful for regular Japanese people in this age. Of course you will be the judge of whether I was successful in my attempt or not. I hope to share this with as many people as possible. ■

# Resources

*What materials are available for the gamelan student or aficionado in Japan? There are of course the international imports, such as CDs and foreign language books in English and Indonesian. But one of our questions was what has been written and recorded by Japanese scholars and musicians in Japan. These are some of the materials we found. —BB*

## Discography

Recordings fall into two categories: traditional recordings made in Japan documenting Indonesian artists during their residencies or tours to Japan, and recordings of new music by Japanese gamelan groups.

The traditional category includes both visiting gamelan musicians and Japanese gamelan groups supporting the Indonesian star artists. The following is a list of CDs and DVDs shared with us by the musicians we visited. There may of course be more.

### Traditional music/dance CDs and DVDs produced in Japan

*Bulan Tumpanggal*. Tembang Sunda performed by Euis Komariah (vocal), Rukruk Rukmana (kecapi), Uloh Abdullah (rebab) and Iwan Mulyana (suling). Recorded in Tokyo following a tour in 2003. Includes a booklet of song texts in Sundanese with translations in Japanese and English. 2003.

*Kuwung-Kuwung*. Sundanese kacapi-rebab performed by Uloh Abdullah (rebab), Rukruk Rukmana and Ade Suandi (kacapi). Insert in Japanese. Bulan Records 1001, 2003. CD.

*Saptobudoyo: Javanese Gamelan*. Concert performance by Saptobudoyo, a Javanese group touring in Japan under the leadership of Saptono. Four pieces. 1999. CD.

*Bayamurti [Meditating Gamelan]*. Four traditional pieces by Saptobudoyo, directed by Saptono. Produced in Japan by Fumi Tamura. BYMRT-001. CD.

*Kaleidoscope*. Javanese dance performance by Didik Nini Thowok with Gamelan Lambangsari. Booklet in Japanese with photos. Ohari Movies JMVK, 2002. DVD.

### New Gamelan Music by Japanese Composers

The second category is the recordings of new music by Japanese gamelan groups of Japanese and Indonesian composers. The two Osaka gamelan groups have been most dedicated to producing these.

*Marga Sari, Contemporary Gamelan Volume I*. Four pieces, including “Bagaskara” by Johannes Subowo, “Pelangi” by Michael Asmara, and “Pepelo-pelog” by Nomura Makoto. 2003. CD.

*Semi*. Three realizations of *Semi* (“cricket”) a piece by Nomura Makoto. The first of the three tracks is Marga Sari’s performance. 2002. CD.

*Dharma Budaya: Overflow*. Six compositions by Hamakawa Hirotooshi and Yamasaki Teruo. 2000. CD.

## Bibliography

The two founding scholars we have mentioned, Fumio Koizumi and Gen’ichi Tsuge, both wrote a number of articles and books introducing gamelan music to Japan through their world music anthologies. In addition, Tomoko Deguchi has compiled this short list of books in print readily available to the public.

### Balinese music

Minagawa, Koichi. *Gamelan o Tanoshimo* [Enjoy Gamelan]. Written for the public school curriculum to provide multiculturalism in arts education. ISBN4-276-32120-4.

Minagawa, Koichi. *Gamelan Mushashugyo* [My Gamelan Studying Days]. A teachers’ guide book, reminiscent of McPhee’s *A House in Bali*. ISBN4-89194-367-X,

Teigo, Yoshida, editor. *Island of the Gods*. Essays on Balinese performing arts. Comparison with various Hindu cultures elsewhere. (Teigo is the translator for Clifford Geertz.) ISBN4-393-29110-7.

### Javanese music

Kazama, Junko. *Java no Otofukei* [Soundscape of Java]. A book about Javanese performing arts and her experience at the local traditional theater group in Java. It includes the typical music educational situations in Japan. ISBN4-8396-0085-6.

### Wayang Kulit

Matsumoto, Tooru. A Javanese style dalang based in Tokyo, Matsumoto has been presenting Javanese wayang kulit for decades and has also written several books about Javanese Wayang Kulit and its stories in Japanese. Links to his material are on his websites CGI Wayang: <http://www.kt.rim.or.jp/~banuwati/pro2.html>, [http://www.harapan.co.jp/english/indon\\_e/cgi\\_wayang.htm](http://www.harapan.co.jp/english/indon_e/cgi_wayang.htm)

Umeda, Hideharu. Performer of Balinese style wayang kulit. Professor of ethnomusicology at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, and a student of Nyoman Sumandi. Some of his writings on wayang are published in *Journal of Musicology*, Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts, in Kikanminzokuga, as well as on line.