

## The New Wave of Jaipongan Dance

by Irawati Durban

*Jaipongan* is a dance style created in 1979 that blends folk dances and *Pencak Silat*, the martial art performance of West Java. Following wild popularity in the 1980s, the genre declined in the 1990s. Recently a new manifestation of jaipongan with more varied movement, music, and costumes has appeared in formal and informal performances, locally and internationally. This article will discuss the form's background, the major innovators of the 1980s, and explain how it is returning to prominence.

### Beginnings

The debut of Jaipongan was at the 1979 Hong Kong Arts Festival, in a performance that melded the charisma of singer-dancer Tatih Saleh and the research-choreography of Gugum Gumbira Tirtasonjaya (b. 4th April 1945). With Nandang Barmaya, a Bandung musician and *dalang* (puppet theater master), Jaipongan developed in the 1980s into a popular dance, both as social dance in villages and as stage performance in big cities like Bandung. (For additional information on Jaipongan see Hellvig 1993; Manuel and Baier 1986; Spiller 2004: 202-262, and Yampolsky 1987) Though Jaipongan's roots were older, the manifestation was new.

To understand Jaipongan's emergence, one must retrace aspects of Sundanese performance from the 1940s to the late 1970s. In the early 20th century there were two major styles of performance in West Java and each style was closely associated with a particular class. A refined aristocratic tradition developed from the combination of *topeng* (mask dance) and *tayub* (aristocratic social dance of the regent's courts, called *kabupaten*), and it was propagated as *tari keurseus* in the schools for aristocrats. This tradition was considered a mark of good breeding and like its dancers had "class." The folk dances of the village were associated with the ordinary people and were considered rude and sometimes salacious entertainment by both

colonial administrators and local aristocrats.

The folk dances, which had a different name in each area, went under the generic title of *ketuk tilu* (literally, "three gong" dance). Performances were staged by professional groups in the open city squares. The dance movements were simple and were accompanied by a simple gamelan orchestra played by four or five people. A normal set of instruments would be a three horizontal gong (*ketuk*), drums (a large *kendang* and small *kulanter*), *goong/kempul* (large hanging gongs), and *rebab* (bowed lute) or *terompet* (reed) instrument. To earn a livelihood, the *ketuk tilu* group moved from one place to another in a tradition called *ngamen* (itinerant performance or "begging"). The troupe included female (or sometimes transvestite male) dancer-singers, called *ronggeng*, and male musicians. The viewers were largely lower class males who eagerly jumped into the arena to dance with their favorite *ronggeng* and paid her afterwards.

The term *ketuk tilu* can be applied to a broad range of dance and theatre forms. Sometimes they would include social dance performance alone, but in many troupes, *ketuk tilu* was part of a folk theatre presentation. The music and songs were specific to a certain area and everyone would recognize tunes as part of the *ketuk tilu* repertoire. For example, in Bandung, this would include titles like *Arang-arang*, *Gaplek*, and *Cikuruhan* as part of the opening sequence where the dancers display their talents prior to the social dance segment. When wedded with theatre, the *ketuk tilu* dance is performed as opening part of the performance to attract people to watch the play.

*Longser* theatre in Bandung is an example. The *Longser Panca Warna* (Five Color Longser) group from Bandung presented their performance in the following order: 1. *Amitan*, praying to ask God for permission to perform; 2. *Tatalu*, instrumental music to invite people to the arena; 3. *Bubuka*, welcoming the audience; 4. *Wawayangan*, the parade of the *ronggengs* with their opening dance followed by song request by the audience members who could dance with the *ronggeng* they selected; 5. *Cikuruhan*, a *ronggeng* dance performance; 6. *Ibing Kembang*, a demonstration of selected (beautiful) *pencak silat* movements; 7. *Bodor* or clowning; 8. the play. Stories might tell of feudal lords or reflect the daily life of common people. The performance order varied somewhat from group to group. Analogous folk theatre

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forms include *Topeng Banjet* in Karawang, *Topeng Tambun* in Bekasi, and *Topeng Cisalak* in Depok. The three genres traditionally used masks (*topeng*) as part of their opening dance sequence, thereby showing lineage related to the mask dance of the north coast (*topeng Cirebon*) in contrast to Bandung's more martial arts influenced dance. Yet in all these genres, the section where the spectators may jump into the arena to dance with the *ronggeng* was the same. The repertoire of *ketuk tilu* links the genres. *Kliningan* or *Ketuk Tilu Bajidoran* is a term that refers to this practice: *kliningan* refers to the music and singing while *bajidor* is the term for the dance between a male audience member and a female dancer.

### Post Independence Changes

After Indonesian independence in 1945, aristocratic influence was still very strong. The aristocrats' respected classical style was considered high art for the cultural elite. Classical, as well as newly choreographed semi-classical dances growing from the classical repertoire, were performed all over West Java, and featured at state performances espoused by the first Indonesian President, Soekarno. Performers of classical works were sent abroad on Presidential Cultural Missions to Indonesian embassies. Personally, I had the opportunity to participate as a dancer in tours to the United States, China and Eastern Europe.

As feudal attitudes gave way to democracy, the gulf between aristocrat and commoner faded. Ordinary people could now show social mobility in various ways, including learning classical dances. In this environment, lowly *ketuk tilu* seemed to be forgotten. The term *ronggeng*, now associated with prostitutes was shunned. Most *ketuk tilu* disappeared since these forms were not considered worthy of governmental or social approval in the era of nation building. *Ketuk tilu* would not be included on cultural missions whose intent was to cement Indonesia's status in the eyes of other countries.

Gugum Gumbira Tirtasonjaya, who came of age artistically in the post-independence era, saw things differently. He traveled widely to study this genre along the north coast of West Java. Among the forms he sought out were *Doger* in Karawang near Jakarta and *Banjet* in Subang, at the center of West Java. He searched for the remaining performers in Cianjur, which is between Jakarta and Bandung, and in Sukabumi, which is south and east of Bandung. He joined in *kliningan bajidoran* performances in areas like Subang and Karawang. He paid the singers and musicians for their songs. Through these activities, Gugum experienced the *ketuk tilu* that existed outside of major urban centers. In the simple dance movements, he felt a lively energy. He found the music and drumming attractive; the singer's voice inviting; the spontaneous, rhythmic shouts of the gamelan players uplifting; and he felt the men who jumped up to dance exemplified joy and passion. For long hours or even the whole night, men would stay to listen to the singer or to dance. The men's dance, drawn



from martial art movements and *pencak silat*'s strong, wide, and sometimes funny improvisations, often made for a lively and energetic event.

Gugum himself was well trained in martial arts and learned *pencak silat* from his father. He also learned *Topeng Cirebon* from Sujana Arja, and the aristocratic *tari keurseus* dance from relatives in Sumedang and Bandung. His training at the high school of performing arts in Bandung (then called KOKAR) prepared him to rework the relatively simple choreography and musical accompaniment of *ketuk tilu* into something new.

Gugum began to create something more dynamic and attractive than the traditional *ketuk tilu* in 1979. He added more complex *pencak silat* moves for the feet and hands, which made the new movements broader and livelier. He selected the flashy drumming style from Karawang (that made Bandung drumming seem rather sedate) and replaced the traditional group of four or five musicians with a complete gamelan orchestra of fifteen musicians, plus a male and female singer. To these two voices he added *senggak* (spontaneous shouts) from the gamelan players, which made the Jaipongan music energetic and exciting. His wife Euis Komariah, already famous in Sunda as a classical singer, became the star vocalist of this new form.

Gugum Gumbira and Euis Komariah first established *Dewi Pramanik* to perform their more artistically focused



presentations. They also formed the Jaipongan group Jugala, whose name is an abbreviation of “**ju**ara dalam **ga**ya dan **la**gu” which means: “first place in style and song.” The couple led a dance company, as well as a *padepokan* (training course), and established the Jugala Recording Studio.

To devise his choreography, Gugum worked together with classically trained dancers who were often graduates of the schools of performing arts in Bandung—KOKAR/SMKI (High School of Performing Arts) and STSI (College of Performing Arts). The most famous of his collaborators was Tati Saleh (d. 2005), a Sundanese singer and classical dancer whose body was big and sexy. Her performance of Gugum’s *ketuk tilu* became famous all over West Java, then Indonesia, and, soon, wherever Indonesian culture went—Saudi Arabia, the U.S., and Europe. Gugum changed the name to Jaipongan, a term derived from the drum syllables of the dace that accompanied the dance moves. The Jaipongan craze was on.

Initially people were shocked by this new dance. The female’s sexy hip undulations, the strong staccato movement of torso and shoulder to accompany the gong stroke, hands which extended high into the air—these were the distinctive features of this style. And all these characteristics were in enormous contrast to the female classical dance which allowed no hip movement, smoothed out head and shoulder gestures, and required arms be kept low to show refinement. Gugum choreographed many female dances such as *Keser Bojong*, *Rendeng Bojong*, *Toka-toka*, *Sonteng*, *Rawayan*, and *Kawung Anten*. But it

may be that this new female dance was right for the time. As Suharto’s government affirmed western culture and education national awareness of female freedom expanded. It was becoming acceptable for women to be stronger and, yes, even sexy without necessarily being labeled as “bad.”

Gugum choreographed duet dances of one male and female dancer like *Banda Urang*. Here the comparatively coquettish and sensual female dancer was combined with the strong and staccato male dancer. This dance resembled *ketuk tilu* of the *ronggeng* and her male *bajidor* partner, but the presumption that the female dancer was available was gone. She was, like her male partner, framed on the stage. While the sexual license of the past was alluded to in dance movement and the female-male pairing, this was “theatre” and not the real thing—the old social dance with the free mixing of sexes provided by *ketuk tilu*.

Some audiences rejected Jaipongan as too risqué, but most loved to see it in performances or do it as a social dance. Middle class girls reclaimed their “inner woman” and males found that martial movements could be as empowering for university graduates as they had been for village men of the past. Gugum’s *jaipong* music jolted almost all of West Java onto the dance floor; teenagers memorized sequences and played their cassettes, making the rhythms second nature. Gugum jazzed up older songs using his expanded and energized ensemble, as well as creating new songs such as *Serat Salira*, *Bulan Sapasi* and others for new gamelan compositions. Cassettes recorded in Gugum’s studio were purchased all over Indonesia,



influencing music and dance in areas like Central and East Java and Bali. It was Gugum's creation that actually sounded the death knell of the art from which it grew. In Subang, where *ketuk tilu bajidoran* influenced Gugum, *Kliningan Jaipongan* is now the name of this genre. The simple orchestra and choreography of the past had been replaced by works influenced by Gugum.

Jugala was very active producing Jaipongan in Indonesia and abroad until 1988, the year Gugum graduated from STIA (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Administrasi, College of Administration), after which he became a government employee. Eventually he headed the Bandung Tourism Department until his retirement in 2000. The lull in Jaipongan after 1989 could partly be attributed to his engagement in government works, depriving the movement of its central innovator. Newer Jaipongan was often sexier than Gugum's; choreographers borrowed undulating torso and hip movements from Subang's *bajidoran* or MTV style singer-dancers on the television who exploited sensuality. Perhaps part of the decline was due to the times, which increasingly questioned Western liberalism, giving birth to an Islamic revival. Younger women adopted the veil as a mark of generational self-definition, just as their mothers had embraced more revealing Western garb twenty years before to express themselves. For this group, Jaipongan was no longer appealing. Whatever the reason, in the 1990s Jaipongan faded and some wondered if it could be revived.

## Second Generation of Jaipongan Innovation: Awan Metro

Wawan Hendrawan (b. 1962), known universally as Awan or Awan Metro (from the Metro Bandung housing where he resides), was an assistant teaching in Gugum's studio in the late 1980s, and has been a force in Jaipongan's revival. Seeing the fall off in Sundanese dance that accompanied Gugum's withdrawal from Jaipongan, Awan quit his work as a designer in the fashion bag industry to devote himself to Jaipong.

Awan is unusual for a contemporary choreographer, in that he has no formal education in the arts. He was born November 2, 1962, and only went to school until the third grade. He remembers watching his mother's uncle, Mama Samsa (Rd. Wangsadinata), dancing when he stayed with him between 1966–1968. He noted that Mama Samsa always wore *bendo* (a traditional head cover made of batik cloth) everyday, the headgear for *tayuban* or *keurseus* dance of the aristocracy. His father, Tarman Ohin, was a member of *Sandiwara Sri Murni* (Sri Murni Theatre Group) in Bandung, his late aunt, Nining Wiarsih, was a famous *sinden* (singer) in a *wayang golek* (rod puppet) group with Dalang Amung.

In 1974 Awan moved in with relatives in Jakarta, and then worked as a waiter until 1977. From 1977–1984 he was employed at Elizabeth Bag Factory in Bandung and then Isetan bags in Jakarta. As the demand for his teaching grew, he decided to quit making bags, even on consignment, and devote himself entirely to dance.

Awan was drawn to Jaipongan early. He learned Gugum's *Keser Bojong* dance in 1981 in Soreang (a suburb south of Bandung) from Ole and Tanbi, a friends of Gugum. He joined a Jugala training course in 1984 at YPK (Yayasan Pusat Kebudayaan, or Capital Cultural Foundation) in Bandung. Two months later Awan became a Jugala dance instructor,

At Jugala he learned the basics of making Jaipongan dance. He met Gugum Gumbira's *pencak silat* teacher from Karawang, Pak Atut, who demonstrated how the four basic steps in *pencak silat* could be expanded into forty-eight steps. From lessons like this Awan developed his hand movement variations. From 1986 to 1988, he choreographed *jaipong* dances to Jugala tunes like *Iring-iring Daun Puring*, *Senggot*, *Teu Weleh Emut*, and *Waledan*, for women; *Tablo* was his only male choreography of this period. Gugum helped refine Awan's work which was then performed by the Jugala Company. "That is the core of how I made Jaipongan dances," Awan noted, generously crediting Gugum and the professional musicians and singers of Jugala, especially Agus Super, the *kendang* player and composer. The feedback he got in a famous group like Jugala allowed him to grow.

Awan wanted to continue the Jugala legacy and was worried that Sundanese dance could vanish, as only a few of the graduates from the formal dance institutions entered choreography. He teaches his dances repeatedly, in many places, in private sessions or to larger classes, to small children, teenagers, or adults. He has hundreds of dance students all over West Java—in Bandung, Garut, Sumedang, Jakarta, Cimindi, and, also his home in Ujung Berung. Outside Bandung, he collaborates with dance studios and sometimes is invited by government offices like the DKI (Jakarta Cultural Office) to train dance instructors in Jakarta. Through these projects, his dance spreads widely. After many years of working hard as dancer and choreographer, he finally established his own group, in 2005, *Padepokan Sekar Panggung* (Stage Flower Studio).

Awan has a simple and open demeanor and loves to help people dance. Tuition is cheap (US \$3-4 per month). He helps anybody who needs his coaching to perform, or to enter a dance competition, regardless of the ability to pay. He always makes choreography appropriate to the ability, posture, age, and character of the dancer. If the person is talented but poor, Awan will make the costume and pay entrance fees. When a student wants to continue studies in the university, he helps her to find a school and pays the tuition.

Awan's students have been successful in competitions from elementary to university levels, from local to international events. In the choreographer competition in the Jakarta Performing Arts Theatre International Festival in 1997, he was among the ten top choreographers, and his dance was performed in the opening of the International Festival of *Gedung Kesenian* (Arts Center) Jakarta 1997. In the *Gedung Kesenian* Jakarta Awards II in 1999 for the Indonesian Dance Festival V, which included national and



international groups, Awan received a second and third prize merit award in the entertainment dance category. For the Jaipongan Award, a national event in 2004 organized by Tati Saleh, he won two first prizes (solo and group dance), and a third prize (group dance). His dancers won two first prizes (solo and group), and a third prize (solo dancer).

Awan appreciates all dance forms, but is selective in what can blend into Sundanese atmosphere in rhythm and aesthetics. He admires the dances from Aceh, Minang (West Sumatra), Bali, and other regions and even the western dance from TV.

"I do not take the movements without thinking them through. I blend them and adjust them for Sundanese form and taste. From Aceh's *Saman* dance I took rapid and unison movement. From the Minangkabau *tari pirang* (plate dance), *payung* (umbrella), and *rantak*, I took active movement and rapid beats. From Bali I was inspired by graciousness and striking expression; that's why I choreographed my Balinese Jaipongan dance. From the western dancing, I took steps and its openness."

Unlike other recent choreographers, Awan does not highlight pelvis-hip movements, the torso moves are initiated by steps not shaking the hip. Dancers themselves decide and can make the movement sexy or not according to their taste. He is calm, self-assured, and clearly explains the movements in teaching. Though he follows his own intuition, people always applaud the work, including Gugum himself.

Awan's life experiences have prepared him well for success as a choreographer. His work in making fashion bags trained him to work diligently, cleanly, and, perhaps most importantly, with an understanding of overall design and order. His eyes became aware of proportion, balance, and harmony. Texture, character, color—he understands these components of composition and the elements come together cleanly in his work. His design process is second nature. Unencumbered by formal rules of the trained academic, he is able to create pure forms that "fit" the individual dancer.

The performance is his canvas. The body movements and costume are his paint and brush. After making the dances, Awan designs and constructs all the costumes himself. He does everything from shopping, to sewing, to jewelry selection, suiting design to movement. Garments are comfortable and decent, flexible and "right" for the dance. His costume designs are rich, colorful, and bright, with flowers, leaves or abstract designs for the blouse, skirt and/or head ornaments. For the skirt he often uses a *batik sarong* (fabric dyed with wax resist technique), which he pleats finely, leaving the lower part wide, so that the dancer can bend low, take a wide stance, or jump freely. He uses beads and sequins to accent the design motif, and repeats the motif in the *kebaya* (traditional blouse). If the blouse is transparent, he adds an ornamented *apok* (chest and torso sheath) outside. Loose, wide pants can also replace the skirt, but because of traditional concepts of decency, he

covers the hip area with another cloth which masks the hips and buttocks. His costume designs make the dancers look attractive, colorful and lively, contributing to the positive evaluation of the dance.

Gugum commented on the new choreographers. "Most of them make dances to fill the market need. Some of them blend it with break dance and other western dance movements, and some still retain the Sundanese flavor although they put in different vocabularies of dances they find or see in Indonesia. They are creative, but still, many of them do not take the basic root of Jaipongan, which are the folkdance and *pencak silat*. They do not make the choreographic concept first, followed by composing the music, but they choose the songs which are already available in the stores."

This judgment applies to Awan as well as others. Most of Awan's dances are choreographed to the Jaipongan tapes and CDs from the store. Besides *Jugala*, many recording studios produce Jaipongan music. By choosing one of these pre-recorded works for his dances, it is much easier for Awan and for his students to perform the dance. Composing music, hiring musicians to practice and record, would raise the costs greatly.

Awan has made several dances, however, in collaboration with a composer. One work that won first prize in the Jaipongan Award Competition is his *Gandrung*



dance. It presents Dewi Sinta, Rama's wife, who is abducted by King Rahwana in the *Ramayana*. The dance portrays the loneliness of Sinta, her anger with Rahwana, and her longing for her beloved husband. In this dance body movements are not sensual. The gestures and face expressions contrast with Jaipongan dances that make the dancers coquettish.

The composer is Ega Robot from Subang, a graduate of SMKI (Indonesian High School of Karawitan) and UPI (Indonesian University of Education) Music Department. Ega has developed Jaipongan music by putting *kentrangan*, an unusual, additional, rhythmically beaten *kulanter* (small kendang or drum) or big kendang, in addition to the regular drum set (one big *kendang* and two small *kendang*). In *Gandrung*, Ega's music made the dance movements and expressions come alive and won him first prize as Jaipongan composer. Some people said that Gandrung was not a Jaipongan dance because it lacked hip movement, but the pencak silat movements and the music with its dynamic drumming, are clearly in Jaipongan style.

In *Gandrung*, Awan and Ego found a Jaipongan which was acceptable to all, not just the young and hip, but also to small children, mature adults and seniors. In their work, movement, costume, aesthetics, and social constraints are all satisfied—and promise Jaipongan an extended lease on life. ■

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