

PROFILE

Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan: Celebrating 40 Years

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

Background

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

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

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

Celebrating Canadian Gamelan @ 40

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

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

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

Concert Program

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

Evergreen Club Contemporary Gamelan musicians

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



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

From the Founder

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Jon Siddall, ECCG Founding Artistic Director

From the Artistic Director

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[Evergreen on Bandcamp](#)

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