

ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

Gamelan Sekar Jaya: Bali's Living Arts Series

by Rebecca Selin

In the early days of the pandemic, Gamelan Sekar Jaya (GSJ) focused on keeping community connections strong within our large group of members through regular Zoom "rehearsals" and learning sessions. Like so many, we assumed that life would return to normal in a few months, and that we would go back to performing in person before the end of the year.

After the first month, it became apparent that the pandemic would deeply affect the lives of our members in the U.S., and our teachers in Bali, for many months, or even years, to come. It was imperative that we adapt our programming to the new era, and find new ways to connect with the public during a global pandemic.

From conversations with GSJ's current and former artists-in-residence, it was clear that COVID's effects on tourism in Bali were disastrous for the performing arts. Thankfully, many musicians and dancers were still able to play for ceremonies, but the economic aspects of music and dance in Bali were essentially put on hold. I wondered how GSJ could use its privilege, as a U.S. non-profit organization, to support the arts in Bali. I saw a promising model in Matthew Dunning's artist-to-artist fundraising campaign and the Nusantara Arts Gamelan Masters Lectures, so I began planning a similar series. But I was not anticipating yet another earth-shattering disaster.

On May 25, George Floyd was brutally murdered by a Minnesota police officer, Derek Chauvin, while three more officers stood by in complicity. This heinous incident pulled back the curtain on America's racist institutions, giving the entire world front row seats. In June, GSJ members began meeting weekly to learn together about race, privilege, and the white supremacist origins of American institutions, and to take our own steps toward unraveling systems of oppression.

These meetings, and countless emotional conversations with GSJ board chair, Emiko Susilo, made clear that GSJ must elevate the voices and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in our return to the public sphere. We decided to make an offering that would be a celebration of Balinese, Indonesian, and Indonesian-American perspectives and experiences, but not a series featuring white Americans speaking about Indonesian music.

Rebecca Selin is the Operations Manager for Gamelan Sekar Jaya, an organization based in the San Francisco Bay Area that has been dedicated to Balinese performing arts since 1979.

So, the Bali's Living Arts Series was born. We invited Indonesian and Indonesian-American speakers from GSJ's international extended family, offered honoraria, and made sure presenters were given the option to speak in Indonesian. It was very exciting to offer opportunities to young Balinese artists, and to raise funds to distribute to communities across the island of Bali.

All of the presenters—recommended by GSJ steering and artistic committee members—were given the flexibility to present on the topics that interested them, in a format and language of their choice. Putting Indonesian presenters at the center of this series on their own terms was one small but significant step towards increasing racial and cultural equity in GSJ. The work of anti-racism is endless, however. GSJ members continue to work in the greater fight against anti-Black racism, and to find the right place for a community gamelan in that fight.

This is a time of great transformation across the arts. For the first time ever, Gamelan Sekar Jaya offered online classes: Balinese Dance Fundamentals (focus on male style), Balinese Dance Fundamentals (focus on female style), Kidung (ceremonial vocals), Suling (Balinese flute), and Balinese Dance Basics for Musicians. We also offered a mix of online and in-person options for GSJ members to play Balinese music, learn new instruments, and work on new choreography.

Although our large ensembles are on hold, we were still able to host two master artists in residence, Bapak I Dewa Putu Berata (music) and Ibu Shoko Yamamuro (dance), thanks to the continued support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Walter and Elise Haas Fund, California Arts Council, and the City of Berkeley.

In the coming year, Gamelan Sekar Jaya has much more to offer the world! We plan to record and release a series of YouTube videos featuring Balinese master artists doing what they love most, and to hold more online events such as discussions and film screenings. We will host our first remote teaching residencies, with two Balinese master artists, Ida Bagus Made Widnyana and Dewa Ayu Tiara Dewi. Through this time, and onward, Gamelan Sekar Jaya's majority-white California artistic community will continue to listen and respond to the Balinese culture bearers who have graciously and openly shared their traditions and deep knowledge with us over the past four decades. ▮

BALI'S LIVING ARTS PROGRAMS

Videos are on the *Gamelan Sekar Jaya* YouTube channel.

• August 5

Conversations with Women Musicians in Bali, Part 1.

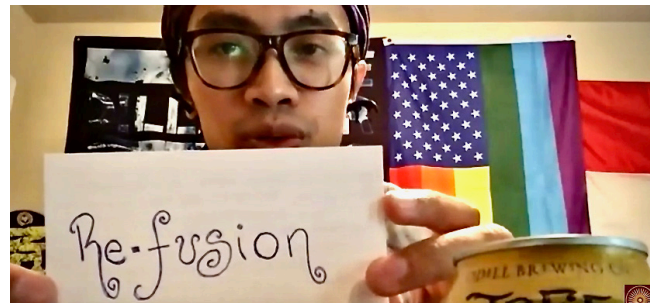
Sonja Downing (author of *Gamelan Girls*), interviews composers Ni Putu Hartini (daughter of Bapak I Wayan Suweca, GSJ's founding teacher) and Ni Nyoman Komang Srayamurtikanti (director of Sanggar S'mara Murti) about their experiences as women composers and musicians in Bali, especially during the COVID era. Simultaneous translation by Wayne Vitale. Bilingual.



• August 12

Conversations with Women Musicians in Bali, Part 2.

Artist-anthropologist Dewa Ayu Tiara Dewi talks about her work and life in Bali during the COVID-19 pandemic in this interview with Sonja Downing. Indonesian, with English subtitles. Live Q&A.



• August 19

Composing Between Baleganjur and Math-Metal

I Putu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena, Indonesian artist and scholar, discusses his recent arrangement of a math-metal tune re-contextualized for gamelan baleganjur, as it pertains to his ideas of darkness and musical fusion. English, with bilingual Q&A.



• August 26

Life and Work as a Balinese Artist in California

I Made Moja—a Bay Area-based Balinese visual artist, dancer, and shadow designer—talks about his family history, artistic process, the challenges of fatherhood, and shares his experience as a Balinese artist in California. English, with bilingual Q&A.



• September 2

Emiko Saraswati Susilo and Dewa Ayu Dewi Larassanti

This mother-daughter Balinese Arts power duo share their thoughts, and statements by others, on “being Indonesian in America” and “being Indonesian-American.” During the presentation, they also demonstrate how these identities are reflected in traditional and modern vocal styles. Open discussion follows. In Indonesian and English, except for the singing!

• September 9

The Gamelan Phenomenon in the United States

Nyoman Wenten discusses the history, current status, and likely future of the Indonesian performing arts in its home country and in the U.S., and considers why, in the past seven decades, gamelan music has become one of the fastest growing musical genres in America. English.



Photos, top to bottom, are from the programs on August 5, August 19, August 26, September 2, and September 9.