# "Prepare Your Bandwidth!": Teaching Gamelan Online at ISI Surakarta

**by Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun, with Jody Diamond**

*ISI Surakarta's classes were suspended like so many others. Faculty were asked to teach theory classes online and give assignments to students of performance classes to practice specific parts. But Thoyyib and Nanang sent a message to their students telling them to "prepare your bandwidth packages" for lots of online material. These are the teachers of the future here in Solo! —Kitise Emerson (email to Gamelan Listserv, March 15, 2020)*

*Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun (left) and Nanang Bayuaji in one of their many YouTube videos.*

**Your YouTube channel has quite a variety of videos—gender and rebab duets with Nanang Bayuaji, performances of your compositions, and some clips with you playing multiple instruments. When did you first start posting videos online?**
I have been actively using YouTube for streaming and performance documentation since 2016.

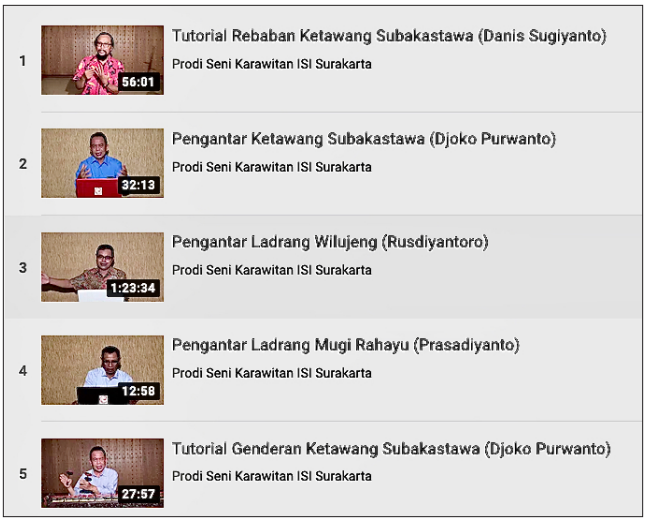
**In response to the pandemic, all courses at ISI Surakarta were converted to online instruction. What did you have to do to implement that?**
My work included designing lesson plans and online teaching materials: notation, study modules, video tutorials, PowerPoint presentations. And I helped senior lecturers make videos for their classes.

Once we had recorded the course content, I chose platforms that would be easily accessible to students, like Google Meet and Zoom. I also had to figure out ways to evaluate student work.

**What else have you done that has been part of the shift to online classes?**
I created the official YouTube Channel for the Karawitan Department. It currently has 41 videos, although access is limited to ISI students. The "ISI Surakarta Official" channel is public. I also designed a learning management system for courses in vocal music (*tembang*). I have also moderated several online seminars.

**What did you find challenging in these preparations?**
It was a challenge to figure out how to make videos that would be easy for students to understand, and to decide on which application to use to present them. In terms of hardware, I had to get together all the equipment for presenting online classes, like cameras, microphones, headphones, computers, and webcams. Then I had to find good camera angles, and figure out how to get a clear picture with good sound quality.

**How did the students manage this experience?**
There were several problems. The students were not used to learning remotely, and they didn't always have good Internet access. Data packages for time online were also quite expensive, although eventually there was some assistance from the government. Students did not have




*Some of the videos ISI Karawitan Department YouTube channel.*

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*Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun was born in Solo in 1994. He is a composer and musician on the karawitan faculty at ISI Surakarta. In addition to music for gamelan, he composes for dance, wayang, and films. He has presented pieces at many music festivals in Indonesia, toured and taught internationally, and produced albums of his own compositions.* [Translated from Indonesian—Ed.]

some of the larger and more expensive instruments at home, such as bonang, gong, kempul, and kenong that they might need for practicing or having a group rehearsal.

For students in Semester III and above there were relatively few problems because they already knew what it felt like to play gamelan together, and already understood the technique required to play various instruments.

Most of the problems were with students in the early semesters, who had not played or even ever touched gamelan instruments at all! I haven't figured out a solution to this problem yet.

**Is there anything you might continue doing in the future, even after you have resumed in-person classes?**
It has been good for the students and the faculty to become familiar with this technology, and learn how to adapt it to each of their needs. In the future, the online system can be used as an alternative—but not a replacement—for direct learning, more like a supplement that will expand the ways we teach and learn gamelan.

There has been another positive outcome. In preparing materials for teaching online, we made quality recordings of performances by some of the most senior artists on our faculty, like Sukamso, Al. Suwardi, Djoko Purwanto, and many others. Because of the high level of their knowledge, experience, and skill, these recordings will become valuable references that will enrich our educational and musical activities in the future.

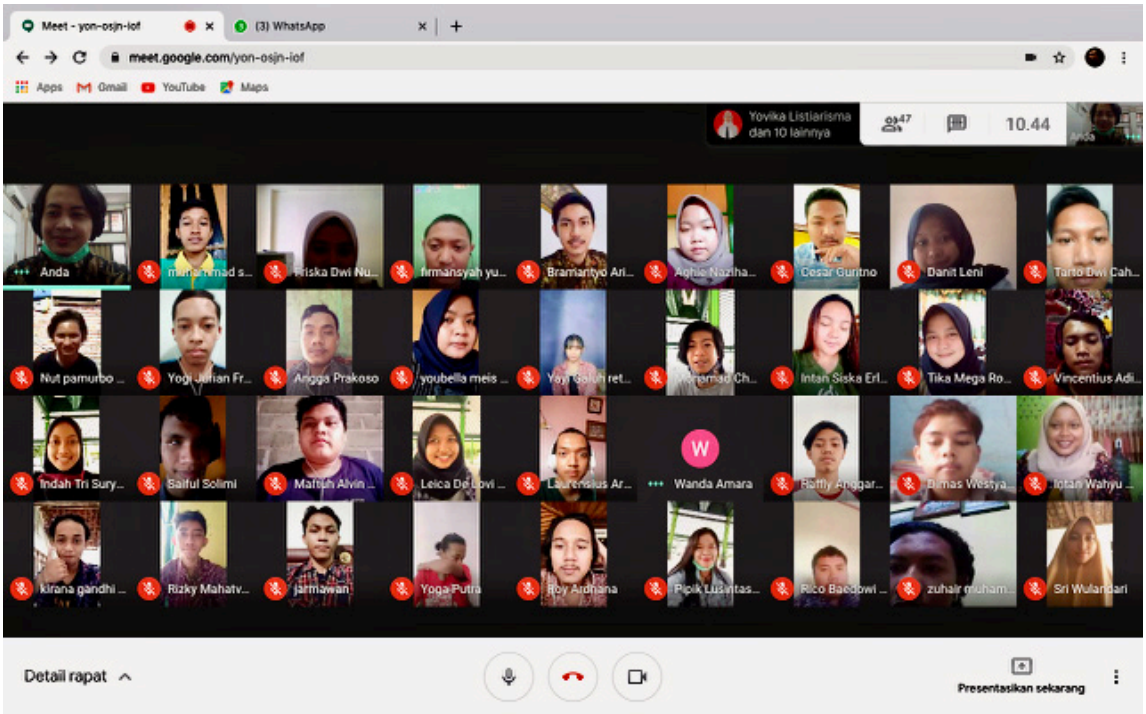
**In addition to teaching and designing the online classroom materials, have you had time for other projects or performances?**
I was involved in a remote collaboration with the Guangxi Symphony Orchestra for the opening concert of the 15th China-ASEAN Cultural Forum in Guilin, South China. I released a new single, titled *Baruna*, which was a collaboration with several musicians. And I have been involved in some online concerts and festivals.

The group Merdu Ruang asked me to be one of the music curators for a project called "Meruang" that compiled and distributed playlists to be used as music therapy for COVID-19 patients and health care workers.

**I enjoyed hearing your composition *Kantaka*—for three rebab, kecapi, and gender—at the International Gamelan Festival Solo in 2018. What inspired that?**
It was one of five pieces from my thesis[1] that were based on the philosophy found in the *Serat Kalatidha*, by Ranggawarsita. It was written in 1860, but has advice for our lives even today. *Kantaka* was based on the verse that said: "You may feel sad when you face difficult challenges, but you must rise up and realize that the trials you experience are part of your destiny." ◗

**Notes**

1. Wahyu Thoyyib Pambayun. *Kalatidha: Interpretasi Makna Karya Sastra Ke Dalam Karawitan Tradisi Kontemporer.* [Kalatidha: Interpreting Literature Through Contemporary Classical Music.] (This page includes a video.) ISI Surakarta, 2018. Also in the AGI Library at <http://www.gamelan.org/library>




*Students in an online class at ISI Surakarta, with Thoyyib in the top left corner.*