

# We Will Survive: Global Gamelan in a Worldwide Pandemic

edited by Jody Diamond and Linda Hibbs

*In March of the year 2020, the spread of the novel coronavirus on our planet changed our lives. For those who practice gamelan and related arts, the restrictions that followed interrupted the very essence of our music-making: to gather with friends and teachers, to react and respond to each other, and to honor both distant roots and local flowers in our ever-evolving global community. This issue of BALUNGAN is dedicated to the stories of gamelan during COVID, the challenges we faced, and the future that we now must envision and create together. We express our deep gratitude to all who contributed, and a sincere hope for everyone's health, safety, and strength of spirit.*

—Jody Diamond and Linda Hibbs

[A table of groups, countries, and authors is on p. 90.]



## GAMELAN GIRI KEDATON

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

At Gamelan Giri Kedaton, our first intuition when the Quebec government announced its preventive measures was to move all the gamelan instruments not belonging to *Université de Montréal* to members' apartments. We did not want to risk being locked out of our rehearsal room where half a dozen Balinese gamelan ensembles are stored. In addition to the gamelan gong kebyar and gamelan angklung sets acquired by the university in 1987, gamelan selonding, gamelan gong suling, gender wayang and gamelan gambang have been purchased by past and present members of Giri Kedaton. Over time, these additional instruments allowed the formation of smaller groups playing specialized repertoire that provide an alternative to full kebyar rehearsals, and, in this time, has allowed a handful of members to keep their hands hot on gamelan since the beginning of the lockdown.

For the greater good, it was imperative that we find ways to keep current Giri Kedaton members excited about gamelan despite being separated. To keep things interesting for the group, and to have a pretext

for bonding on a regular basis, we launched a series of YouTube programs to explore theoretical and historical perspectives about Balinese gamelan, something we rarely have time to dive into during hands-on rehearsals. [See the report by Pierre Paré-Blais on page 14.] Then came casual Zoom calls between musicians and attempts at coordinating a virtual kecak, but these only reinforced the fact that for the most part, our heads were elsewhere.

Other immediate consequences of the pandemic were the cancellation of all concerts and activities for the current artistic season, including I Made Terip's visit to Montreal as guest teacher and composer. This cancellation prompted us to rethink our upcoming objectives, wondering whether we'll be able to regroup at all to prepare for any potential performance. Meanwhile, a fraction of the full group is attending gender wayang and gamelan gambang rehearsals, as well as kendang classes, taking place in parks and open spaces on a regular basis. As Montreal has pretty strict regulations about loud sounds in public places, musicians have made panggul socks for gambang, and use rubber panggul on gender instruments.

I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara, who is currently undertaking a master's degree in composition at the University, leads these rehearsals. Questions arise as to what will become of his ongoing studies given the university's decision to hold all courses online for its fall semester. Despite worries and challenges, the experience of teaching gamelan during this restrictive situation has allowed Arya to draw interesting parallels with the way gamelan is taught and played in Bali. [See following essay.]

It should come as no surprise that support from the university has been very minimal on the gamelan front. As opposed to other ensemble courses were allowed to resume somewhat normally in September, the music department chose to single out its introductory gamelan workshop "*Atelier de gamelan*" by turning it into a virtual class. This oxymoronic decision is yet another discriminatory blow from above in which casual disregard will have threatening consequences for gamelan's presence on campus. As for Giri Kedaton, which is operating on more independent grounds, the future is unclear as we wait for grant results, and are still in the dark about access to rehearsal spaces.

*Laurent Bellemare, Musicology graduate student*



### Teaching Gamelan in Montreal and Bali

Teaching gamelan gambang to Giri Kedaton in Montreal is different from teaching gamelan in Bali. It required a new approach, because I only teach a few people at each rehearsal. In my opinion, it is initially very difficult to comprehend and study gamelan gambang pieces, because it is hard to hear the basic melody of the gangsa, and how it relates to the parts played by the other bamboo instruments. I try to explain to them how each instrument interacts with all the others. I have to sing the basic melody while I show each of them their part. And because the students wanted to follow the government recommendations for social distancing, they took turns attending, I had to spend even more time rehearsing than I had when everyone came each week.

Playing gamelan outdoors in a public space, surrounded by other people also enjoying the park, plus traffic noise and other sounds, was a challenging experience for some of the members of Giri Kedaton. One of them complained that “It is very hard to concentrate on playing [with all of this noise going on].” On top of that, the long pieces for gamelan gambang are harder to memorize than the other gamelan styles they have studied. This adds to their complaints, because they are more used to playing in a studio where there are no outside disturbances, although they have admitted to playing gamelan in the garden at the beginning of summer.

Ironically, the atmosphere outside feels more to me like playing gamelan in Bali. Usually when I play gamelan, it is not in a studio, so I am used to a noisy environment. When we play for a cremation ceremony, for example, the gamelan gambang is only one of several ensembles that are involved—there can also be gamelan gong kebyar, baleganjur, gamelan angklung, and more. All these gamelan play at the same time as part of the ritual activities. And because the gamelan gambang is among the quietest of all, it is quite common that we players can’t even hear the sound of the instruments we are playing! I manage to play by watching the hand movements of the other musicians to make sure that we are all playing together. Besides that, I can also hear the noise from the traffic, the sound of the cremation fires, people talking, and the cries of the peddlers selling things like ice cream.

That’s why the situation [of playing outdoors in Montreal] reminds me of playing gamelan in Bali. It gives me a chance to explain to my friends at Giri Kedaton that playing gamelan in this environment is just like playing gamelan at a ceremony in Bali. So, even though there are limits to what we can do during this time, we have a chance to expand our experience of playing gamelan during the pandemic and beyond.

*I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara, Composition graduate student*



### GAMELAN PENEMPAAN GUNTUR Barcelona, Spain

I’ve been thinking about it since the question was posted, but I haven’t been able to write a single line—it is still so recent in our memory that it just hurts too much to think about it. All our gamelan activity has been frozen, and we stopped seeing each other for a long time. Of course, we keep in touch through our smart phones but even this is increasingly scarce as time progresses and everyone is flooded with their own circumstances derived from the pandemic. As we are dependent on the Music Museum’s decision to allow access to the gamelan, it’s not really up to us to make plans. We live with the uncertainty of what will happen this next season. Are we going to be able to meet and rehearse? What conditions will be required before we are able to play together? Does it make sense at all to plan our usual annual concerts? Should we take a pause for all of next year?

Despite the lockdown, we found ways of not completely cutting off all our individual gamelan activity. In the early days of our group we decided to build ourselves some small instruments, so we could practice at home,

in order to maximize rehearsal time at the museum. We designed the simplest and lightest instruments we could think of. They were made by cutting aluminum plates tuned to match our gamelan, putting them over two pieces of wood to serve as a supporting frame, and attaching the keys to the frame with padded velcro strips for easy mounting/unmounting, high enough to be able to damp the keys as we would do in our gangsa. We called these little portable metallophones *gamelinus*.

For the past few years, we have been building them in the Baschet Sound Sculpture Workshop at Barcelona University, where some in our group have studied or currently work. Everyone who joins the gamelan can have one. We also produced a wealth of audio and video recordings to use at home with the gamelinus practice. After some months had passed and with no good news on the horizon, we began to play the gamelinus individually, along with our pre-recorded materials.

We resumed our rehearsals at the museum in October. Fortunately, we are not considered a “social gathering,” but a sort of “work group,” therefore, some of the security restrictions decreed by law, like keeping physical distance, do not apply to us. We have to use masks at all time inside the museum, and we have to disinfect instruments and panggul after each use, but we are grateful for not being required to keep social distance; we can play in our usual formation. Our annual concerts are still scheduled. We have also discussed that in the eventuality of another lockdown, our Plan B will consist of recording more audiovisual content, so all of us can study our own parts at home, while wishing for at least some group rehearsals in order to put everything together before the actual show.

*Jordi Casadevall, Founder*



**GAMELAN GENTA KASTURI**  
**Kansas City, Missouri, USA**

We are a community Balinese semaradana gamelan in Kansas City, established in 2003 by I Ketut Gede Asnawa and the members of his family.

On February 22 we announced that our “Annual Spring Workshop and Concert” of Balinese music and dance would be March 21. On March 11 we sadly canceled the concert, and soon stopped our twice weekly rehearsals. For a while, we held regular weekly meetings via Zoom to socialize and plan for the future. A few of our members have instruments at home and studied new pieces. Our director tried taking some kendang lessons with our former director over Zoom, but this proved too challenging due to latency problems with sonic delay.

On June 14, we had our first small group rehearsal since the shut-down. We found a way to practice safe distancing outdoors and got to dust off a few pieces from our repertoire!

Two of our members are working on creating videos for teaching interlocking gangsa parts, with the sangsih and polos parts panned hard left and right and both parts displayed using a split-screen.

We were excited to read about Abby Dolan’s Virtual Gamelan Instruments at Bucknell, and we took a little time to try them out. Alas, we have not yet found a way to use them directly as a teaching or learning tool. We made some suggestions to her for inter-networking to allow real time collaboration at a distance, and were excited to learn she intends to work on such capability.

With the shorter days of fall coming on, we have recently curtailed our midweek evening rehearsal until it is again safe to rehearse indoors, but will continue our outdoor garden rehearsals on Saturday mid-mornings as long as weather allows.

*Malcolm Cook, member & Business Manager*



**SEKAR ENGGAL**  
**London, England**

The Sundanese group Sekar Enggal rehearses at City University, London. The coronavirus (as we were still calling it then) first impacted the group on 14 March, which was just before official lockdown brought the whole of the UK to a standstill.

Together with students at Royal Holloway, University of London, we had worked very hard to prepare a nice program of gamelan degung, also including some kacapi suling, angklung buncis and ngék-ngék tarawangsa pieces for a concert at the London School of Theology. Unfortunately the social distancing advice made it impossible for us to go ahead, and the concert was canceled at the last minute (and after the instruments had been transported). We were also due to play at the wedding of one of our members at the end of June in the idyllic surroundings of Richmond Park, but the wedding has been postponed until June 2021.

Sekar Enggal members often have social gatherings on Zoom on Monday evenings, when we normally rehearse. We don't yet know when our latihan can resume. The issue is not so much the rehearsal itself, as there is plenty of space for social distancing in the gamelan room at our school. The problem is getting there, which is impossible without everybody spending a great deal of time on public transport during the rush hour.

*Simon Cook, Director*

L to R: Jade Flahive-Gilbert, Tasha Prendergast (who was supposed to get married), Katie Bruce (back turned), Rob Campion, Aidan Maier. Photo by Oom Cook, June 2019.



## GAMELAN ENCANTADA

**Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA**

When “stay at home” orders were first being introduced in New Mexico, we were about 10 days away from a concert we had been preparing in memory of Gamelan Son of Lion’s Barbara Benary, featuring compositions by her and other GSOL composers. At that time (mid-March), gatherings of more than 50 people were not allowed, and it was predicted that the limit would be 10 or fewer by our concert date, so we decided to cancel, as did so many others.

Fortunately, one of our members had made numerous rehearsal recordings on her phone, in order to practice on her own. We decided to edit the best of those together into a virtual concert, which we posted on our website, along with a PDF of the program, so that people could follow along.

It was a great way to focus on something positive during that time, and we were able to finish the project by the

date of what would have been the live concert. We sent the link out to the people on our mailing list (who had already been notified of the concert cancellation); we received so many wonderful responses, it was really worth the effort!

Although we have not met since completing that project, we have stayed in touch. Some of the members are working on their skills for more advanced parts, and I have been sending them videos, notation, and other instructional materials to help them in their individual practice.

We were hoping that at some point during the summer we might be able to meet as small “study” groups (3–4 people vs. all 10 of us), but we all agreed that doesn't feel practical yet or even enjoyable, as what we really love (in addition to the music itself) is the energy of the whole ensemble gathering together. So the priority is to take care of ourselves and each other by staying home. As far as the future goes, we'll just have to wait and see. . . Until then, we hold the music in our hearts.

*Jenny DeBouzek, Director*

L to R: Jenny DeBouzek, Bob Kasenchak, Chris Morosin, Brendan Rome, Kristen Keilman, Devin Williams, Mike Russo, Oscar Alcalá, Sooz Hoffman.



## GAMELAN SANTIAGO

**Santiago, Chile**

Sadly, because of COVID, all our activities had to stop in March, and the pandemic is still really strong here. We are a young group, only one year old (not counting the little time we had pre-COVID). We are basically an ongoing workshop within the Indonesian Embassy in Santiago, and the only gamelan in Chile. We have a lot of enthusiasm to do nice things with the gamelan here, and we hope in South America also.

Last December we had a workshop with the teacher of Sang Bagaskara, the gamelan ensemble in KBRI Buenos Aires; he is the husband of the Indonesian Ambassador to Brazil. We had a lot of plans for 2020—the classes in March had 20–30 really nice people—until the coronavirus came and we had to be in lockdown. We can't get to the gamelan yet, or do anything about that, so we just wait and study “theory” from home (including reading issues of *Balungan*).

*Nicolás Del Pino, Martín Reyes, and Sofía Paladines,  
Co-directors*



**GAMELAN DANANDA  
Melbourne, Australia**

*Due to the current COVID-19 situation there are no public rehearsals at this time, but we are looking forward to reopening as soon as possible. We are taking hygiene, student capacity, and distancing recommendations very seriously and many new safety measures have been employed at our Thornbury studio. Please stay connected to our social media channels to be kept up to date with our return to glorious music making. In the meantime, please stay safe and patient with each other (from the website).*

Just before the official lockdown in March, our group, a community-based Balinese gamelan kebyar, decided to stop rehearsals and split the instruments up so people could practice at home, with an option of online lessons. I brought some instruments home to make tutorial videos but I wasn't able to do as many as I would have liked; however, online private lessons continued. The videos were only meant as a stop-gap until things got back to normal, but here we are four months later in our second wave.

Positive insights gained from this situation are that video content is useful for new and prospective members; and private lessons are desirable—so both will be part of our future teaching activities.

The future of rehearsing in real life is uncertain, but we are looking into creating simple substitute instruments for outdoor rehearsal and as take-home practice tools. These will be light, compact, rugged, and easily assembled so that we can relocate to various locations or be able to avoid sudden weather changes. (In Melbourne? . . . Surely not!!) They will not be pretty, or timbrally accurate, but the size, feel, and tuning will match our kebyar and prepare players for the special occasions when the “real” gamelan will be played.

Obviously, strict hygiene and interaction protocols will now become part of every gathering. No more shared tea and snacks, no more swapping instruments within a session, and who knows how much harder interlocking parts will be with 2 meters [6.5 feet] between players!

*Jeremy Dullard, Founder and Director*



**KEMBANG ARTS  
Croydon, England**

The first lockdown in England began in March and since then there have been very few opportunities for our gamelan community to play music together. (Jade plays in London with Sekar Enggal, the South Bank Gamelan Players, and Asada Duo; Eka plays with Sekar Enggal, and is a dancer for Asada Duo.) During the months when we had no work, we created Kembang Arts, a project to share Indonesian arts and music through workshops and performances, with opportunities for creativity, mindfulness, and learning. We planned to start later in the year, thinking that in-person sessions would not be possible until schools opened again.

Croydon Council wanted music workshops for young refugees from Asian, Middle-Eastern and African countries, including Vietnam, China and Afghanistan. Their summer program was located in a beautiful historic Quaker building, where we keep a gamelan degung, so logistically it worked out very well. We were delighted that these workshops could take place.

The big challenge for us was following all the government's pandemic guidelines: no sharing or swapping of instruments during a session (so normal during gamelan workshops!), a lot of hand sanitizer, a very spread-out gamelan, and finding ways to clean and disinfect the instruments safely, amongst other measures. Although these extra health and safety concerns were rather stressful, we were very pleased that the teenagers had an opportunity to experience a different kind of music, explore their creativity, and learn about Indonesia—we all had lots of fun.

England is currently in a second lockdown, but after this we hope to continue to share Indonesian music and arts with the people of Croydon.

*Jade Flahive-Gilbert and Eka Rahmawan, Co-founders*



## U.C. BERKELEY BALINESE GAMELAN Berkeley, California, USA

When the pandemic hit halfway through the semester's intensive in-person learning, we suddenly needed to shift gears. Both my classes—Balinese Gamelan (a performance ensemble co-taught by myself and Dewa Putu Berata) and Music, Theater, and Ritual of Bali (a lecture course with a hands-on component)—had to switch to remote learning.

Pak Dewa and I wanted the students to continue to have a “live” gamelan experience, so we held *kecak* sessions via Zoom and then put together a *kecak* video at the end of the semester that combined recordings of students from both classes on a volunteer basis. Many thanks go out to Pak Dewa's two children, Dewa Ayu Larassanti and Dewa Dodé Sanjaya who helped by playing on the original video that was sent out to students. They also helped during some classes by demonstrating interlocking parts or playing a beat and gong part which I could not do remotely due to the time lag of Zoom. A kind student, Amy Liu, edited the parts together.

Of course, while there are limits to video editing such precise rhythms—the interlocking would have been much cleaner performed live—all the students were very moved by the experience and happy to continue our community spirit during this time.

Students in the lecture class always do final group performance or research projects. This time the groups came up with innovative solutions for these performances. One group, which had special *baleganjur* workshops with Pak Dewa, composed and edited together their own *baleganjur* composition (videos of the *kecak* and *baleganjur* are on YouTube). Other groups adapted Balinese pieces or composed their own, using whatever instruments they had at home. This was a fun and successful project.

We continued our gamelan class meetings with Zoom sessions to learn about Balinese concepts through demonstrations and discussions. We had been intensively working on a complex composition by Pak Dewa, and were to perform in a noon concert, which was canceled. I had videotaped segments of the piece during class while Pak Dewa was teaching parts; I edited these together to show on our last day on Zoom. Just getting together to go through these pieces meant a lot to the students, especially those who were graduating. The community spirit on that last Zoom class was palpable—not a dry eye.

Pak Dewa and I are currently teaching gamelan completely via Zoom from our respective homes, where we each have a *gangsra*. I gave an introductory class from the gamelan room at U.C. Berkeley, and Pak Dewa and I taught a second class there to demonstrate the way parts fit together. I augment the online classes with lectures and videos.

The students in this semester's gamelan class are learning more about theory and context than they normally would in the performance ensemble, and they are being taught to notate what they learn (which we rarely do in normal gamelan classes). They will do projects at the end of the semester to either compose or adapt pieces, editing together the parts. Since they don't have Balinese instruments at home, I asked them to transfer the parts onto whatever instruments they do have. We have two students from China who both happen to play the *guzheng* [Chinese plucked zither]; they will try to play the *kotekan* of the piece we are working on, one on *polos* and the other on *sangsih*.

Above all, the emphasis is for the students to have the experience of memorizing, playing, and enjoying pieces as much as possible in this situation. Students in this class who have played in the group for several years tell me it gives them a new appreciation for gamelan from new perspectives.

*Lisa Gold, Lecturer and Gamelan Instructor*



## MEKAR BHUANA Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

The onset of the virus had a huge impact on our activities. There were no practices or performances starting around late February, when we had our last practice together for our *pelegongan* and *semara pagulingan* group as well as our family *selonding* and *angklung* group. By the beginning of August it had been more than five months. Our private students and study groups are no longer able to attend. This will not come back in a hurry as Bali is not going to open to international tourism any time soon.

While we have been teaching gamelan and dance virtually since 2012, there is less interest now, although we are still consulting with a few PhD students. Fortunately we still have customers at our online store. Restrictions of international postal services have complicated things a little but it is currently our main lifeline. Perhaps since there are more people worldwide staying at home who want to play gamelan, there has

also been an increased interest in the portable practice instruments we produce.

We keep connected with our musicians and dancers via WhatsApp groups and social media. We have also initiated a weekly livestream on Balinese gamelan and dance topics, which we hope to continue after the pandemic. We gave two talks in the Nusantara Arts Gamelan Masters Lecture Series: one about our efforts to educate people about the dangers of single-use plastic; another on our film *Nyejerang Swara*, about a rare type of gamelan selonding.

We have distributed food parcels to our musicians and dancers (not wrapped in single-use plastic!) to support them as much as we can. There is no tangible financial support from the government in Bali for gamelan musicians and dancers. The only food parcels from the government are at the banjar or village level, and there are some individual donations.

In August we were one of 200 groups invited by Bali's Cultural Department to create a virtual performance. Our short film *Waliang* [Balinese: bring back] focused on the plastic waste issue, expressed love for Bali's nature and culture, and highlighted the idea that gamelan music can stay alive even in a global pandemic. This project was a challenge because groups were not able to gather together to practice or perform.

We do not plan to have any practices until it is really safe to do so—when a vaccine and effective treatment is available. It is too risky otherwise, especially considering that Indonesia, particularly Bali, has increasing cases from day to day, and Indonesia has entered a phase currently called the "New Normal."

*Vaughan Hatch, Founder; Putu Evie, Director*



#### SEAN HAYWARD

##### Solo, Central Java, Indonesia

When the pandemic hit I lost my Fulbright grant and was told to go back to the US. Instead, I decided to stick around in Solo. Events completely stopped for quite sometime, but soon enough, livestreaming of performances, presentations, and lectures became standard practice.

Don't really make any money these days, but staying at home all the time isn't too expensive anyway. I'm

fortunate that it hasn't been particularly stressful for me personally in that regard.

Very early on, individuals here stopped quarantining, and instead adopted an informal policy of *kampung* isolation. People interacted only with those who lived close by and outsiders were seen with distrust.

During the whole period of initial quarantine, I spent time mixing old audio projects, practicing calung, and taking more than the usual amount of time to relax and reflect. Playing calung just isn't the same by yourself; it's hard to stay motivated. Eventually, I was able to have individual lessons with Pak Darno Kartawi in my home.

In recent months I have had the chance to play in three different livestream concert series. I joined Wahyu Thooyib for the *New Tradition* concert (during rehearsal we recorded a music video of his piece "Baruna" and released it as a single); my new lute trio, *Cenglu*, played at *Bukan Musik Biasa*; and I'll perform with a calung ensemble in the *Banjoemas Art Festival*. Live performances are slowly starting up again too (whether this be well-advised or not is another matter).

It's strange; most things are open now and daily life is very similar to how it was before the pandemic. Just the concerts are gone, and the masks are on. There's an "x" marked on every other seat in most public locations, but a lot of the time people just sit on them anyway. Cases go up daily, but it seems people have mostly lost the strength to stay home now.

I've forgotten a mask once or twice leaving the house—as soon as you get on the motorbike with out it you feel naked. Feels like driving fast with no helmet. I don't know if it will ever feel normal to drive maskless again.

*Sean Hayward, performer/composer/independent scholar*



#### DARNO KARTAWI

##### Solo, Central Java, Indonesia

The onset of the pandemic was a shock to many. More than a few people were frustrated, although some were quick to adapt. I am a teacher of traditional Javanese music at the university level, but continuing class activities as normal was difficult. To study performance skills you need to play together in a big group and have access to gamelan instruments, but neither of these two things were possible. We were not able to practice together because it would have been against the health protocol rules, and it would be difficult for each student to have access to gamelan instruments.

Nevertheless, since classes had to continue, I decided to create new opportunities for studying online. To address the practical component of the course, I created groups of students into “zones,” according to where they lived, so that they could play together in smaller groups without violating the COVID restrictions. The results were not perfect, but this structure did allow students to continue with lessons that were somewhat normal.

*Darno Kartawi, Karawitan faculty, ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia) Surakarta*



### **GAMELAN SON OF LION**

**New York City, New York, USA**

Our last rehearsal on Tuesday, March 10, was like any other. We had no idea what was coming! But by Monday, March 16, New York City had pretty much shut down for all but essential workers.

The eleven of us haven’t been back together since then. We haven’t made definite plans for when to return. There’s some interest in getting together, if only with a smaller group. We are all wrestling with what feels safe to us at this time.

We recently lost our long time Artistic Director, Barbara Benary, who died of Parkinson’s disease, on March 17, 2019. She co-founded the group with Philip Corner and Daniel Goode in 1976, and built all the gamelan instruments (with the later addition of bonang and gongs by Suhirdjan). We had a Memorial Concert for Barbara in December of 2019 featuring her music and wayang puppets, and we were in the midst of working on a number of new compositions.

Most of the music we play is composed by group members. My gamelan music folder currently includes “Haiku” (Layne Negrin), “A Day in the Life of a Melody” (Laura Liben), “Scherzolan/Scarce Lawn” (Skip La Plante), and “Underdevelopment” (David Demnitz). It also includes a few oldies but goodies: “Halloween” (Jody Kruskal) and “Eine Kleine Gamelan Music” (Daniel Goode). Jody Diamond’s composition “Kenong (for bonang)” is part of our repertoire, but her commute to our rehearsals takes so long (train and subway), that even if we do start meeting in the city again, it will still be a challenge for her to join us.

We’ve been meeting every Tuesday for as long as I can remember—since I joined the group in 1983. It feels very strange to have suddenly had this evening free for the last eight months. I hope we’ll get to continue working on the pieces we started. I think we all miss playing together.

*Laura Liben, member since 1983*



### **GAMELAN LANGEN SUKA**

**Sydney, Australia**

Since we had to stop playing earlier this year due to COVID, I’m afraid Langen Suka Javanese gamelan has not been active at all, except for members keeping up with each other and chatting on our WhatsApp group. We don’t know when we will be able to resume our meetings at this stage.

The instruments are at the University of New South Wales, and we were informed that we can meet only when the campus reopens. Campus officials had hoped to open in August, but given the progression of the pandemic that was overly optimistic.

I became director of the Sydney University Gamelan Society in 1988, which later became the current group. Langen Suka has grown in membership over the years and collaborated with guest teachers and performing artists from Australia and abroad. So it is quite sad that we have not been able to continue. As with many groups tied to universities, the instruments are not able to be accessed at the moment, even to take home and practice or try playing online.

*Vi King Lim, Director*



**GAMELAN TUNAS MEKAR  
Denver, Colorado, USA**

Gamelan Tunas Mekar ceased rehearsals in mid-March, amid country-wide shutdowns. Founded in 1988, our ensemble meets regularly twice a week, on Sunday afternoon and Tuesday evening. We often perform locally in Colorado, and recently returned from our 2019 tour of Bali (with support from the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation), which included performances at the 41st *Pesta Kesenian Bali* and the *Gelar Kesenian* in Karangasem. On Sunday, March 8, we held our last full rehearsal, and on March 12 our board made the decision to go on hiatus amid the growing pandemic—prior to the issuing of stay-at-home orders from the city of Denver and state of Colorado. Though we were planning for a month-long break, it rapidly became clear that rehearsals and meetings would be on hold indefinitely.

Initially, we held weekly Zoom coffee hours—a chance for our group to catch up, socialize, and check in with each other from our homes. This gradually moved to our regular Sunday meeting time, with educational Zoom calls led by our artistic directors Bapak I Made Lasmawan and his two older sons, I Putu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena and I Made Tangkas Ade Wijaya, focusing on topics ranging from gong cycles and *angsel* to *kotekan* and cosmology.

Our meetings included trivia games (about our group, the things we were learning, and general knowledge of Bali and Balinese gamelan), board meetings and business, time to talk, and a tongue-in-cheek performance of “*Cat-Cak*” arranged and edited by Putu Tangkas (coinciding, coincidentally, with *Tumpek Kandang*, the Balinese ceremony commemorating the animals in your life).

In June we discussed tentatively resuming some gatherings to play together in small numbers, socially distanced, outdoors, in masks, with members spread out to minimize contact. We held our first of these “non-rehearsals” on June 14, in the backyard of our banjar rehearsal space, workshopping new compositions by Ade Wijaya and Putu Tangkas, and playing through new and traditional repertoire for gamelan *angklung*.

As an ensemble, we remain cognizant of the ever-changing situation and the need to remain cautious in our meetings. We continue to emphasize that these gatherings are informal and possibly temporary; we will likely need to cease meeting in person again.

With a return to live concerts still up in the air, we are additionally looking at virtual options for collaborative work and applying for grants and funding to cover the deficit caused by our lack of performance. As a group, we are hopeful for a return to our full-ensemble rehearsals, and we continue to check in with our friends, family, and collaborators in Bali.

*Elizabeth McLean Macy, Secretary*

*I Putu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena, Artistic Director*



**WARSAW GAMELAN GROUP  
Warsaw, Poland**

The pandemic seriously affected our work in April and May during the lockdown in Poland. We were forced to stay home. We kept in touch and tried to do some things online together. The main problem was that most of us don’t have gamelan instruments at home. Normally, during rehearsals and performances we use the *pelog* gamelan that belongs to the Indonesian Embassy in Warsaw, or the bigger *slendro-pelog* set owned by the University of Warsaw Musicology Institute.

Instead, we focused on practicing and learning new vocal parts. We also collectively played a few simple pieces at our homes, adding recordings track by track, using available instruments: gamelan, musical toys (mini-gamelan), Orff instruments, and even a set of bottles tuned to *slendro*. (Some of the results were posted online in the Polish new music magazine *Glissando*.)

Warsaw Gamelan Group is the only Javanese gamelan in Poland. We play both traditional Javanese gamelan and contemporary compositions. We often travel all over Poland to play and have taken part in some prestigious international festivals, including celebrating the 100th birthday of John Cage, and collaborating with Indonesian jazz pianist Dwiki Dharmawan during his tour of Poland.

Our group has a long history and we were not used to not being able to perform together. In late summer our group functioned more normally and started to have a busy schedule. We gave concerts in August and September, and performed a *wayang kulit*. The current restrictions in Poland apply more to the size of the audience (the limit is 50% of the hall capacity) than the number of artists. The performers must keep a distance of 1.5 meters [5 feet] from each other if the space on the stage allows this.

Unfortunately, we have recently experienced a drastic increase in the number of the COVID-19 infections in Poland and, despite the government assurance that there will be no second lockdown, it is only a matter of time until new restrictions will appear.

*Dawid Martin, Artistic Director*



### OTONOMORI GAMELAN STUDIO

Tokyo, Japan

From the end of March to the beginning of June, all courses and lessons were stopped by the government's Declaration of Emergency. I felt seriously depressed being torn apart from my gamelan friends and family, and I know many others felt the same. Almost all performances were canceled, including an annual outdoor concert in May, and the Asagaya Balinese Dance Festival, which would have celebrated its 20th anniversary this year.

We gradually restarted our activities in early June, but with fewer students than usual. Many were still worried about the possibility of infection during the lesson, or while commuting. Everyone wears a mask, and all instruments are 1.5m [5 feet] apart. Teachers wear transparent face-shields plus masks while teaching. We avoid playing reyong in the usual way, instead assigning a pair of gongs to each player, like in baleganjur. I used to teach gender wayang to a few people as a group, but now I teach privately, with the instruments 2 meters [6.5 feet] apart. It is totally strange and inconvenient for us, but we think something is better than nothing.

My gamelan *geguntangan* [small Balinese theater ensemble] group, **Mametangan**, has not yet been able to start rehearsals. Because our ensemble has several *suling* players, we are more cautious about the possibility of infection. In addition, we can't help being close to each other and feeling each other's breathing, as it seems an essential part of performing our music. We had a concert scheduled for July, but I substituted our gender wayang duo, **Padma**. I have instruments at home and my husband is my *pasangan* [partner], so it is less risky and easier for us, although I miss my group so much.

Some of us who teach Javanese or Balinese gamelan at universities have been asked to teach online. I have been giving video lectures once a week for more than two months to 22 students who have never touched any

gamelan instruments. Possibly I will be allowed to teach face-to-face in July, unless the situation becomes worse.

On July 11th Padma performed in a concert with Japanese Noh musicians and a group of percussionists of western classical music. The concert staff said it was the first concert after the "self-restraint request" that had lasted two months. The audience kept two seats distance between each person, and they had to leave the hall in a strict order to avoid becoming a crowd.

Several gamelan groups and dance groups have gradually started their activities, while they cautiously struggle to find a comfortable but efficacious way of rehearsing: wearing masks or face guards, keeping social distance, not having food nor snacks during rehearsals, and frequently opening the windows and doors.

My regular class of Balinese gamelan at Otonomori gamelan studio had 11 students registered, but recently only four or five people have come. So it is relatively easy to have gatherings of not too many people and keep the required distance. Yukie Miyamoto invented a "COVID-19 reyong" arrangement. The instrument is divided into two parts, and she added two reyong tones from other sets, so that both players have the necessary tones. One has *deng, dung, dang, ding, dong, deng*; the other has *dong, deng, dung, dang, ding, dong*.

Both Kayo Kimura (one of the leaders of the Javanese gamelan group **Lambang Sari**) and I were forced to teach gamelan students online who had no access to instruments. I encouraged the students to sing, clap hands, and pat laps to experience the gong punctuations, reyong and kendang rhythms, and kotekan patterns of gangsa, and to understand and listen to the musical structure of the ensemble as a whole. Kayo made several video clips with only two or three players to show what each instrument should do during the musical flow, explaining each musical layer step by step. Of course we are not satisfied with the results. But at least we could do something.

I had an informal Zoom meeting with three friends who had tried online teaching of gamelan and dance, to exchange ideas about our shared experiences. It was great fun! Most importantly, we all felt that we were not alone in struggling with this weird situation. We acknowledged the significance of the physical space and the instruments, and agreed that gamelan needs a sense of intimacy and social bonds, as well as musical interdependence, indispensably embedded and enfolded in the same space. We should be close to each other physically, to say nothing of psychologically.

This meeting inspired me to plan a series of Zoom meetings of the musicians, ethnomusicologists, and dancers doing online teaching, as part of my research project focusing on the difficulties of teaching gamelan during COVID-19, both online and face-to-face. Last year, four of us had started exploring the transmission and teaching-learning of the embodied knowledge of traditional performing arts. We organized at least three meetings with

guest speakers: Japanese ethnomusicologists teaching Korean drum and Persian *santur*; performers of Japanese traditional music teaching in universities; and one session with two Javanese and two Balinese dancers. I hope to document our findings from an experience we have never had before, as well as our strange but sincere efforts to overcome the situation.

*Ako Mashino, gamelan teacher*

Photo by Yukie Miyamoto.



### GAMELAN SAMA-SAMA

#### Nerima-ku, Tokyo, Japan

We usually have rehearsals of Javanese gamelan once or twice a month. Everything is pretty basic, but we enjoy playing gamelan while we drink and talk with our friends. But by April, the coronavirus situation in Japan got so serious that we were not allowed to meet. We have not been allowed to play gamelan for months, and the gamelan room has become very quiet.

By June, there were fewer cases in Japan, and we were able to begin rehearsals. To guard against the virus, I prepared alcohol, gloves, and plastic panels to put between the instruments as “cough guards.” I told everyone, “When you come to rehearsal you have to wear a mask, bring your own drinks, and if you don’t feel well, stay home!” Even in this very unusual situation, we were glad to play gamelan again.

Many groups are now meeting virtually, and performing on YouTube or via livestreaming, in order to avoid transmission of the virus. But gamelan really ought to be in a place where people can gather, chat with each other, and play music together.

Whether we can continue to play gamelan or not depends on the situation with the virus. But I hope we can maintain “Sama-sama Gamelan” as a musical oasis for our friends.

*Kumi Masuda, Director*



### NCH (NATIONAL CONCERT HALL) GAMELAN

#### Dublin, Ireland

When the lockdown started in Dublin, we were just nearing the end of a six-month gamelan residency with Pak Sumiyoto from ISI (*Institut Seni Indonesia*) Yogya, so we were particularly sad to have to send him home one month early and then cancel all of our planned performances.

After my National Concert Hall gamelan classes were canceled, I was asked to make a few video demonstrations for the beginning and intermediate classes, just reviewing the theory and repertoire we had begun before the lockdown. A few members contacted me to let me know how much they appreciated those and how much they missed the gamelan.

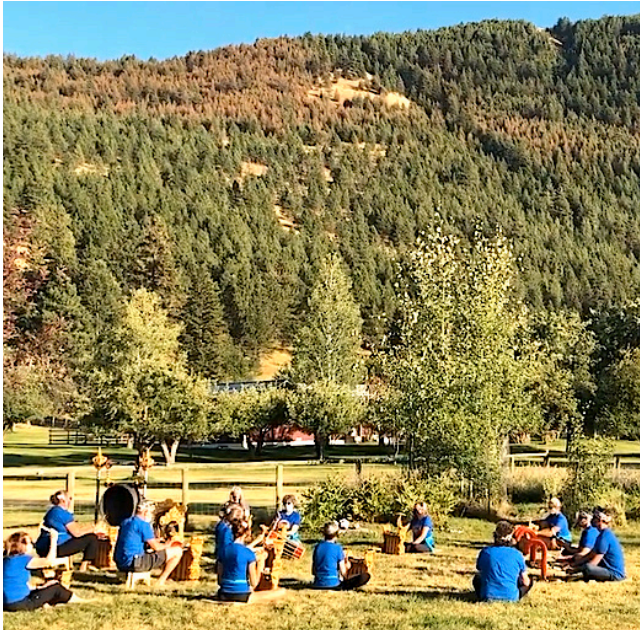
A little later in June, when restrictions were lifted to allow very small gatherings of people, my lead NCH Gamelan Orchestra was invited to perform for an online music festival. We couldn’t gather our gadhon group, so we had an unusual mix of bonang, peking, slenthem, siter, suling, pesindhen, and me drumming. We also used that opportunity to launch our debut online single “Embat,” which we had hoped to launch at our canceled end-of-residency concert, so we were delighted to finally release that. The online performance was an extremely positive experience for all the players involved. Everyone really appreciated the opportunity to play together again.

As for my gamelan module in University College Dublin (UCD), we switched to online classes for the last five weeks of the semester. I had visited the university to borrow a few instruments as soon as the lockdown was announced. In our online classes, we focused more on the theoretical aspects of the music we had been learning (like irama, bentuk, garap, inner melody), and I replaced our final concert with a written assessment. Students were not expected to sing or play at home, but I assigned them some listening, and we had online class discussions about the musical and cultural significance of respecting the instruments and learning each other’s parts and so on.

Looking ahead to next semester, university classes will most likely be a mix of online and in-class teaching, so I have developed an interesting plan to facilitate that, which I am quite excited about. We will combine gamelan and western instruments, so that students who can’t attend in person will be able to work out their garap on their

own instrument at home (since our slendro tuning at UCD is particularly close to western pitches). So this year we will be learning not only karawitan, but also campursari and kroncong, which I am really looking forward to! The National Concert Hall has not yet announced any plans for the coming year, so we are still waiting to hear how and when those ensembles may resume their activities.

*Peter Moran, Director*



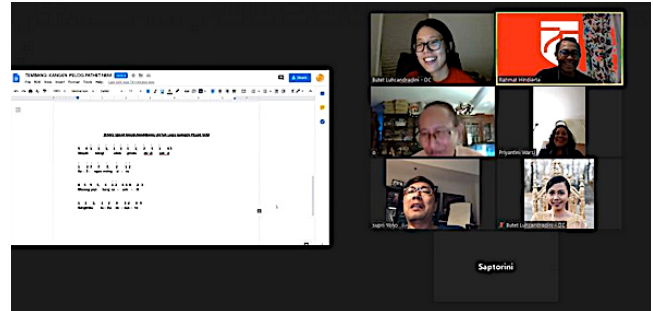
**GAMELAN MANIK HARUM**  
**Missoula, Montana, USA**

We moved our gamelan angklung rehearsals outside onto my backyard deck in June after taking a COVID-induced break that had started in March. We met weekly, all masked and socially distanced. Sadly, both our fall baleganjur gigs were canceled: the University of Montana Homecoming Parade; and The Peace Festival at Ewam, Garden of 1000 Buddhas.

To keep our motivation going, in September the group recorded and posted on YouTube a piece I had written earlier in the spring, titled *Menanti* [Waiting].

The weekend of October 24, Missoula was hit by record cold and snowfall, which effectively ended our outdoor practices. The plan is to regroup again outside when the weather allows, hopefully in early spring. If COVID numbers improve before then, we will see about practicing in a local school gym.

*Dorothy Morrison, Music Director*



**MURYANTO**

**Indonesian Embassy, Washington D.C.**

Since the Indonesian Embassy in Washington D.C. was closed to the public because of the coronavirus, the Embassy offered several virtual programs hosted by the Education and Culture Attaché program: Beginning and Intermediate Indonesian Language, Jaipongan Dance, Angklung with Indonesian songs, and Javanese Singing (Langgam/Nyinden).

Since the gamelan program was suspended, I taught the “Virtual Javanese Singing Class,” starting in September and continuing through December.

Almost 15 students registered for the class, and every person got a chance to sing as we went line by line; singing the first line, then the first two lines, then the first three lines, etc., until each person had learned the whole thing.

The advantage of an online class is that participants can come from anywhere. On the other hand, it is harder to give the students corrections. But I really miss singing with the group, so this is good for now.

These are some of the pieces we studied. Each starts with a Bowo Sekar, followed by a Langgam:

- Sinom, Yening Tawang Ana Lintang P6
- Dhandhanggula Rembulan, Wuyung P6
- Maskumambang, Kangen P6
- Dhandhanggula Nyidhamsari, Nyidhasari P6
- Dhandhanggula Sida Asih, Setya Tuhu P6
- Asmarandhana Jakalola, Dadiati P7
- Megatruh, Jenanggula P7
- Gambuh, Lelaledhung P7
- Pangkur, Lorobronto P6
- Kinanthi, Imbangana Katresnanku P6
- Pucung, Gubug Asmara S9
- Dhandhanggula, Sesidheman S9.

Everyone seemed to enjoy learning these beautiful pieces, and I enjoyed finding ways to teach them.

*Muryanto, Gamelan Director*



### JAMAN SUARA GAMELAN ENSEMBLE Zagreb, Croatia

Jaman Suara Gamelan Ensemble, founded in 2019, gathers students of music and enthusiasts interested in gamelan and Javanese culture. The gamelan we play is of Solonese provenance and owned by the Indonesian Embassy in Zagreb, whose Sanggar Merah-Putih offers courses in Indonesian language, traditional dances and gamelan. Aside from participating in touristic events organized by the Embassy, last year Jaman Suara gave two big performances: one at the Music Biennale Zagreb, and the other in collaboration with the vocal ensemble *Harmonija disonance* [Harmony of Dissonance].

On March 16, Croatia entered a full lockdown. Jaman Suara was scheduled to perform in April at the Academy of Music in Zagreb, but the concert was postponed almost instantly. Conditions in the capital were further aggravated by the magnitude 5.5 earthquake that hit Zagreb and its surrounding area on Sunday morning, March 22, causing much damage. Even though the city is located in a seismic area, strong earthquakes occur very rarely; the last earthquake of such impact happened in 1880—thus escaping people’s memory. Among the worst-hit areas was the city center, where the Sanggar we practice in is located. While the old building suffered damage to its roof, caused by the collapsed wall of an adjacent building, the gamelan was intact and our rehearsal space required only minor repairs. Still, the situation prevented us from practicing and all plans were put on hold until further notice.

Croatia gradually eased the lockdown by the end of May, in anticipation of the upcoming tourist (and election) season. Our group was invited to perform at the 54th International Folklore Festival, which usually focuses on traditional music and dance performed by “tradition bearers.” But since it was impossible to make arrangements with international groups, the Festival had to adapt to new conditions and temporarily change the concept. Jaman Suara was one of several local groups performing music from outside of Croatia, and for the occasion, we decided to present traditional repertoire in Yogyanese style, concluded by arrangements of Jaranan and “Jedna mala ružica,” a traditional Croatian song. We

were lucky to perform twice within the Festival, and on both days, the concerts were well-received and attended, although the second one was indoors and had a limited number of indoor seats.

After a summer break, members of Jaman Suara are slowly returning to the city. We will continue rehearsing in preparation for our next concert, scheduled for late November, when we will play Lou Harrison’s “Double Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Javanese Gamelan.” While the epidemic conditions in Croatia are far from good, we remain optimistic and do our best to stay healthy and safe.

*Julija Novosel, Artistic Director*



### BREMEN GAMELAN GROUP Bremen, Germany

The Bremen Gamelan group, which has its home in the Bremen overseas museum (*Übersee Museum Bremen*), stopped all musical activity in March. No teaching, no rehearsals, no concerts, no interactive activities. The museum was closed. We plan to meet in smaller private groups soon (playing pieces in “gadhon” manner or any other possible constellation), but regular rehearsals won’t start until later in the year. Also, the wonderful cooperation with the Hamburg Gamelan group, located in the Elbphilharmonie and lead by Steven Tanoto, was stopped by the virus. Today we would have had a concert with musicians from both of the groups, out in the countryside on the banks of a small river near Bremen. What a pity—but it is a concert that we do regularly every year in the beginning of July, so 2021 may hopefully be better!

*Jens Ohlrogge, musical support and organization*



## PIERRE PARÉ-BLAIS

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

I researched the potential of online gamelan practice for Gamelan Giri Kedaton early on in the pandemic, trying to find alternatives to practicing in person. For live performing, I tried the programs Jacktrip and Jamulus, neither of which I would consider “user friendly” for people who are not already somewhat tech savvy. I also tried JamKazam and Reaper’s Nijam, which are perhaps a bit more user friendly. We even gave Zoom a shot, just in case. None of these really worked for us. I could see them working fairly well within limitations for improvisation-based music like jazz, experimental and so forth, but Balinese gamelan was a definite failure. We attempted kecak with a kajar marking a moderate tempo, but after a four-beat cycle we were all getting delayed beats.

We have also dabbled in the “fake live” video, where recordings are made separately then edited together as one. Obviously this works very well. Our resident Balinese master, I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara, recorded master tracks of all the voices for a very basic one minute kecak with some members of the group. The video was then sent out with a set of instructions. Members of the group recorded their individual parts, which were then edited together.

My daytime job being in film post-production, I was comfortable with all the editing of both video and audio, but I must admit that part is very time consuming even for a professional editor like myself. With 12 individual camera feeds, a full group video would mean 18–20 video feeds.

In terms of software, I used Reaper for Audio and DaVinci Resolve for the video editing, both of which are sort of free (Reaper works on an honor system, free unless you use it professionally, and Resolve has a free version with some limitation that only matters for high level professionals). But both of these software programs are professional level and I would not consider them “easy” to pick up unless you have previous experience in editing video and/or audio. That being said, there are literally millions of tutorials online showing how to use both of these tools.

More importantly, I realized that while we had a lot of motivation early on in the pandemic for this type of project, interest among our musicians waned quite a bit as time went on, and so we have put these types of projects

aside for now. With our members being allowed to gather physically distant in parks or open spaces, some have resumed small group practices of gender, gambang or selunding with 4–7 people with masks sitting 2 meters [6.5 feet] apart. This is a direction we will likely go in for the beginning of our regular season this fall.

## Panggul & Kendang: online presentations

In these times of self isolation, our gamelan ensemble began streaming live discussions and presentations. The original idea was to simply keep our members engaged by sharing with them the kind of information we rarely have time to discuss when our efforts are solely concentrated on learning new pieces and repertoire. But while we’re at it, we figured, why not open it up to a larger audience as well!

The first week in late February was a “pilot” episode with Laurent Bellemare presenting his master’s thesis, “The History Of Gamelan In Montreal, from Colin McPhee to Today’s Balinese Gamelan Community.” The presentation was in French, and is on our social media pages.

For the second episode, we had a free-form conversation with guest artist I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara about various topics related to basic concepts of Balinese music. We talked about Balinese notation systems, how Balinese musicians perceive rhythm and how that differs from western rhythm perception, speed in modern Balinese music, how Balinese learn new pieces, and the challenges of teaching gamelan to Canadians. Other episodes included an introduction to the music of Java, by John Gilbert, and a discussion of the music of Northern Bali.

*Pierre Paré-Blais, Artistic Director*



## GAMELAN ENCINAL

Oakland, California, USA

Our ensemble was preparing to go into a studio in May to record a collection of my compositions for gamelan, which we intended to release sometime in 2021. The onset of the pandemic came right when we were getting to the point where we could really begin to refine the pieces as a whole, instead of focusing on tricky parts.

We are in permanent residence at Mills College, but within a week, we were unable to gain access to the instruments. None of us was allowed on campus, unless we were on-campus residents. About half of the ensemble

members were graduating students, who have now moved on to other locales. The group is made up of community members, graduate students, and undergraduate students.

In late June, the college administration allowed me access so I could record the gamelan. Patrick Liddell and I used those recordings to create a sample library of the instruments, so we could create demos of pieces at home.

We are using a set of instruments built by Daniel Schmidt with the assistance of Lydia Martín, myself, and various others. We used the same tuning that Lou Harrison and Bill Colvig used for the Gamelan Si Darius/Si Madeleine that they built at Mills in 1981. Their instruments' age was showing, so we decided to build a more robust set to replace them.

We are hoping that the recordings will make it easier for ensemble members to quickly get up to speed by the time we start meeting again, by being able to hear the pieces fully realized while learning them at home. We are remaining positive, and are hopeful that we will be able to begin rehearsals by 2021!

Personally, this has been a difficult time for me as an artist. The music I have dedicated myself to creating is driven by a yearning to work on and play music with others. Being unable to do so has been the hardest thing in my adjustment to living in a pandemic-ridden society. I miss the ensemble. I miss the camaraderie of my chosen artistic family.

*Stephen Parris, Director*



**PENI CANDRA RINI**  
**Solo, Central Java, Indonesia**

The arrival of COVID-19 had a big impact on my gamelan activities. New rules didn't allow us to gather in large groups, which became difficult for us gamelan players, as you need to play in a full ensemble. At the same time, I had to provide guidance (to my students) as a lecturer in the Performing Arts faculty of ISI Surakarta as we had to continue teaching. I had to transfer the sindhenan and music composition lessons online. It took a lot of hard work to continue teaching via various online avenues (Zoom, WhatsApp, and YouTube) to ensure that each student had access to the materials.

Doing all this online kept me very busy because it was all new to me as well as my students. I had to record tutorials of sindhenan, and go through the following process: talk with the team of teachers, agree on how to teach sindhen and karawitan, write the sindhenan notation, practice myself, invite several gamelan musicians to help play for the tutorial, record the instrumental parts only, record the instrumental tracks with the singing, send the notation to the students, upload the recordings to social media, set up a meeting online to discuss the results of their study, create an exam with the students uploading video recordings of themselves with the instrumental recordings I made earlier; and then evaluate all their work!

And there was a lot of sindhenan material required in this semester. As a result, I was busier teaching this term compared to before the pandemic. For the composition class I also had many problems. I had to give lessons online, the students had to present their concept for their compositions, and then they had to prepare and video the composition and upload that to social media so that we could see them on screen. Students doing a final project in composition had a lot of problems. They had to change their proposal to a minimalist format with very few musicians to suit the pandemic conditions, and just upload a recording.

As for other creative activities, all concerts were canceled. Therefore we had to have virtual concerts working together on an international and national level. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture provided a virtual stage project via their YouTube channel called *Budaya Saya* [My Culture]. I made a composition called *Tembang Doa* [Song of Prayer], and did a number of other virtual performances for this.

I have adapted to the new conditions for COVID, and followed the government requirement to restrict activity. My creative work continues, teaching activities are ongoing, and I am also a mother and a wife, working from home with optimized virtual media. As a singer and composer, I have had the opportunity to create music for several festivals and international collaborations, all online. What continues to be an obstacle is that the equipment for recording audio and video was inadequate. There is a need for good recording equipment, so that the tutorials can be documented in high quality suitable both for local students and the world.

The plan for the future? For the moment it is still the virtual stage, but I am sure that when the pandemic passes everyone will long to return to live performances. I believe that performing live on stage gives one a real feeling for the aura created by the interaction of sound, music, vocals, gamelan, the audience, and the stage lights and atmosphere. So we must and we will continue to develop creative ideas for those activities that are forbidden during the pandemic, so that when the world is healthy again, we will be ready to embrace the live stage and audience with hearts full of loving energy.

*Peni Candrarini, composer; faculty, ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia) Surakarta*



## JAVANESE GAMELAN COURSE

**Brisbane, Australia**

I teach Javanese gamelan at the Griffith University Queensland Conservatorium in Brisbane. The semester started as usual at the end of February but after just four lessons (one two-hour lesson per week), the class had to be moved online in accordance with the government health guidelines.

My students were mostly beginners. I tried to make the online activities as practical as possible, using audio and video files and asking them to play along using body percussion or appropriate vocal sounds. I found Benjamin Brinner's book *Music in Central Java* particularly useful for this. I set listening and critiquing tasks and also encouraged them to explore some online resources such as the *Gamelan Mecanique* from the website of *La Cité de la Musique* in Paris. I also took the opportunity to introduce them to a range of Balinese gamelan genres. YouTube was a useful resource for excerpts of wayang and gamelan groups performing around the world. The student feedback was very positive, though of course they would rather have been learning gamelan on the real instruments in person!

I was mindful of the students' mental health as they navigated their way through the early stages of life in a pandemic and I tried hard to provide enjoyable and engaging activities. I hope that I was able to instill in them a keen interest in and respect for gamelan that will stay with them until we can meet face to face again.

*Julia Pope, gamelan teacher*



## GAMELAN PACIFICA

**Seattle, Washington, USA**

Gamelan Pacifica went on hiatus because of the virus. We did our last concert in March, just before everything shut down. Our instruments all reside in a space at Cornish College of the Arts, which is closed; they are planning very limited use of the facility in the fall because of

inadequate ventilation. Spaces in the building will be made available only for single occupancy, which will hardly do for gamelan. The situation is complicated by the fact that I retired this spring. My office and large studio were the home for the gamelan during the 35 years I taught at Cornish. Now it seems they want to move the instruments to another space. They would like me to continue teaching gamelan as an emeritus professor, but there are no regular ensembles planned for the fall because of COVID.

So, things are in limbo right now. As an ensemble Gamelan Pacifica has not been trying to connect online, other than to say hello and ask how everyone is doing. We might work on mixing some recordings, tuning instruments, composing, and so forth. Of all the things I do musically, gamelan is the least satisfying thing to do online. To me, the presence of the full resonance of the instruments is what gamelan is all about. There is just no substitute for that. Better to wait until one can return to that. There is a concert producer in Seattle that has been wanting us to do a concert at Town Hall which they would livestream. It is a big space and we could "social distance" while playing. The problem is we have no place to rehearse where we could social distance in a similar way, so it doesn't seem possible.

## Merdu Ruang

Some recordings by Gamelan Pacifica were included in *Merdu Ruang*, a project in Indonesia to choose and distribute music to hospitals that could be used to help both patients and medical workers during the COVID crisis. The team looked for music that could create an atmosphere of "calm and quiet, safety, hope, and spiritual well-being," focusing on two musical styles: traditional Javanese and electronic.

I was contacted by Lani (Leilani Hermiasih), Joan Suyenaga and Suhirdjan's daughter from Yogyakarta, who is part of *Madjoe*, an Indonesian artists' collective that was involved in the project. She let me know that one of the curators, Wahyu Thooyib Pambayun, had chosen four pieces by Gamelan Pacifica as part of their playlist. (Some of the Merdu Ruang playlists, under the name *Meruang*, are available online.)

*Jarrad Powell, director*



**KRAUTGAMELAN**  
**Munich, Germany**

We started in March 2015 as a spin-off of the (non-official) gamelan study group of the Münchner Stadtmuseum. We have a small, basic, mixed set of pelog instruments, drawn from collections of Indonesian expats. They are partly historical, with the addition of some newer iron instruments from Solo. Our rehearsal room is my living room (13 m<sup>2</sup>) [140 square feet]. Alternatively, we play on the Gamelan Kyai Dipa which is located in the museum. We are eight non-professional musicians, all German, with ties to Indonesia.

The pandemical wave hit Germany at the end of February. The lockdown started and all social-cultural activities ended. The museum closed. Meetings were forbidden. All gamelan activities stopped. In conjunction with the pandemic metrics the restrictions later became looser. Since mid-July meetings were allowed again under defined hygienic requirements (rehearsal in a small living room still illegal). The museum opens partly, except the music department. No gamelan for now.

The Münchner Stadtmuseum is the biggest municipal museum in Germany. It consists of different architectural and historical buildings, which are largely technically outdated and under protection of the country's historical heritage. A reconstruction, highly needed, had to consider the heritage restrictions. Planning started in 1999 and ended in autumn 2019 with a financial commitment: a big, expensive, full-blown solution for almost every one of the museum's relevant wishes. *Juchuu!* [Yay!] Then, the municipal council postponed the entire project until 2026 or later, citing collapsed tax revenue. *Buuh.* [Boo.]

"Bronze. Bamboo. Beats." was the Munich Stadtmuseum's ten-day international gamelan festival in June of 2018, initiated and organized by Dr. Andras Varsanyi, who then retired. As of now there is still no new head of the museum's music department, hence no one is able, qualified, or assigned to make decisions. The possibility that we will someday be able to return to playing gamelan in the museum seems to have moved to an uncertain remote future.

Future activities? On the one hand we depend on the museum. The awareness and importance of gamelan is still low in Munich. An advocate is missing. Culture is sacrificed—and if the people who are engaged in culture believe that "gamelan" is a computer gaming convention, my hopes to play within this year on Kyai Dipa will vanish.

Maybe we could reconstruct our group into a kind of *ngamen* [busking] unit with up to 4 *pengamen* [street performers], to rehearse legally in my small living room. It's still a challenge to be a non-professional group with limited resources. The German gamelan community has no umbrella organization gathering all activities, events, etc. I know—it's always a question of funding.

But my hands-on experience in Indonesia tells me this: especially in the silent moments, you can very often hear somewhere nearby the sound of a gamelan.

*Jangan putus asa! Gong terakhir belum memudar! Sampai gamelan lagi,* [Don't despair! The final gong has not yet sounded! Until we play again,]

*Peter Rosen, Director*



**GAMELAN DADALI**  
**Moscow, Russia**

We were lucky to have performed in March just a day before Moscow was locked down due to COVID-19. After that, we had to stop rehearsing for six months, since the embassy was closed to the general public, and we could not retrieve the instruments from there.

Our group, the first in Russia, was established in 2017 under the patronage of the Indonesian embassy in Moscow. Our leader, Tri Koyo, studied at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. The dancers who perform with our group were able to continue practicing online, but for the gamelan, it turned out to be impossible.

After the Indonesian Embassy re-opened its doors on September 11, we started our classes again. Our first post-quarantine performance was on September 19th, with a wayang two days later. We did not wear masks during the events, since in Moscow the quarantine had eased. But when we had to make official pictures for the Indonesian press, we put them on just for the photo, as the rules had not eased in Indonesia.

How did the virus affect our playing? Certainly, it brought a lot of sadness and grief for the lost time that we could have spent practicing; at the same time, it gave us some space to rethink our attitudes towards priorities, including the place of gamelan in our lives. Personally, I have found an answer—I can live well without gamelan, but life is much better with gamelan.

*Julie Ryzhaya, gamelan member*



**BAMBANG SOSODORO**  
Solo, Central Java, Indonesia

The coronavirus, which at the moment is still attacking Java, is creating serious unease and difficulties for those who work in the arts, especially in Solo and surrounding area. Why is that? Because we live day to day, seeking income from one performance to the next. During this prolonged pandemic, many musicians have been forced to give up their chosen profession, and go into business.

Even though the situation is very hard, it hasn't meant that artists have given up—they continue to be enthusiastic about creating. I have participated in several events with young musicians in Solo that went ahead in spite of the pandemic. Several new groups have been created in response to our situation, like "*Gadhon Keliling Kampung*" [small ensemble that tours villages], and "*Ngredil*," which organized creative activities for children, led by students and alumni from ISI Surakarta. There has also been time to revive arts that are rarely performed, like the unearthing and remembering of the music for "*Bedhaya-Srimpi*," a classic dance from Kasunanan (Kraton) Palace in Solo. The gamelan at the Mangkunegaran Palace plays "*Sowan Rebon*" [Wednesday Recitals], and for dance practice with the Javanese dance group PaKaTi (*Paguyuban Karawitan Tari*).

The impact of the pandemic, in spite of the negative effects, has definitely made musicians more creative, like the creation of the virtual "*Ngamen Online*" [buskers online]. More and more of the teaching musicians are posting pre-recorded or streaming tutorials for lessons in gamelan and vocal music. Musicians are even participating in virtual wayang and dance performances.

I hope something can be gained from this dire situation affecting our country. As professional artists, we must learn this lesson: "No matter what, stay productive during the era of COVID!"

*Bambang Sosodoro, Karawitan faculty, ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia) Surakarta*



**GAMELAN KUSUMA LARAS**  
New York City, New York, USA

Gamelan Kusuma Laras meets at the Indonesian Consulate in New York City, with regular visits by our artistic director I. M. Harjito. We stopped rehearsing in mid-March.

I was emailing with Alex Yoffee (Artistic Director of Friends of the Gamelan in Chicago) about the fate of our groups and he asked me if I wanted to try playing together online. I sent the following report to the Dartmouth Gamelan Listserv:

Luckily, two Javanese gamelan players can still play together online, even with some delay, as long as one of the players is on gender, and the other plays rebab or sindhen (or, I would imagine, suling), since all of these instruments play behind the beat. So you can combine rebab and gender, or sindhen and gender. I have been doing this a lot with friends since March and it's actually really fun. We have been trying different ways to interact, and so far FaceTime with both players using headphones works the best. If one of the players can't use FaceTime because they don't have an Apple device, Google Meet works OK. Zoom is the worst in our experience.

It turns out you can also do it with three players! Pak Harjito, Marc Perlman and I played together the other day (*Mongkok Dhelik*, *Laler Mengeng*, and a couple of smaller pieces) and actually sort of kind of pulled it off! You have to put up with some sound distortion, especially on gender. We used Google Meet and turned off the video while playing, which worked better than with the video on, and we all wore headphones. The

various instruments we tried to play together were rebab, gender, suling, and sindhen. As long as only one instrument plays on the beat (gender), the audio lag/latency not a big issue.

*Anne Stebinger, Co-director*

Kendhang: I. M. Harjito; Pesindhen: Heni Sawitri, Denni Harjito. Photo by Jody Diamond.



#### **SUHENDI AFRYANTO**

**Bandung, West Java, Indonesia**

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on all aspects of life, without exception, including performances by artists from various fields. As a result of the pandemic, performing artists from the service sector are barely able to earn anything, and this has created the sudden arrival of a kind of “culture shock.” Certainly at the beginning of the pandemic, performing artists (especially gamelan performers) felt they had been hit hard, considering that their only chance to make a living and play a role in society was becoming more and more uncertain.

Almost a month into this, all we can do is think about fate. I don’t know if after tomorrow we will have hope or not. The crisis has entered all aspects of life; the longer the situation lasts, the longer we feel burdened by it. This is our reality right now, but at the same time the government isn’t paying attention to the seriousness of the impact on people as a result of the pandemic.

As the pressures of the pandemic continued, we gradually began to think of finding ways to continue being creative in the arts. Initially, friends would get together to play; when this was done online these became virtual performances, essentially like livestreaming a jam session. Over time this model became an example of what the community can come up with when everyone is working from home, yet have similar goals. This is one of the ways we responded to the dire situation.

Since “livestreaming” is constrained by having high-end access to the Internet, which is not the same in all districts in Indonesia, some artists pre-record their performances, a technically less risky option, and a better guarantee of a successful outcome than trying to livestream a jam session.

Eventually, the government responded to this model: the Indonesian Directorate General of the Ministry of Education and Culture began funding a series of virtual performances called “*Budaya Saya*” [My Culture], as a way of giving support to active performing artists. Although it took a while to catch on, this program is now helping around 10,000 performing artists in various artistic fields, and the performances are posted online. Other organizations also tried this model. The Performing Arts Faculty of ISBI required that the final exam for university students include making a recording, which was then uploaded directly to the school’s YouTube channel.

These are some of the approaches we have tried during the pandemic. They are not perfect, but the plus side is that most of these activities can be considered for future projects. Why not? Our live performances had a limited audience, but by changing those to virtual performances via social media, anyone can watch! This instantly becomes an event which can be uploaded and published widely in the midst of a time that is difficult for every artist. The truth is that the art of gamelan itself will be able to be appreciated by many more kinds of people, from the younger generation to the older generation. Looking ahead, we can’t predict when the pandemic will end, and eventually virtual performances like the ones we are doing now will just become one more choice. But by then, we will certainly know how to do them!

*Suhendi Afryanto, ISBI (Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia) Bandung, Vice Rector for Collaboration; Composer, Karawitan Department*



#### **WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY GAMELAN ENSEMBLE Middletown, Connecticut, USA**

Like everywhere else, all music activities at Wesleyan were either canceled or adjusted according to the situation of the pandemic. Eventually, however, it became possible to have in-person gamelan classes. We were required to follow strict guidelines for wearing masks and gloves, and social distancing. The procedures for students in the in-person gamelan classes and the bi-weekly mini productions were praised as excellent by the Music Department and the University.

The protocol required that all students wear a mask and disposable gloves. Hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes had to be used. The university made all of these available to the students in the World Music Hall, where the gamelan meets. The gamelan instruments were set up six feet apart, and the students were required to maintain that distance, while playing or sitting in the audience for discussion, and when lining up to enter or exit the hall. Singing, however, was discouraged by the university to keep the virus from spreading across greater distances.

We also planned to have occasional online lectures and discussions, so the group did not have to meet as often. In the process of planning this hybrid class, I came up with the idea for a series of virtual performances, which I discussed with Pak I. M. Harjito. We decided to present a series of biweekly 30-minute virtual mini-concerts and demonstrations, each one showcasing a different theme or style. The six online presentations focused on the following: welcoming pieces (*Ladrang Wilujeng*, *Ketawang Puspawarna*); singing the macapat poems *Pangkur* and *Ladrang Pangkur*; Gendhing Soran, Yogyakarta style; Wayang Kulit, Perang Kembang; a recital by beginning students; and classical pieces in Surakarta style.

For these presentations, we worked very closely with production staff of the Wesleyan Center for the Arts. In the first two productions, we experienced technical difficulties in image and audio quality. Everyone was very satisfied with the third and especially the fourth production, which was the mini wayang kulit performance. I gave a brief introduction to the program:

“Good evening everyone! Thank you for coming out in cyberspace to attend our fourth virtual mini gamelan concert. I hope you have time to read the program notes. Because of the pandemic, we can only offer you a condensed portion of the midnight scene of a usual all-night wayang performance. Even though you’ll see only an abbreviated scene, I hope you’ll learn how to enjoy wayang performance. Here is why. Although a story line is the main element of wayang performance, it is not the only element for enjoyment. Rather, other art forms—music, dance, literature, and visual arts—closely collaborate with the drama, producing effects that are peripheral ornamentations to the plot. But often, these embellishments become the focus of enjoyment, placing the story line on hold. Almost each scene of an all-night wayang performance contains a juxtaposition of story line and its ornamentations. The scene you are about to see, called *Perang Kembang* [flower battle], is a fight scene between a prince and a giant; it contains a little bit of dialogue and narration delivered in stylized prose (unfortunately this one will be in Javanese); and expression of levity (aka jokes) by wise clowns. The jokes will be in Javanese—sorry, I meant the jokes will be in English (that was a joke). Enjoy the show.”

Our wayang presentation was an excerpt from the central portion of a usual all-night wayang performance. After the conflicts of the evening’s story have been

revealed, the hero Arjuna appears; he thinks about a task that he has to carry out. Arjuna is always accompanied by his wise buffoon servants (Semar and his sons Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong), who bring welcome comic relief and an opportunity for often explicit topical reference to current and local affairs. In carrying out his task, Arjuna is confronted by a group of demons sent by the enemy

The hero and villains engage in the *Perang Kembang* or Flower Battle, a standard section in the highly structured plot development of a wayang performance, in which the puppeteer demonstrates his skill at intricate manipulation of several puppets. Arjuna, because of his prowess as a warrior and practitioner of *samadi* [extraordinary self-control], is able to dispatch his assailants with simple, refined movements—thus the term “flower battle”—and the demons are repelled and killed.

*Sumarsam, Winslow-Kaplan Professor of Music*



## GAMELAN SEKAR KENANGA

### Hamburg, Germany

The Javanese gamelan ensemble Sekar Kenanga meets at the *Elbphilharmonie* (Hamburg’s Philharmonic building) and usually rehearses Mondays during school semester, meaning, no rehearsals during school breaks. There are two groups: a beginner’s group for participants who need more practice or newcomers who have just joined the group, and an advanced group comprising mostly members from the “first generation,” meaning they’ve been playing with the group ever since it was founded in September 2017.

The Elbphilharmonie was one of the first of many places that were closed down. I thought it would be good nevertheless to meet up every week on Zoom at our usual time, for two hours, to discuss gamelan, talk about theory, sing, watch movies, etc. There is always plenty to be done. Of around 18 people, about 10 came regularly to these meetings, which was really nice.

Benjamin Holzapfel, who leads the education and outreach program, liked the idea of the online meeting. I asked him if it would be possible for us to lend out the gamelan to the regular players. He said yes, and on May 8th we drove around Hamburg delivering instruments. I thought it was a really nice gesture by the coordinator, who

in the beginning of my taking over the group in 2017 was rather skeptical. He has been so helpful and supportive these past few months.

So now, we “rehearse” every Monday as “usual,” but on Zoom. We are trying out *Gendhing Gambir Sawit slendro sanga* with all the changes in irama. We usually rely too much on reading the notation, which obviously hampers understanding and listening to the gamelan itself, so we are working on memorizing the *sesegan* of the *inggah* section of *Gendhing Bonang Sidamukti slendro sanga*. These are our two biggest projects, so to speak.

By the time we can rehearse together again, I am hoping that we can play these two pieces without much difficulty—especially hearing everything at the same time! During our online rehearsals, because of the latency problems, I get everyone to mute themselves while I sing and play something, and the players play along with me on the instruments they have at home. Lately, I’ve also been inviting a few friends to play with me at my house, making a mini-gadhon, so the other players on Zoom have more sounds to rely on.

The virus situation is rather upsetting but we try our best to not let it stop us from playing gamelan. So far, I think it has been pretty good.

In early September, our group started meeting up again. We now play in a larger room, in order to keep distance between the instruments. We are allowed to take our masks off, as long as we stay on our instruments. If we were to sing, however, we have to put on our masks.

The first time we played again, it was definitely an experience we won’t forget. As we played the first piece we learned together as a group, *Lancaran Singanebah* (which every one of us knows pretty well—I thought it was good to start with something we all are familiar with, so the players don’t feel discouraged), we realized that we won’t take the sound of a full gamelan ensemble for granted ever again.

*Steven Tanoto, Director*



## **GAMELAN ANAK TIKA Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA**

On any given Wednesday evening, gamelan rehearsal at the Endicott World Music Room at M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) cannot start without a coveted



bit of social time the members of Gamelan Anak Tika refer to (loudly) as “snack time”—or what I also call a “feeding frenzy.” As soon as we have removed the giant bag of snacks from the storage closet, the kids are kids— skipping around instruments, racing each other into the hallway, and lining up to choose a snack. They then escape into the halls to play tag, buy drinks from the vending machine at the end of the hall, and play rounds of the Tetris game on display in the window of the MIT Model Tech Railroad Club room around the corner.

This fifteen minute break, before any playing has started, has become a crucial part of our rehearsal process. It gives the kids in our group, ages 5–18, the opportunity to get to know each other better, decompress after a long day at school, connect with teachers in the program, or simply enjoy a salty snack or the sought-out pack of Oreos hidden at the bottom of the bag. So important is this time to the kids that SNACK TIME is usually written out in sprawling capital letters on the white board in our rehearsal space, followed by the names of the pieces we are working on that evening in tinier letters. Clearly, we know what part of rehearsal is their favorite.

We held our last in-person rehearsal on Wednesday, March 11. After announcing to the students that this would be our last rehearsal together for a while, one of our younger members blurted out, “Can we still have snack time every week?” And while I don’t doubt our group’s fondness for the snacks, I think that question spoke to a larger concern that we were all grappling with in that moment: in spite of all that was happening, could we still find a way to stay connected?

Those of us who have spent years performing in gamelan ensembles know all too well the friendships and relationships that grow out of playing such interconnected music. Most of the students in Gamelan Anak Tika have been performing with each other since the group’s inception four years ago, so it was critical for us to find a way to preserve those interpersonal connections at a time when all physical connection was being actively discouraged.

And so—SNACK CHAT (named by one of our members) was born! Every Sunday, from late March until the end of June, I hosted a Zoom video call so that the members of our group—including our co-instructors So Yeon Shin, Matt Elkins, and Mark Stewart—could connect

over snacks, jokes, riddles, and random Internet facts. We taught each other how to alter virtual backgrounds, shared our online school experiences, watched gamelan videos together, and enjoyed the company of special guests, like I Nyoman Gusti Darta, our guest instructor earlier that winter, and a special presentation on Jauk by I Putu Tangkas Adi Hiranmayena, which the kids really enjoyed. One of our members even took to engaging in strange performance art during our Zoom calls, which ranged from wearing as many as 10 pairs of sunglasses on their head while standing ominously in the background, to showing off a cardboard plague mask they had made during the week. Let's just say there is a treasure trove of hilarious screenshots from these weekly sessions.

In addition to our weekly SNACK CHAT, I sent out a weekly PDF that included a mini-lesson on Bahasa Indonesia, a cultural fact about Bali (with links to explore on the web), performance videos to check out, and guided activities to explore gamelan at home using the piano, voice, and gamelan apps available on smart devices.

As we move into the fall, we are hoping to remain connected as much as possible. Plans have ranged from seeking out a well-ventilated rehearsal space that would allow us to continue, should families be interested, to rehearse together while observing all social distancing and health and hygiene protocols. Another option has been to move rehearsals to a virtual setting online and to use virtual gamelan instruments on smart devices. Either way, we hope to continue with our weekly SNACK CHAT gatherings to stay in touch and keep the sense of community alive the best that we can for our kids and families.

*Emeric Viani, Co-founder and Artistic Director*



### **SEKAA GONG TIRTA SINAR Sydney, Australia**

I have been teaching Balinese gamelan gong at Sydney Conservatorium of Music for many years. This year I had 15–20 students—until COVID hit. All group activities were immediately stopped by the university. It seems I have now completely lost my job for at least the next 6 months or until they find a vaccine (sadly no online option for us).

I have been thoroughly impressed by the technological triumph of a number of composite videos of people performing together. I was glad Jody Diamond posted the link to how these are made, and appreciated the contributions by many on the Gamelan Forum [Dartmouth Gamelan Listserv]. Call me stubborn, however, because for a group of 15–20 who need to be close together in the same room at the same time, listening keenly to each other in real time, I don't quite see how technology can help.

I was planning to take some of my students to Bali for June and July this year to study with Gamelan Çudamani, but of course this is now impossible. We can only hope and pray that next year the sun will shine on us all again.

*Gary Watson, Lecturer*



### **PAJAJARAN GAMELAN DEGUNG ENSEMBLE Armidale, Australia**

I can't say that COVID impacted greatly on the gamelan music scene here; Armidale had already gone from a dynamic place of ethnomusicology and active gamelan to a sudden standstill in 2015. I used to lecture in ethnomusicology at the University of New England, but with the course shifting online in 2015, I was no longer required! Gamelan Swara Naga, a contemporary degung group based at the University of New England, made two CDs and were highly sought after at festivals, but the group folded when David Goldsworthy retired and Wahyu Roche, an artist in residence from Bandung who had been an active player and composer, also left.

I founded and have been directing the community group "Pajajaran Gamelan Degung Ensemble" for seven years, with my own instruments. We play everything from Celtic tunes to Philip Glass, Violent Femmes to original Pop-Sunda tunes and "klasik" degung. We include pieces from the Swara Naga era, and some of my compositions such as those incorporating Celtic fiddle.

But COVID has shut my group down as well! Hopefully it will start happening again, at least at the community level, when the pandemic passes.

*Kerry Watson, Director*



## GAMELAN SINGA NGLARAS

### Singapore

Singapore went into lockdown—here termed a “circuit breaker”—on April 3. For Singa Nglaras, this meant that we could no longer meet and rehearse at the university campus where our instruments are, nor gather at any alternative venues. To keep the group’s interest going, we did two things. First, some of us who had private collections of gadhon instruments loaned them out to other members who were keen to learn them. Second, we organized weekly sessions on Zoom which involved either presentations on certain aspects of gamelan, or more general chat sessions that touched on Javanese life and the experiences of our members who had lived and studied there. A nice thing about these sessions was that friends who had previously played with Singa Nglaras but who were not in Singapore could now join us again.

With more of us having gender, gambang and kendhang at home, we made efforts to teach individual lessons over Zoom. These employed a range of methods depending on the student and their situation: some preferred phone calls to discuss cengkok and garapan (this worked best for those learning gambang); some worked best with “homework,” practicing notated parts by themselves or to recorded backing tracks of balungan/peking parts played on the gender; in some cases it was possible to have a session which was more like a regular *les* [lesson] with the student watching and listening, then trying alone, and getting feedback. What really wasn’t possible was playing together due to issues of latency—the only exceptions were practice sessions involving gender and sulukan.

We did one project in this time, which was to attempt to record all the parts of *Mijil Wigarintyas* separately, then combine the results digitally. The whole project, led by Zachary Chan, involved quite a lot of technical manipulation: he digitally altered the pitch of a set of samples he had recorded to match the tuning of a gadhon set that had been split amongst the musicians. With the samples, he created a digital backing track featuring the loud and colotomic instruments; this was sent to the musicians, who individually recorded rebab, gender, gambang, suling, siter, and vocal tracks for the piece.

Trying this process—and encountering its trickiness—highlighted several subtleties of gamelan music that some of us had not quite noticed before. In making the backing track, the uniqueness of gamelan tuning with its stretched octaves became clearer, while the speed and irama changes, though remarkably smooth for a digitally worked track, nonetheless still didn’t feel the same as when playing together. Musicians mentioned having to “learn” the idiosyncrasies of the track’s irama and laya as they played. This was a problem especially for the gambang and siter who play more finely subdivided parts, but even Rose, our sindhen, mentioned having to adapt herself to the slowing tempo at the end, and the gap before the gong. KS, our gambang player, noted how the experience made him realize how reliant he was on both listening to the drumming and watching everyone else when playing: it was a sense of mutual accommodation between the players that made these shifts easier to achieve. All in all, although the experience felt different from how we normally play, it was still fascinating and enjoyable, particularly within the lockdown.

One new direction we have managed to go in is slowly building up an interest in Javanese dance amongst our members. After some of us took the virtual lessons offered by Nusantara Arts in Buffalo, we seemed to have broken through a barrier, of sorts, and felt more willing to try to learn dance through watching videos. Our ensemble commissioned a set of instructional videos for *Menak Koncar* from teachers Mas Danang Pamungkas and Mbak Dewi Galuh Sinta Sari in Surakarta.

Now, with the more relaxed rules in Singapore, we’re able to gather in small groups of five to practice together. While this, like the other things we’ve been doing, is no substitute for the real experience, nonetheless, we hope we’ll be ready to better appreciate playing together when the time comes.

*Xin Wei, Assistant Music Director*



## NYI GEMI RARAS

### Melbourne, Australia

The start of February saw an eager return to rehearsals for The Melbourne Community Gamelan in Victoria, Australia. After a successful 2019 with several performances and a

wonderful learning experience with visiting musician and teacher from Solo, Pak Danis Sugiyanto, we were looking forward to planning an exciting 2020. We began the year with rehearsals for a wayang kulit performance in May, and were planning dance and drumming lessons with a visiting teacher from Sydney, Vi King Lim.

After our Easter break, it was evident that we could no longer meet for rehearsals and decided to take an extended break. We all miss getting together to learn and play gamelan, and most importantly miss the social aspects of interacting with like-minded people. I am sure that the members are continuing to pursue their interest in gamelan by accessing what is available to them on the Internet.

The Melbourne Community Gamelan rehearses on a Solonese slendro/pelog bronze gamelan set housed at the University of Melbourne, which is also where I teach a subject called "Indonesian Gamelan Ensemble" to the University students. First semester this year commenced at the start of March. Enrollment numbers were a little lower than usual because of the uncertainty of what was happening with COVID. After two or three classes in the gamelan room, I was asked whether it would be possible to deliver the gamelan subject online. I said "Of course, no problem!" and then went into a mild panic! I had two weeks to figure out how to give my students a meaningful experience that included as many practical activities as possible, but without instruments. After all, they had enrolled in a practical subject and I was not going to simply teach them theory for two hours each week.

I spent several hours with a ruler and compass drawing paper templates of the instruments. I then scoured the Internet searching for relevant and appropriate recordings and videos of gendhing that I could teach my students. I then set about planning my lessons for the rest of the semester.

Although the students couldn't actually play the real instruments, I found that by the end of the semester they had quite a good understanding of mipil, as well as imbal on the bonang and saron. In fact, probably a better understanding than learning in the gamelan room! When learning parts on an instrument like the bonang, only one person can play it at a time. When doing the same on the "paper" bonang, the students all learn and play it together at the same time.

Obviously in a non-COVID world, we would continue to play together and enjoy each other's company. Because I have been forced to come up with new ways to teach gamelan and make it work, it has opened my eyes to new possibilities. I think that the instrument templates will continue to play a big part of my students' learning, even when we return to face-to-face classes.

This whole experience has been a huge learning curve for me, with learning new technologies and working out new ways to teach, but you know what they say. . . you can always teach an old dog new tricks!

*Ilona Wright, Director*



## **GAMELAN JEPUN BALI**

### **Bucharest, Romania**

The pandemic impacted greatly on our activities in Romania, including gamelan practice and performances. We had to cancel all of our performances for this year except one, which took place in the town of Sibiu, during the International Folklore Festival "Songs of the Mountains," because for a moment there were fewer COVID-19 cases. Even this performance was strictly organized and only a few people were allowed to watch. Four hundred were allowed to watch a show that normally would be witnessed by more than 2000! Otherwise, the only other activity was being part of the wonderful Connect Arts project "Perspectives," which creates electronic portfolios for Romanian artists. We recorded "Panguripan" by DanDe Popescu, a new creation written for our group that draws inspiration from Indonesian philosophies about life and existence, and uses elements of traditional and contemporary gamelan music.

Gamelan Jepun Bali grew from a Balinese music and dance club in 2009 with only a few bamboo instruments and a drum; now we play on an iron seven-tone Semar Pegulingan, crafted by Vaughan Hatch from Mekar Bhuana Conservatory in Denpasar, with cases and resonators built by Made Suwitra from Blahbatuh. Our group includes very passionate Romanians who are both professional musicians and amateurs, as well as members with other nationalities, including Indonesians.

Balinese gamelan exists today in Romania mostly thanks to Pradnyani Dewi, a Balinese dancer who was willing to buy all the instruments, one by one, and bring them from Bali to Romania, mostly in checked baggage on the plane. We had to do it this way because we couldn't get funding to buy and transport the instruments; most of the people in Romania are just learning about gamelan music now, and gamelan has been here only for the last 10 years.

Even with the new harsh conditions imposed by the government, we still managed to practice for the two events that we had this year. Knowing we had these two performances made members willing and determined to practice, because we a clear reason to do it. Of course we obeyed the rules imposed by the government, wearing masks, using hand sanitizer and so on.

Some members have recently contacted me and told me how much they miss gamelan practice; but even in October, I was not brave enough to organize meetings. Besides, we don't have any more performances planned for this year (or even for the beginning of the next one), and the official numbers of coronavirus cases are growing every day in Romania.

In the past, gamelan practice was for most of us a moment of relaxation. Now, we cannot benefit in that sense. Many people are afraid of the disease, and even if others are not, we can't break the rules imposed by the government limiting the number of people attending a meeting, which is especially bad for gamelan.

Besides our performances we are also very active in education. In October of 2019 we introduced the study of gamelan to the University of Music in Bucharest-Romania, made possible by the wonderful support of the Indonesian Embassy in Bucharest lending us a Javanese gamelan that has been here since the 1970s. This means that the students can experience learning three kinds of gamelan: Javanese (bronze), seven-tone Semar Pegulungan (iron), and Joged Bumbung (bamboo).

We hope we can have gamelan rehearsal and classes at the university again, once the situation with COVID-19 improves.

*Lucian Zbarcea, Director*



## **EFIQ ZULFIQAR**

### **Brisbane, Australia**

My name is Efiq Zulfiqar. I am from Bandung, but since 2005, I have lived in Caboolture, a suburb on the northern outskirts of Brisbane, Queensland. I work as a musician, performing gamelan degung, jazz fusion, and my own compositions, although there have been no new performances recently.

The impact of the pandemic has been big; many gigs and festivals have been postponed indefinitely. The Brisbane-Asia Festival and the Australian Gamelan Festival have been canceled. Even December's Woodford Festival—the biggest festival in Queensland and possibly also in Australia—might be cancelled; even if it happens it will be a lot smaller than usual.

Other events are going ahead, but only online. I am one of three musicians in a group called Makukuhan.

We work with Musica Viva In Schools, an organization that presents live music performances, workshops, and interactive sessions with students all over Australia. Usually our group tours regional areas and cities doing workshops with our "mini gamelan," but now we have to be online.

As soon as the pandemic hit, we were straight away contacted by the Musica Viva team to learn how to present a "show" online. We were trained by Australian TV experts, including some from the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), who wanted to make sure that we presented and expressed ourselves well on screen, almost like "Play School" (an Australian TV show for young children). We had to learn a lot about online audio and video technology.

Another problem we face is that the musicians in our group are spread far and wide: I am in Brisbane, Deva Gatot Permana is in Sydney, and Reza Achman is in Bali. So the three of us are in our separate homes, but together on screen playing music for school children in Australia.

The pandemic has brought some new opportunities, like the "Stay Home Jam" (with musicians performing together online). At the moment we are jamming with friends from Australia, America, Indonesia, and Brunei. Maybe we will also work with other musicians from around the world. This might become a project and provide opportunities for us later. With lots of free time, this is now how musician friends communicate. Before, when everyone in the world was just at home, we didn't talk to each other very often. Now, through technology, we can play music and be together on the Internet, no matter where we are.

*Efiq Zulfiqar, composer, member of Makukuhan*

Based on an interview in Indonesia with Alfred Ginting, SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) Radio, Australia.



## GAMELAN SI BETTY

SUNY New Paltz, New York, USA

When the pandemic hit, I was playing in a different gamelan group five days a week. Monday was Balinese gamelan at Bard with Nyoman Suadin and Sue Pilla. Tuesday I took the train to New York City to play with Gamelan Son of Lion; the group was started by the late Barbara Benary. Wednesday I taught at SUNY New Paltz, with the instruments of Gamelan Si Betty, left to me by Lou Harrison and William Colvig. Thursday was gamelan degung across the river in Kingston with Dorcinda Knauth and the Catskill Mountain Gamelan. On Friday I went back to the city, joining Kusuma Laras at the Indonesian Consulate to play the classical music of Central Java.

At New Paltz, the gamelan was part of my anthropology class "Music and Culture of Indonesia." At our first Zoom meeting, the students were very stressed. Some of their professors tried to continue classes as usual. Lectures were videotaped, papers were assigned, and assignments were returned with no personal feedback. Some of the students were at home with sick older relatives, others felt that without personal contact with their teachers they just weren't motivated. I told them that our in-person class was finished. There would be no more assignments, and no more grades. Instead, we would have Zoom meetings with special guests.

With Naning Pranoto, a poet and novelist from Bandung, my students learned to write poetry in Indonesian, finding words in Google Translate, then making quatrains to express their current feelings. Kitsie Emerson gave them insight into Javanese wayang kulit, with live demonstrations from her home in Solo. I talked to them about how I compose for gamelan.

Melati Suryodarmo presented a moving discussion of her life as a performance artist, which she started in Germany before moving back to Indonesia. In talking about one of her most powerful performance works, "Butter Dance," she included some advice that would come in handy: "I didn't worry about falling down, but I was determined to always get back up."

*Jody Diamond, Director* ▶

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