

BOOK REVIEW

by Kent Devereaux

Karawitan: source readings in Javanese gamelan and vocal music

Judith Becker, editor; Alan H. Feinstein, assistant editor
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This is the first volume to appear in a series of three volumes of translations of Javanese and Indonesian texts being published by the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

The editor, Judith Becker and her assistant, Alan Feinstein, have done an excellent job selecting, compiling, and in some cases translating the seven texts that make up this first volume. The scholarly approach to the preparation of the work should please even the most particular ethnomusicologist, while at the same time, providing both accessible and practically oriented information for all serious gamelan enthusiasts from beginning to advanced students.

The articles and monographs that comprise volume 1 span the years from 1930 to 1975. At least one of the articles, Sumarsam's "Inner Melody in Javanese Gamelan" has been generally available in the United States since it first appeared in 1975. The remaining works were all translated specifically for this volume from their original Javanese or Indonesian texts. Four of the articles, those of Martopangrawit, Sastrapustaka, Gitosaprodjo, and Poerbapangrawit, deal with general summaries of the gamelan and taken as a whole provide a clearer introduction to central Javanese gamelan performance practices than any other single extant English work on gamelan. Two other articles deal with specific aspects of gamelan--Sumarsam's on the role of inner melody in Javanese gamelan, and Sindoesawarno's on the function of willet and cengkok. Finally, Probohardjono's article provides a very useful summary of the various sulukan and their alternate texts employed in wayang kulit.

The bulk of the volume, some 244 pages worth, is taken up by Martopangrawit's two-part monograph "notes on Knowledge of Gamelan Music". This text alone makes this first volume of translations a valuable reference guide. Martopangrawit provides a concise summary of the general background of gamelan that, although he assumes some knowledge of gamelan, is primarily introductory in tone. The opening discussion of irama and lagu is quite good, as well as subsequent topics, gendhing form, cengkok, and pathet. A separate section deals specifically with the inter-relationship between balungan types, pathet, and cengkok.

In the second half of the paper Martopangrawit introduces pelog, and specifically a discussion relating to the performance practices appropriate to the tuning system. But, whereas the first half of the paper employs the gender almost exclusively to demonstrate appropriate cengkok in slendro, in his discussion of pelog he introduces the rebab as well. Finally, an interesting discussion on variation in balungan concludes the paper.

Among the several appendices accompanying the text, one on vocal music, another on creating gendhing compositions, and another on "barang miring" are particularly interesting.

Whereas Martopangrawit takes an almost empirical approach to the understanding of karawitan, Sastrapustaka,

in his article "Knowledge of Gamelan Revisited", outlines the function of gamelan in purely social and metaphysical terms. While his discussions on the symbolic and metaphysical characteristics of the specific tones of the pelog and slendro tuning systems and the delineation of various pathet may not provide the hard and fast rules that western students of gamelan so desire, it does provide one with a broader understanding on the whole role of pathet in gamelan music as well as make interesting reading.

The concluding two survey articles, "summary of the Theory of Karawitan and the technique of playing the Gamelan" by Gitosaprodjo and "Javanese Gamelan Music" by Poerbapangrawit, each at approximately one tenth the length of Martopangrawit's paper, tend to be less complete general introductions to the practice of karawitan. Gitosaprodjo's article covers the instruments of the gamelan, Laras, Pathet, Notation, Irama, and gendhing form and function. Poerbapangrawit's article is even more terse.

Two other articles, "an Important Factor in Gamelan" by Ki Sindoesawarno--a very specific discussion on the role of willet and cengkok and their relationship to gamelan practice--and "Inner Melody in Javanese Music" by Sumarsam, which analyzes the role of the "nuclear theme" or "balungan" in terms of the implied melody, should be of interest to all those wanting to develop a more elaborate panerusan than the standard "college" style of elaboration employed presently throughout the U.S. Both articles shed light on the inter-relationship of pathet, irama, and balungan and the determination of proper panerusan.

Finally, "A Complete Manual of the Sulukan used in a Wayang Kulit Performance" by Probohardjono is a valuable reference for those interested in the function of sulukan in the shadow play. Probohardjono lists all the sulukan commonly employed in the slendro pathet along with a variety of alternate texts and additional directions.

On the whole this first volume of **Karawitan: Source Readings in Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music** is a well balanced, scholarly piece of work. In its entirety, **Karawitan** will help to fill a wide gap in gamelan literature in English pertaining to the understanding of the performance practices of central Javanese gamelan. I would recommend that anyone seriously interested in gamelan consider purchasing this work for their library. Although the \$36.50 price tag for volume 1 alone may be a bit steep for some, one may be in some way minutely consoled by a quick comparison with the current price for a copy of Kunst's classic *Music in Java*. I hope that the future volumes, available next year--volume 2 with articles by Warsodiningrat, Sumarsam, Gitosaprodjo, Purbodiningrat, Poerbatjaraka, Sindoesawarno, and Paku Buwana X, and volume 3 containing a glossary, gendhing notation, and bibliographies--will be equally as valuable.

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