PROFILE

Cambridge Gamelan Society

by Bill Martin

The gamelan society of the University of Cambridge in England is a young, but flourishing group of gamelan enthusiasts. The society has a membership of some 20-30 people who meet to play once a week in term time, with additional weekend workshops and other special events.

The formation of the society was prompted by the presentation to the University, in February 1983, of Gamelan Duta Laras. This gamelan, which was a gift of the Indonesian Ambassador in London, is a full set of traditional Javanese instruments, with both slendro and pelog tunings. Apart from being extensively used by members of the society, it has been played by various visiting groups, notably by a group from ASKI who toured in the U.K. and Spain in March and April of 1984.

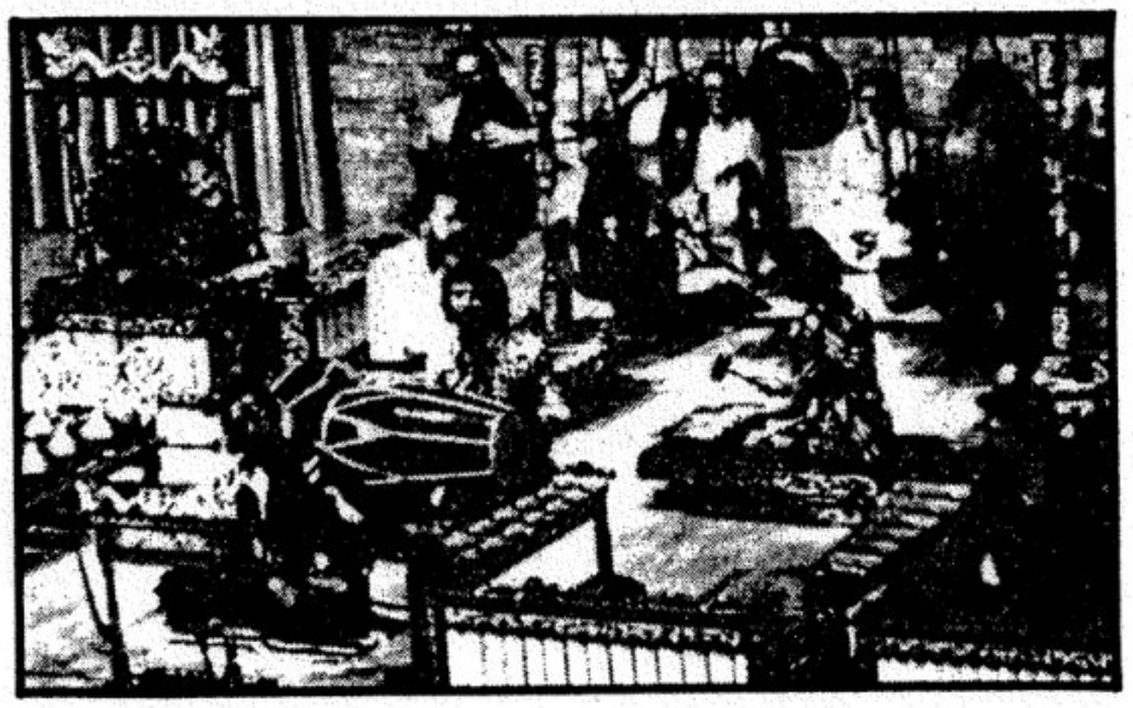
So far, the Cambridge Gamelan Society has concentrated on playing traditional [Central] Javanese music. Most of the group who started playing in 1983 had little previous practical experience of gamelan. After two years the society now has a mixture of some reasonably experienced players and others who are less skilled, but equally keen.

Members of the society come from both inside and outside the University. There are undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members and others who just happen to live in or near Cambridge and have been bitten by the bug of gamelan playing. In addition to British and American players, the group has members from Germany, Switzerland, Canada and Australia.

During the first year and half, playing sessions were closely supervised and directed by David Posnett, a member of the English Gamelan Orchestra. Since Autumn 1984, when David left Cambridge to study in Durham, the resident leader of the groups has been David Hughes, an American ethnomusicologist currently living in Cambridge. Members have also gained greatly from the instruction of visiting gamelan players. Notable among them have been Sri Hastanto (who luckily for us has been studying in England), Elsje Plantema from Holland (who led a marvelous weekend workshop), and Alec Roth (who is now coming up regularly from London). Just recently the Indonesian Government has appointed Joko Purwanto to the London Embassy and it is hoped that he will be able to come up to Cambridge from time to time.

A major landmark for the Society was its first public performance, given in June 1984 to an audience of well over 200 people at the Cambridge Music School. For the concert the group was augmented by a member of very experienced guest players, including Sri Hastanto. Other guests, all members of the English Gamelan Orchestra, were Alec Roth, Neil Sorrell and Adrian Lee. The concert presented a bonangan ensemble followed by a gadon ensemble. The main programme included Lancaran Kebogiro, Ladrang Wilujeng, Lancaran Tropongbang, Ladrang Agen-Agen, Gendhing Bonang Denggung Turulare, Ketawang Puspawarna and Bubaran Hudan Mas.

In November 1984, members of the society also took part in a charity concert of international music and dance in aid of the Ethiopian Famine Relief Appeal. Two informal concerts are planned for June 1985. New pieces in the possible repertoire for these include Ladrang Moncer, followed by Srepegan and Sampak, Ladrang Enggar-Enggar and Ladrang Mugirahayu. And the lancaran that the group has been playing recently is Legung Jumengglung, which the Secretary of the Society, Cecile Hales, heard on a visit to her home in Chicago early in 1985.

Cecile is one of three members of the Cambridge Society who will be visiting Java this year. The visits have been made possible by a travel grant of £ 1000 ($1250) from a local travel agency. Cecile won this for the Society with her entry in a university-wide competition. Apart from getting to know something of Java, hearing a lot of gamelan, hopefully doing some playing and having some lessons, the visitors will be buying new mallets and sulings to supplement those available in Cambridge.

The Cambridge Gamelan Society welcomes visiting gamelan enthusiasts to its sessions, which are held in the Music School in West Road, Cambridge. Since November 1984, we have published a newsletter called **Pelog** (three issues a year) which contains details of the Society's activities as well as some articles of wider interest on gamelan and gamelan playing. For information about the newsletter or the Cambridge Gamelan Society, contact the editors: Bill and Sandra Martin, Lint Growis, Foxearth, Sudbury, Suffolk, United Kingdom, telephone: Sudbury (0787) 75777.