

PROFILE

University of Wisconsin at Madison

Within a gamelan tradition that has existed for more than a thousand years the University of Wisconsin at Madison's gamelan program, at a little more than ten years old, hardly seems noteworthy. However, when one considers that gamelan music "came" to the United States only twenty five years ago the University of Wisconsin gamelan program is one of the oldest in the midwest United States. Moreover, the quality of the gamelan program and its ensemble is excellent, placing it among the finest in North America.

Lois Anderson, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, initiated the program in 1975 when she convinced the University to purchase the beautiful bronze court gamelan. It was first played during the summer of 1976 when Ki Wasitodipuro and several assistants from California instructed the neophyte Wisconsin gamelan players. With the helpful instruction of various guest artists the ensemble was soon on its way to become what it is today—one of the premier gamelan programs in the country. By the fall of 1978, Roger Vetter, a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin who had originally studied with Pak Susilo at the University of Hawaii, took over direction of the advanced ensemble. The gamelan program as a whole remained under the advisorship of professor Lois Anderson until, in 1981, R. Anderson (Andy) Sutton, an ethnomusicologist with a specialization in Javanese music, was appointed professor at the University of Wisconsin campus. Sutton was also from the University of Hawaii and brought with him extensive experience and knowledge of Javanese music and the *gambang* and *gender* instruments specifically. He assumed the position of running the advanced ensemble in 1981 and continues to this day, with Roger Vetter's assistance, as director of the Wisconsin gamelan ensemble.

Numerous guest instructors have worked with the ensemble over the years to build and expand the program. Instructors have included Sumarsam (Wesleyan University), Ernst Heins (Jaap Kunst Ethnomusicology Center, Amsterdam), Hardja Susilo (University of Hawaii), and Indonesian musicians and teachers Sumandiyo Hadi, F.X. Widaryanto, Sri Djoko Rohardjo, and Suratno. Many of the guest instructors were brought to the Madison campus through a cooperative program to share Indonesian Fulbright scholars with the University of Michigan and Oberlin College. This has allowed all the programs to benefit from continued instruction of the highest caliber by both Indonesian and American teachers.

The University of Wisconsin at Madison gamelan, known officially as *Kyai Telaga Rukmi* (or the Venerable Lake of Gold) is a Yogyaneese bronze court gamelan consisting of two *demung*, two *saron barung*, and the usual complement of court gamelan instruments (with the exception of the *bonang panembung*) in both *slendro* and *pelog* tunings. It is slightly unusual for a bronze court gamelan in the United States, since it originates from Yogyakarta, Java and not Surakarta, Java, like the majority of the larger court gamelans in America. The

ensemble is augmented with a *siyem barang* (*gong suwukan* pitch 1 that is also used as *pelog* pitch 7) and a *saron sanga* (a nine-keyed *saron* for use in the wayang performances) both belonging to Andy Sutton.

In addition to *Kyai Telaga Rukmi*, Madison is also home to another gamelan, *Kyai Biwara* (or Venerable Messenger). This gamelan is a Javanese iron double gamelan, also made in Yogyakarta, Java and owned by Roger Vetter. Vetter has used the gamelan for performances and workshops, and now the instruments are on loan to the World Music program at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois.

The *Kyai Telaga Rukmi* gamelan ensemble performs two to three times a year, usually in a winter and a spring concert held at Mills Concert Hall on the Madison campus. The members of *Kyai Telaga Rukmi* are not all music majors by any means and a sizable minority are people no longer associated with the University but who live and work in Madison. The ensemble rehearses two times a week. All music instruction is done by rote.

In addition to past concerts that have included a variety of forms and styles from *gendhing kodhok ngorek* to *gendhing bonangan* recent concerts have also included a selection of regional musics from Banyumas, Semarang, and Surabaya, Java. Concerts also often include dance, lead by Peggy Choy, an accomplished teacher and student of Javanese dance. And, in the past two years, with *dhalangs* Sri Djoko Rohardjo and then Suratno present at the Wisconsin campus as part of the cooperative sharing of Fulbright scholars with Michigan and Oberlin, *Kyai Telaga Rukmi* has staged short, one to three hour, wayang performances to the delight of the Madison community. Last year's wayang, with Suratno as *dhalang*, was *Anoman Obong*.

Now the members of *Kyai Telaga Rukmi* look forward to the arrival of the next Fulbright scholar, A.L. Suwardi, who will be in Madison during the coming summer months.