

Gamelan Sekar Jaya

by Wayne Vitale

Gamelan Sekar Jaya, the California-based Balinese music and dance troupe, has enjoyed a remarkable evolution. Since its first workshop in 1979 with I Wayan Suweca (intended originally only as a six-week class in a friend's living room), the group has grown to be recognized as one of "the finest Balinese gamelan outside of Bali" (*Tempo*, 1986). The group has catalogued a long list of performances with many of Bali's most talented dancers and musicians as guest artists, teachers and resident music directors. In addition to the more than one-hundred concerts in California, they have performed at the First International Gamelan Festival at Expo '86 in Vancouver. Perhaps the highlight of their concert career was at Bali's annual Art Festival in 1985, at the invitation of Bali's then-Governor Ida Bagus Mantera. The wildly enthusiastic (and totally unexpected) response of the Balinese, reinforced by television broadcasts which have been rerun for years since, left the group not only astonished at how far they had come, but wondering what could possibly follow after such an experience. For quite a while afterwards, it seemed that the performance quality attained in preparation for the tour to Bali would never be reached again, not to mention the excitement of the tour itself.

The last few years, however, have proven otherwise. Through the steady pace of rehearsals and performances, Gamelan Sekar Jaya has been able to reach even higher levels of playing, and has generated as much enthusiasm among its players and audiences as at any point during its ten-year history. The group's members have been inspired by their two most recent Balinese teachers (I Wayan Sujana and I Ketut Partha) invited for one-year residencies as guest artistic directors. The nature of the organization has also contributed much to its success: rather than a formal class or professional performing troupe, Sekar Jaya has maintained its status as a independent not-for-profit organization, with the members donating their time and efforts in keeping the group active. (In fact the players and dancers in Sekar Jaya pay dues each month to support its activities.) More importantly, the group has kept the informal community atmosphere that was present from the very first rehearsal in 1979, when founding directors Michael Tenzer and Rachel Cooper invited several friends to study with Suweca. The emphasis has always been on the sheer fun and excitement of learning directly from Bali's best musicians and dancers, who convey not only the



techniques but the spirit of their performing arts traditions and culture.

Rehearsals are held twice weekly for the main gong kebyar ensemble and once a week for the angklung group (which shares many of the same members). But almost every day of the week the house where rehearsals take place is filled with the sounds of gangsa, reong or kendang as someone studies privately with the resident Balinese teacher. Between rehearsals there are private lessons, performances, meetings, visits by Indonesian friends passing through the area. . .the list goes on! The group sometimes resembles more a small village rather than a performing group. In fact Sekar Jaya's home in El Cerrito is often referred to as "the banjar", the word used for a neighborhood organization and community meeting hall in a Balinese village. Many Balinese guests are as much impressed by the atmosphere of the group as the playing abilities, and often return home with as many comments about "Banjar Sekar Jaya" as about its music.

Although many Americans have helped the group to remain active and vital over the years, it is really the teachers who have been able to inspire and motivate Sekar Jaya's performers. Starting with Suweca, each of the group's teachers has adopted the attitude that the playing standards here should be no different than those in Bali; anything less is simply not acceptable. This belief in the group's ability to learn and progress has been the source of Sekar Jaya's success, and has attracted many fine musicians and dancers to join in its activities. A list of the group's teachers over the years reads like a "who's who" in the musical world of Bali: Wayan Suweca, Komang Astita, Wayan Temberes, Wayan Sinti, Wayan Rai, Wayan Sujana and Ketut Partha have all spent months or years with the group as guest artistic directors. Many of Bali's most renowned dancers have also appeared with Sekar Jaya as guest performers, including Wayan Dibia, Made Wiratini, Nyoman, Nanik and Putu Wenten, Gusti Ketut Arini, Gusti Putu Alit Ariani, Wayan Lendra, Putu Lastini, Nyoman Catra, Nyoman Sumandhi, Gusti Ayu Srinatih, Wayan Kawi, and Ketut Tuttur.

In addition to studying pieces from the traditional gong kebyar and angklung repertoire, Sekar Jaya has invited several of its teachers to compose new music for the group. This has proven especially challenging to the technical abilities of its players, but equally rewarding as well when, after months of intensive rehearsals of a new instrumental composition, Sekar Jaya is able to present a world premiere to California audiences. Thus far the group has commissioned eight new works from its guest teachers, and hopes to continue this trend in the future.

Perhaps the most prolific composer who has joined the group in recent years is Ketut Partha, who in the ten months of his residency with Sekar Jaya (Sept. '88 to July '89) composed three large new works: two for the angklung ensemble and one for the main gong kebyar orchestra. Each of these pieces are brilliant examples of the wide range of musical expression possible in the dynamic kebyar style,

and each has been enthusiastically received by audiences in the Bay Area. Partha is also one of the most gifted kendang virtuosi in Bali, and his mastery of that instrument (as well as all the other instruments in the gamelan) has added an extra spark to rehearsals and performances.

After Partha had been with Gamelan Sekar Jaya for several months, it became clear that his teaching abilities and virtuosity had brought the group to a new plateau in its musical evolution. For that reason it was decided to make a professional recording before he returned to Bali. In June, 1989 Gamelan Sekar Jaya made a digital recording at Bay Record Studio in Berkeley of most of its current repertoire, including Partha's new works *Wawu Atangi* and *Kembang Sari*. (This recording has been released in cassette format, and is available from the address that appears below.)

During the next two years, Gamelan Sekar Jaya will again expand its program. Plans are currently underway to invite not only one teacher, as in the past, but two Balinese artists to join the group for extended residencies: a musician and a dancer, who can work in tandem to develop the music and dance programs on an equal footing. These artists will be, for 1989-90, the well known composer Nyoman Windha and his wife Gusti Ayu Warsiki, and for 1990-91, Wayan Sujana and his wife Wayan Iriani. The presence of both a musician and dancer as resident teachers will be another first for the group, and will help a great deal in preparing for participation in the upcoming Festival of Indonesia in 1990-91.

Gamelan Sekar Jaya and Gamelan Angklung are extremely grateful to two individuals for their generosity in making the gamelan instruments available for rehearsals and performances over the past several years: Rachel Cooper (owner of the gamelan gong kebyar) and one of the founders of the group, and Eugene Cash (owner of the gamelan angklung) who purchased the instruments during Sekar Jaya's tour of Bali in 1985.

Gamelan Sekar Jaya's gong kebyar repertoire includes the instrumental pieces *Jaya Semara*, *Gesuri*, *Galang Kangin*, and *Wawu Atang*, and the dance pieces *Legong Keraton*, *Teruna Jaya*, *Baris*, *Kebyar Duduk*, *Jauk*, *Topeng Tua*, and *Topeng Arsa Wijaya*. The angklung repertoire includes the instrumental pieces *Madu Suara*, *Nedes Lemah*, *Nakula Sedih*, *Sindu Arsa*, and *Kembang Sari*, and the dance piece *Panyembrama*.

The members are Avi Black, Tom Ballinger, Philip Chang, Rachel Cooper, Poul Eriksson, Carla Fabrizio, Raymond Fabrizio, Jim Finck, Dan Freed, Lisa Gold, Barbara Golden, Rocky Guagliano, Valerie Harris, Jim Hogan, Maddie Hogan, Susan Jette, Lars Jensen, Andreas Johns, Steve Johnson, Joyce King, Todd Manley, Paul Miller, Susanna Miller, Jean Moncrieff, Mudita Ostrin Nisker, Mimi Prather, Chris Romero, Wayne Vitale, Sarah Willner, and Evan Ziporyn.

Gamelan Sekar Jaya may be reached at 6485 Conlon Avenue, El Cerrito, California 94530, telephone (415) 237-6814. ■

Gamelan Angklung in Denver

by Wayne Vitale

1) Start with two jazz/rock/blues/electronic/salsa/rockabilly musicians from Denver, Colorado. Choose carefully: be sure that their names are Mark McCain and Mark Fuller.

2) Allow to ripen, by letting them steep for many years in dark basement rehearsal spaces with other like-minded musicians, then put out in the sun for several more years until they float to the top of the mixture. (Set other like-minded musicians aside for the moment.)

3) To add a touch of Asian flavoring, send them to Singapore as part of a big band tour from the Denver/Boulder area.

4) Very important! Just when they are beginning to achieve a balanced seasoning, blow apart their minds by sending them to Bali for a two-week vacation to hear gamelan music.

5) Return fermenting mixture to Denver, Colorado; recombine with other like-minded musicians. After a short time, the initial ingredients will act as a catalyst, and the natural juices formed will heat up the mix.

6) To further promote the fermentation process, enclose the mixture in a container with a tight lid, well away from any gamelan instruments.

7) After a few months, critical mass will be reached. At this point it will be impossible to keep the ingredients from uniting with gamelan instruments, no matter how far away they have been placed.

In March of 1988, more than eight months after he had returned from Bali, Mark McCain heard from a friend that Denver University actually owned a Balinese gamelan—a complete set of *angklung* instruments that had been stored away in the basement of the music building for several years. When Mark finally saw the gamelan, intact but unused, it became clear that this was the opportunity he had hoped for since his return from Bali. With the help of Professor John Trainor, an ethnomusicologist teaching at Denver University (DU), he was able to convince the Music Department to lend out the instruments, so that he and several other musicians could start rehearsals. By September the gamelan was sitting in his living room.

By the time the instruments arrived, Frankie Anderson, a percussionist and member of the Colorado New Music Association (and the one who originally told Mark about the DU gamelan), had completed a grant proposal to the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities to invite a teacher for the group. Although they



had made some progress in teaching themselves some basic playing techniques, they felt it was time to study traditional angklung music.

As their first teacher, I was able to experience first-hand the degree of enthusiasm that had already been generated. Starting almost from scratch, the group rehearsed every night for two weeks, often into the middle of the night. In that short amount of time the players were able to learn all the *gangsa* and *jegogan* parts to three complete angklung pieces. (These had been taught to me originally by I Wayan Sujana during his year in California as Gamelan Sekar Jaya's guest artistic director.) In fact to say "learning the parts" doesn't do justice to their playing: by the time I left they were able to master the difficult *kotèkan* patterns of Balinese angklung music so that they sounded like one unified ensemble with a high degree of rhythmic synchronization, proper phrasing and dynamics, and even a sense of feeling for the music. It was clear from the start that these were musicians who had been playing together for many years, and were already attuned to one another in the kind of ensemble work that is so critical in playing Balinese music.

Rehearsals have continued steadily since that time, without any loss of momentum. In addition to refining the pieces that were learned in the first two weeks, the group has been able to add other pieces to their repertoire by learning the individual parts from a four-track recording. By dubbing each track successively with one of the four primary parts—the *polos* and *sangsih* of the *gangsa* and the two *réong* parts—we were able to record two more compositions in such a way that they could later be learned part by part, and then checked against the total mix. It seemed the best solution until the group is able to invite a Balinese teacher who will then be able to work with them on an advanced level. This method also has the advantage of avoiding the use of written notation, which often hurts more than it helps by diverting attention away from the unity of ensemble and rhythmic precision necessary in playing interlocking figuration.

The angklung group is also encouraging its members to compose new music integrating Indonesian forms with Western music. In June of this year Mark Fuller and Mark McCoin created a new work, entitled *Snoring Dog* (named for the reaction of one player's pet to the first rehearsal of the piece). The composition makes use of the full gamelan angklung, as well as three new instruments built by artist and craftsman Fred Metz. These are modelled after the angklung instruments, but use iron keys and PVC resonator tubes to replace their bronze and bamboo counterparts, tuned in a different (but compatible) scale.

The group should have no problem generating other new compositions as well, considering that at least five of the members are experienced composers with a wide range of backgrounds. In this connection the group is collaborating with the Colorado New Music Association, a tax-exempt organization which is involved in the presentation of diverse

styles of music, including cross-cultural idioms, by Colorado artists and composers.

This new ensemble is a good illustration of a community-based group that is propelled totally by their enthusiasm and fascination with the music that has enabled them to become a competent performing ensemble within the span of a year (see the list of recent performances below). The contrast with many university programs is clear. Although these programs are often able to generate a great deal of excitement and attract many talented students, the turnover in players from one semester to the next makes it difficult to maintain high playing standards over any length of time. The momentum the gamelan angklung group in Denver has created, combined with the musical talent of its members, promises to carry it much further. They are currently making plans for participation in the Festival of Indonesia, a nationwide celebration of Indonesian arts and culture that will take place in this country in 1990-1991.

Co-director Mark McCoin is a percussionist, synthesist and composer with a background in many diverse styles of music and theater. He has collaborated with Bruce Odland in the music for the David Taylor Dance Company production of *Anasazi Dreams* and the *Bruce Odland Big Band*. An album of his music has recently been released by Prolific Records. Mark was commissioned by the Colorado New Music Series in 1987 to create a new work, entitled *Transition: Music in Motion*. He is also a member of the Gitanaji Music Ensemble.

Co-director John Trainor, is a Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Denver's Lamont School of Music, as well as a teacher of instrumental music for the Denver public schools. Dr. Trainor received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in Seattle and has done field work in Vietnam, Hungary, Spain and England. He is the ethnomusicological consultant to the Denver Museum of Natural History, where he has worked extensively with the Crain collection of Amerindian musical instruments.

Group members are Frankie Anderson, John Cheney, Mark Fuller, Mark Harris, Glenn Nitta, Greg Painter, Michael Stanwood, Dane Terry, Valerie Terry. The group's repertoire includes the traditional pieces *Madu Suara*, *Nedes Lemah*, *Nakula Sedih*, *Tabuh Dung*, and *Panyembrama* as well as the new composition *Snoring Dog*, and another untitled work in progress.

Between January and June 1989, the group performed at the University of Denver; Alliance Francaise de Denver; Smoky Hill High School; Heatley's Teahouse; Denver Botanical Gardens Amphitheater; Capital Hill People's Fair; and David Taylor Dance Theater, involving impressions of Balinese culture, music, and dance in an outdoor performance, Tuscany Building Fiddler's Green.

For further information on the Denver Angklung Group, please contact Mark McCoin, 3340 Wyandot Street, Denver, CO 80211, telephone (303) 455-3074. ▀

ARCHIVES

The Archives collection of materials by Indonesian authors and artists has increased dramatically in the last two years. Some items are for research only, others are available for distribution. All Archives sales support the production of *Balungan* and free subscriptions for Indonesian artists and scholars. For a complete catalog and price list, or information on the research collection, write to Box A-36, Hanover, NH 03755, USA.

Publications from STSI Surakarta

One of the most active and important publishers of books on Indonesian music is STSI (National College of the Arts) in Surakarta, formerly ASKI. These books are only sold in Indonesia, and many are now out of print. The publications are the work of STSI's expert faculty, covering many areas of music, dance and wayang. While texts are generally in Indonesian, many of the manuscripts consist almost entirely of musical notation, and are therefore useful for those who might not have yet learned Indonesian. An agreement between STSI and the American Gamelan Institute allows many of these out of print publications to be distributed in photocopy through the Archives. (The following is a partial list; write for more complete information.)

Dewi, Nora Kustantina. *Tari Serimpi Sangupati Kasunanan Surakarta*. ASKI, 1985-86. 73 pp. Floor patterns and choreography for the dance.

Djumadi. *Belajar Rebab*. SMKI 1982. 179 pp. Notation and exercises for rebab playing.

Hastanto, Suparno, Rustopo. *Cengkok-Cengkok dan Wiledan Genderan Gaya Surakarta*. ASKI, 1976. app. 200 pp. Notation for many gender cengkok.

Martopangrawit, R.L. *Gending-gending Santiswara*. Vol. I. ASKI 1977. Vocal notation for 57 pieces in pelog pathet nem and barang.

Martopangrawit, R.L. *Gending-gending Martopangrawit*. ASKI 1983. 69 pp. Vocal and balungan notation for 40 pieces composed by Martopangrawit. Notes in Javanese.

Murtiyoso, Bambang. *Pengetahuan Pedalangan*. ASKI 1982. 149 pp. Discussion of details of puppet forms.

Parsana, Harjito, Sutarno. *Titilaras Genderan*. ASKI, 1972. app. 80 pp. Gender notation for several pieces.

Soemanto. *Teks Catur Wayang Kulit Purwa Sala*. 75 pp. Wayang text in Javanese.

Soeroso. *Rebaban Lagu Patetan*. 1971. 22 pp. Notation for rebab for 18 pathetan.

Sri Hastjarjo, Gunawan. *Gendhing-gendhing Sekar, Vol. I*. 1979. 135 pp. and *Vol. II*. 1980. 59 pp. *Sindhenan* (female vocal parts) notation for pieces in the form *ketawang sekar*.

Sri Hastjarjo, Gunawan. *Sekar Ageng, Vol. I*. ASKI 1983.

153 pp. Vocal notation for 223 poems.

Sukerta, Pande Made. *Gending-gending Gong Gede*. 77 pp. Cipher notation for 24 pieces.

Sukerta, Pande Made. *Gamelan Gong Gede di Desa Batur*. Pande Made ASKI 1986. 99 pp. Notation and drawings of instruments and cases.

Suparno, T. Slamet. *Sindenan Andegan Nyi Bei Mardusari*. PDK, ASKI 1984-85. 58 pp. Discussion and notation of about 30 *andegan* (vocal interpolations) used by the famous singer Mardusari, with balungan notation for the gending and vocal notation for the andegan.

Suparno, T. Slamet. *Dokumentasi Wangsalan: Susunan Nyi Bei Mardusari*. 1985. 44 pp. Translations (Javanese - Indonesian), discussion and lists of *wangsalan* (poetic riddles).

Suratman. *Gending-gending Dolanan Anak-anak di Surakarta I*. 1985. 84 pp. Vocal and balungan notation for 75 pieces for children with texts in Javanese.

Vocal notation by Nyi Supadmi

Three new books of Javanese vocal notation have been co-published by Nyi Supadmi and the American Gamelan Institute. This project represents the interest of AGI in working cooperatively with Indonesian artists to enable their works to be better known to an Indonesian and international audience. These books, first produced in Surakarta in 1989, were compiled by Nyi Supadmi for use by both her students and other *pesindhen* (female singers). They are practical tools for a vocalist in a Central Javanese gamelan, serving as a reference or a study guide. Nyi Supadmi, a singer, teacher and composer, is on the faculty at STSI Surakarta.

Palaran: Gaya Surakarta & Gaya Yogyakarta. 100 pp. Vocal notation (text and melody) for 59 palaran in Surakarta style, 21 in Yogyakarta style, and an additional 49 in "Surakarta style pelog nyamat."

Ladrang: Sindhenan Gendhing Ladrang Slendro & Pelog. 89 pp. Notation for the balungan, pesindhen melody and text for 32 frequently performed ladrang. A short indication of the performance structure of each piece is given, and some *andegan* (vocal interpolations) are provided.

Cengkok-cengkok Srambahan dan Abon-abon. 72 pp. A "dictionary" of vocal *cengkok* (melodic phrases) arranged by text, pathet, *seleh* (goal tone), and syllable length. Several variations are given for each pitch. For example, to "go to" pitch 6 in slendro manyura, this book shows seven phrases each for a four, eight or twelve syllable text. ▀