

## Gamelan Freiburg

by Dieter Mack

I was lucky that Wayne Vitale was around to help me form my group in 1982. We started with *pelegongan* music and added *kebyar* in 1985. That year we also had the good fortune to play with two Balinese dancers from the village of Mas, who strongly influenced my group, especially the "hard-core" members. Since then we have tried to maintain and develop our performance standards, and I am quite happy with the quality of the group, although there is still a lot to do!

Our group has two basic problems. The first is the difficulty of keeping members for a long time. This may be the same with other groups too, but I believe that the problem is worse in Germany because there is little interest in ethnomusicology, and even less in actual performance [of

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*Dieter Mack, a composer from Freiburg, Germany, is currently involved in a three year music education program at IKIP Bandung.*

non-Western music]. For several years I have struggled to get the gamelan into the curriculum at the music department where I teach. With the support of the Indonesian Embassy (the Cultural Attaché is a big fan), I had convinced all the necessary institutions to support a gamelan program (by inviting them to listen to us!), but at the last moment the program was canceled because there was no money for it. So the gamelan is still my sole responsibility, which, though it is better as far as our independence, is hard concerning discipline.

Since 1985 we have maintained a membership of about 23, with a core group of 12. Some now have jobs in other towns, but they return for weekend rehearsals before concerts. We also work with the other two German/Swiss gamelan groups (Andras Varsanyi's group in Munich and Charlie Richter's gambuh group in Basel). The gambuh members play in my group also, five people from Munich



*Pelegongan Freiburg.*



Dieter Mack performing at ASTI Bandung with 12 gamelan players and 7 jazz musicians.

join us for our concerts, and members of our group play in their concerts. We must collaborate if we want to play with a full orchestra, because of the large gap between beginners and advanced players.

Our second problem is that we rarely have Balinese teachers in Europe. I am somewhat satisfied with what we have achieved, although it could be better, especially in comparison with groups such as Sekar Jaya [in El Cerrito, California].

Nonetheless, we have given many concerts. The big event in 1990 was a tour of southern Germany sponsored by the local government to bring "culture to rural areas." It was a great success—every concert in small towns drew about 400 people. The other major series was an invitation by the Indonesian Embassy for three concerts. One was for a gathering of Indonesians in the embassy, who didn't believe that a concert like this could take place in Germany. As a result, we played for a visit of President Suharto on the Fourth of July, 1991.

Our current repertoire consists of the following styles and pieces. Pelegongan: *Sekar Ginotan*, *Kebyang-dong*, *Gambangan*, *Liyar Samas*, *Tabuh Gari*, *Legong Kutir* and *Ampin Lukun*, a dance of the Sisian (not really Pelegongan but it fits). Kebyar: *Kebyar Duduk*, *Hujan Mas*, *Sekar Kamuda*, *Budi Duwit Tunggal* and *Purwa Pastima Baris*. We perform the *Topeng* repertoire and almost all the basic repertoire of *Gambuh*. Except for the *Gambuh*, the only dances we do are *Kebyar Duduk* and *Ampin Lukun*. We performed *Topeng* with Balinese dancers in 1985 and in 1990. We do not have Indonesian dancers in our group, so we concentrate on instrumental music.

My other work for gamelan is totally different and relates more to my work as a composer and teacher. This started in 1988 when I was invited by the Goethe Institute to

tour my music in Southeast Asia with a chamber music group of six people. The tour (including seminars) was an unexpected success and led to invitations to teach at various institutions in Indonesia in 1989, including ISI Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and especially in Bandung at ASTI (*Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia*, an arts college).

My first workshop at ASTI focused on two projects. The first started from a composition of mine for alto flute and percussion. The idea was to create a version of this piece for Sundanese instruments (and also to discuss basic ideas of composition). I had two German players with me, and a Sundanese dancer, Juju Musnah, choreographed a dance to the original version of the piece while I arranged the Sundanese version. The work was not easy but I think it was interesting for both parties. The second project was a multimedia work created in collaboration with the ASTI theater department. This was easier, with a more improvisational structure, but difficult in terms of rehearsal discipline. This was always the first point of conflict between the Indonesians and me, but we always came to a reasonable resolution.

Another project at ASTI focused on basic musical training. I gave a workshop and concert where I composed a piece for seven western jazz musicians and the 12 Sundanese players who were there. I also wrote a big multimedia work for Sundanese and Western instruments, live dancing and a kind of black-box stage, working with invisible screens, black light and fluorescent colors and a basic idea of geometrical symbolic structures. I liked the piece a great deal but it got mixed reviews. Recordings and videos of the performances are in Bandung at the Goethe Institute and ASTI. ▶