

## INTERVIEW

# Joko Sutrisno: "Penataan—many different feelings in a short time."

by Gareth Farr

Farr: What is a *penataan*?

Sutrisno: The word *penataan* just means "arrangement," so almost anything can be called a *penataan*. But the concept of *penataan* that originated at my school (STSI, *Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia* in Surakarta, formerly called ASKI) means to perform and to express many feelings, characters, *pathet* [tonal hierarchies], dynamics, *irama* [density relationships in time], structures, styles (Javanese, Balinese), tunings, scales, etc., — all in one short performance. In Java, gamelan performances can go on all day and all night. The idea of *penataan* is to make a short, condensed performance by making new arrangements of traditional pieces. Many gamelan musicians in Java still do not play or know about *penataan*, but I think that this will change in the future as more people find out about it.

In my opinion, there are four types of *penataan*. There are traditional *penataan* that have their own special consistent characteristics. They are comprised of three or four pieces and the transitions between the pieces is very smooth, for example from the form *gendhing* to *ladrang* and then to *ketawang*. This is a very traditional scheme and everyone knows how to make those changes. Second, traditional pieces such as dance suites are also a kind of *penataan*. For example, in the dance *Klana Topeng* there are many different sections joined together, but in Java it would not be called a *penataan*, just "music for Klana."

Arrangements for dance are usually the same *pathet* all the way through; all of the sections are traditional and could include forms such as *Adha-adha*, *Gendhing*, *Ladrang*, *Lancaran*—all with different feelings and moods. The third kind is the *penataan* from my school, STSI Surakarta. These are a very new style, as the concept of *penataan* only started there recently. This form of *penataan* is very difficult—we

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sometimes need to practice these thirty to forty times when preparing for a performance.

Last, there are *penataan* that I arrange to display gamelan to New Zealanders who have never heard it before. For example, when the Victoria University Gamelan went on tour to Christchurch in 1989, for many people it was the first time they had ever heard gamelan. If we just played traditional pieces, each one lasting five to ten minutes, people might get the impression that gamelan is all the same with very few contrasts or differences. But in a *penataan* there are many contrasts—one moment it is loud and then suddenly it will become soft. There is much happening, a lot of life. I believe that people are more attracted to gamelan when they hear something like this.

So my first consideration is how to present, in a short time, gamelan from Java, using gamelan players from New Zealand. I first look at the level of the players I have in New Zealand. Their level is unavoidably different from that of

Javanese people, so I have to decide how to make good music using their abilities. It would be very different if I wrote a penataan at my school in Java—I would have no restrictions in the skill of players. At the same time, I try to challenge my New Zealand players with more and more difficult things in my penataan, and as a result the standard of playing gets better and better. Sometimes I use different pathet: pelog lima to pelog nem to pelog barang, which is difficult. For example, in a recent penataan (Figure 1) I used *Kodok Ngorek*—a very old piece used for weddings that combines pelog and slendro tuning systems, while the *balungan* repeats the phrase 6 · 6 7—as a transition from *Ganda Mastuti* in pelog lima but with pitch seven to *Sampak* in pelog barang. *Kodok Ngorek* is a very suitable piece for a gradual transition like that. Although the pathet does not always have to change gradually—it is sometimes necessary to change suddenly.

Sometimes I use a smaller penataan, unlike my penataan to display the gamelan. For example when our gamelan plays *Manyarsewu* (a fast bold lancaran) we put *Tumadhah* (a slower quieter piece) in the middle. I don't have to use long pieces. Sometimes I just use two traditional pieces—it makes it easier for me!

**Farr:** You studied composition as your major subject. Was it part of your composition degree to learn how to put penataan together on your own?

**Sutrisno:** Yes. There are five main divisions of study at STSI. First is *Tabuh Khusus* [traditional gamelan study], second is gamelan for *wayang* [puppet theater], the third is dance, the fourth is study of gamelan from other regions in Indonesia, like Bali, Yogyakarta, and Sunda. The fifth division is Composition, which includes penataan. But penataan at my school is really used for the final exam for the student's degree. The exam is called *Penyajian* [recital] because of the skill level of the students.

**Farr:** Are there any strict rules that you must follow to make a penataan?

**Sutrisno:** The hardest rule that we have to follow is how to put all this material into a good order. And changing from one part to the next is very hard. For example, if you were going to go from Javanese style to Balinese style it would be a real challenge to figure out how to put it in a good order. Some people try things like that, but so far I have never tried that myself. You need a lot of practice and it is very hard. Balinese is a particularly difficult one to join to other styles; Banyumas or Sundanese is easier because they use the same instruments as the Solonese gamelan (the gamelan that Victoria University uses).

**Farr:** When gamelan composer and performer Jody Diamond visited the Victoria University Gamelan last year she was impressed that you were using penataan with the group. Could you outline what the major difficulties are in putting a penataan together that might make foreign groups

shy away from them?

**Sutrisno:** The major consideration is the resources of players you have—the level and ability of the players is very important. My penataan from 1989 and 1990 are very different, because last year (1989) I didn't have *siter* [zither] or *gambang* [wooden xylophone]. So I had to decide on a nice piece without *siter* or elaborating instruments. I used *Sampak*, which uses basically just *balungan* and *bonang* and not as many elaborating instruments.

Another major consideration is the fact that we don't have much time to practice. Penataan really need a lot of practice, especially on the changes between sections. So I have to spend a long time looking at the whole repertoire and deciding which pieces to use. Will I use *Sampak*, *Pangkur*, *Ketawang*? And all the while I am thinking about this, I have to also remember that the time is so short that there will be no time to make changes at the rehearsals if the transitions do not sound good. What I have written will sometimes sound totally different at the practice, and if I start making changes, then there is no more time left to practice them. I also like to protect the feelings of the players, so that they are not disappointed. If we try again and again to get it right and then I decide to change the whole thing, they get upset.

**Farr:** So what is the best way of practicing the transitions between the sections?

**Sutrisno:** Usually in Indonesia we just try the pieces again and again until we find ones that fit together. The penataan composer thinks it out alone, and then practices and makes changes together with the group, because their ideas are often very different.

**Farr:** Trial and error?

**Sutrisno:** Yes, that's right. And at STSI when the supervisor comes round to listen, he also has to be satisfied that the piece works. But in New Zealand, I must try to make these transitions by myself.

**Farr:** That happens with western composers too. You write something down in your manuscript and when it is performed it is nothing like what you heard it in your head!

Would you ever compose a new piece yourself as a part of a penataan?

**Sutrisno:** No, the material is always traditional, but the way of playing it is different. For example, one of sections of the penataan presently in the Victoria University Gamelan's repertoire is *Godril* in pelog. In the traditional form it is just:

6 2 6 2 6 3 5 6 2 1 3 2 6 5 3 5  
2 3 5 · 1 6 5 3 6 1 3 2 6 5 3 ②

After playing the traditional pattern a few times we add something new :

②62626262 6 . . . 2·353235 . . . .  
1 6 5 3 6 1 3 2 6 5 3 ②

This is used for penataan by one of my friends. I think

it originally came from a village in East Java.

Another example is *Sampak* (pelog). In traditional form it is:

2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 1 1 1  $\widehat{1}$   
 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 6 6 6  $\widehat{6}$   
 6 6 6 6 3 3 3 3 2 2 2  $\widehat{2}$

but in our *penataan* we use this variation on some of the repeats:

2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 1 1 1 1  
 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 6 . 6 .  
 drum -b tb d b - b -  
 . .  $\overline{6 6}$  . .  $\overline{3 3}$  . .  $\overline{.2 22}$  2  
 -b b t t - -Pl b t t -t -t -b bb b

This sort of variation would be very seldom heard except in *penataan*. In fact, I never heard anything like it when I was at ASKI. I got the idea for this from my father who sometimes used this rhythm in the character's voices while performing wayang.

In *penataan* you can try new things with the traditional material—you can change the *irama* (tempo or rhythm), do something new with the *balungan*, use ornamentation...

**Farr:** Is it more acceptable to modify traditional material within the context of *penataan* than if you are playing, say, *Sampak* by itself?

**Sutrisno:** Yes. You don't have to modify, but you need to have creativity when you put together a *penataan*. And experience.

**Farr:** Is there a right and a wrong in *penataan* composition?

**Sutrisno:** No, no! You can't say "this is wrong and this is right." I think "nice and not nice" is better! If you are playing *Pangkur* and some people are in a different place from others, then you can say that is wrong, but not here.

**Farr:** If someone wanted to put together a very basic simple *penataan*, what advice could you give them?

**Sutrisno:** It depends on who is doing the composition—there are Western gamelan pieces that are similar to *penataan*, but I can't say that they are *penataan*. They are a series of pieces which are simply played consecutively, not really a true *penataan* with proper Javanese transitions. Well, your piece *Siteran* for gamelan and harp is like a *penataan*.

If people want to compose a Javanese style *penataan*, they must have a lot of experience playing in a gamelan. They would first need to have a very good understanding of all gamelan cues, especially the *kendhang* [drum] cues, because the changes in *penataan* are vital and should always lead to something different. For example, changing

suddenly from loud to soft, or a sudden cut — [Joko vocally demonstrates a short, loud drum cue for a sudden cut-off immediately followed by a soft slow drum introduction to the next, much quieter section]. I also mean the longer cues as well, e.g. *ombak*, *suwuk*, (these are longer drum patterns intended to forewarn the players of the next section). They would also need experience in the elaborating instruments—for example, *kendhang*, *gender*, or *bonang*.

Finally, and very importantly, they must listen to a lot of gamelan: recordings, performances, etc. I think the principle of combining and presenting many different feelings in a short time is not difficult, but you need the wide knowledge of the repertoire, otherwise the feel of a fifteen minute piece or a half-hour piece will be the same. The only way to do this is to listen all the time and keep playing. ▀

Penataan

\*- Ayun-ayun - Godril - Srepeg - Gangsoran 2 - Gandamastuti -  
Kodok ngorek - Sampak

1) Jkr. Ayun-ayun. Pl. 6.

Bk: 6 6532 3216 121(6)

$\begin{array}{cccc} \hat{2}3\hat{2}1 & 353\hat{2} & 532\hat{1} & 353\hat{2} \\ 635\hat{6} & 216\hat{5} & 363\hat{2} & 312\hat{6} \end{array}$   
 -+- -+- -+- -+-

Wiled

$\begin{array}{cccc} 56-- & 2321 & 21-- & 353\hat{2} \\ 12-- & 2321 & 21-- & 353\hat{2} \\ 12-- & 235\hat{6} & 2321 & 654\hat{5} \\ -356 & 353\hat{2} & 5316 & 121\hat{6} \end{array}$   
 ending → 123(2)

2. Jkr. Godril Pl. 6.

$\begin{array}{cc} \hat{6}\hat{2}\hat{6}\hat{2} & \hat{6}\hat{3}\hat{5}\hat{6} \\ \hat{2}\hat{1}\hat{3}\hat{2} & \hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{3}\hat{6} \\ \hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{5}\hat{6} & \hat{7}\hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{6} \\ \hat{6}\hat{1}\hat{3}\hat{2} & \hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{3}\hat{6} \end{array}$   
 +++++ +++++

B.  $\overline{6} \overline{26} \overline{26} \overline{26} 26 - - -$   
 $\overline{235} \overline{323} - - -$   
 1 6 5 (3)  
 6 1 3 2 6 5 3 (2)

3. Srepeg Manyuri

$\begin{array}{ccc} \hat{3}\hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{2} & \hat{5}\hat{3}\hat{5}\hat{3} & \hat{2}\hat{1}\hat{2}\hat{1} \\ \hat{2}\hat{1}\hat{2}\hat{1} & \hat{3}\hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{2} & \hat{5}\hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{6} \\ \hat{5}\hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{6} & \hat{2}\hat{3}\hat{5}\hat{3} & \hat{6}\hat{5}\hat{3}\hat{6} \end{array}$   
 +++++ +++++ +++++

4. Gangsaran. 2

$\begin{array}{cc} +2\hat{2}\hat{2}\hat{2} & \hat{2}\hat{2}\hat{2}\hat{2} \end{array}$   
 +++++ +++++

Note: Barang BB + BP are Klenangan

5. Ketawang Ganda Mastuti

$\begin{array}{cccc} \overline{-2} \overline{32} \overline{13} & \overline{26} 5 3 \hat{2} 3 & \overline{12} 3 2 \hat{1} & 3 2 \hat{1} \\ - \overline{-2} \overline{32} \overline{13} & \overline{26} 5 3 \hat{2} 3 & \overline{12} 3 2 \hat{1} & 3 2 \hat{1} \\ - \overline{-7} \overline{57} 6 & 5 4 2 \hat{1} & - 3 - 2 & - 1 - \\ - 2 - 3 & - 2 - \hat{1} & - 3 - 2 & - 1 - \end{array}$   
 -+- -+- -+- -+-

6. Kodok ngorek.

P · P · P · P · P (b)  
 $\begin{array}{cc} 7 \cdot 7 6 & 7 \cdot 7 \end{array}$   
 for slentem only  
 4 2 4 6 4 2 4 1

Note: BB + BP Klenangan again.

7. Sampak. Pelog Barang.

$\begin{array}{ccc} \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee \\ 6666 & 3333 & 2222 \\ \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee \\ 2222 & 3333 & 7777 \\ \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee & \vee \vee \vee \vee \\ 7777 & 2222 & 6666 \end{array}$   
 Ending 666 - - - - - 53

Figure 1. Notation for a penataan arranged by Joko Sutrisno for his group in New Zealand.