

Ra Ngandel: Martopangrawit's last "experimental" composition

translation with an introduction and notes by Marc Perlman
original program and performance notes by Sri Hastanto

Introduction

In early 1986, students graduating from the *Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia* (Indonesian Academy of Musical Arts) at Surakarta had three choices for the form of their final performance examinations: they could arrange a suite of traditional pieces [*tataan gendhing tradisi*]; they could compose a modern composition, using traditional instruments but in non-traditional ways [*komposisi*]; or they could compose and perform music to accompany dance. (The type of performance examination which had previously been obligatory—a recital of several large, difficult *gendhing* from the classical repertory—was abolished in 1981, and would not be reinstated until late 1986.)

Of the two purely musical (that is, unrelated to dance) examination formats, the arrangement [*penataan*] of suites was the more conservative, in that it still made use of traditional *gendhing*; however, even here the emphasis was on novel arrangements of old pieces, and "creative" ways of using familiar material. For example, while traditional "medleys" (such as *Petalon*, the "overture" to the *wayang kulit*) have always brought together *gendhing* of the same *pathet*, a student's *tataan gendhing* was expected to unite *gendhing* from more than one *pathet*. Shifts of *irama* more sudden or extreme than any traditionally used were also common, as were many other novelties.

However, the *komposisi* was the major locus of musical innovation in the Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia (ASKI) examinations. Although students often incorporated fragments of traditional or traditional-sounding material, the conventions of colotomy, *pathet*, and *irama* were discarded, and the emphasis was on the "modern." This included new instrumental and vocal techniques (e.g. striking the keys with bare hands instead of mallets; wordless singing; whistling), dramatic, even violent changes of texture and mood; "fade-out" / "fade-in" transitions; long non-metric passages; and so on.

Martopangrawit (since 1984, officially known as R. T. Martodipura; henceforth, "Pak Marto"), as a senior faculty member of ASKI, usually served on the examining committee which passed judgment on these *komposisi*. His attitude toward them, and toward ASKI's artistic

experimentation in general, was complex. On the one hand, he was not a rigid traditionalist: some of his own compositions explored the innovations introduced into *karawitan* in the 1950s (such as the triple meter and two-part vocal "counterpoint" in his *gendhing Parisuka*); others (like his "fantasia" for solo *gendèr*, *Perjalanan*) broke with the tradition in more unique, personal ways. On the other hand, Pak Marto saw no point in the pursuit of novelty for its own sake, and he found much to criticize in ASKI's *kreasi baru* (new pieces).

He felt, for example, that these pieces had no social context. Traditional *karawitan* (both by itself, and in conjunction with dance or *wayang*) is still an important accompaniment to Javanese weddings and other ceremonies; as such, it plays a role in society that ASKI's new pieces could not assume. "Who," he once asked rhetorically, "would want their daughter married off to the strains of an ASKI *komposisi*?"

However, Pak Marto also had a more radical critique of the "new music" orientation. The entire issue of "modern versus traditional" was, he felt, beside the point. Whether something is new or old is not important; what is important is that the musician develop *karawitan*. (The term he used was *membangun* [to build, to build up]. It was the New Order's term for its national development effort, and a word that was inescapable in the Indonesia of the 1980s.) So first we must ask ourselves: what about *karawitan* needs development? For there is no point in developing something which needs no development. Furthermore, how can we tell if our attempts to develop *karawitan* are in fact improving it? After all, *karawitan* is not like transportation systems (for example). The progression from the bicycle through the motorcycle and automobile to the airplane is clearly modernization; but who can say if ASKI's new pieces represent musical progress?¹

Pak Marto often pointed out to me how impoverished the *komposisi* were, compared to traditional *karawitan*. Not only did they tend to avoid or de-emphasize the so-called "two-mallet" [*tabuh dua*] instruments like the *gendèr*; they also specified the instrumental parts completely, eradicating the latitude the musicians traditionally have to arrive at their own interpretation of a *gendhing*, and through which they can express their own personalities.² Indeed, Pak Marto believed that the new composers at ASKI were content to explore new sounds, and had nothing to express.

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For him, to whom art was an "expression of the soul" [*ungkapan jiwa*], this was a fatal defect.³

It is understandable, therefore, that Pak Marto fulfilled his duties on the examining committee with no great enthusiasm. He sometimes complained that there were no cogent criteria with which to judge the komposisi. Only once did I see a komposisi provoke a strong reaction from him, and that a negative one: he became outraged when one unfortunate student used the sound of pebbles thrown on the floor in her komposisi.

Meanwhile, things were changing at ASKI. The return of two senior faculty from long stays abroad, and a change of leadership, prompted a reevaluation of the Academy's artistic policy and educational goals. Some, for example, felt that the emphasis on creativity could too easily be exploited to mask poor achievement in traditional musical skills; and so the senior recital of classical gendhing was reinstated as an option for graduating students. The komposisi and tataan gendhing were not eliminated, but it was decided to define more carefully the rationale for them, and to clarify their educational value.

For this purpose, ASKI's Karawitan Department asked Pak Marto to compose one komposisi and one tataan gendhing to serve as models for the student composers. And so it happened that Pak Marto's last two compositions were, in a sense, student works.

In this article I present a translation of the score and performance notes for *Ra Ngandel*, the komposisi Pak Marto produced for this commission, along with Sri Hastanto's program notes for the first (and, as of September 1988, still the only) performance, on March 14, 1986.

In making this piece available to English-speaking readers, I should explain that I have not chosen it because of its artistic superiority to Pak Marto's other compositions. Indeed, the Javanese musicians and music-lovers with whom I spoke tended to agree that Pak Marto's last two compositions were far below the standard of his earlier pieces. This may or may not reflect a real diminishment of his creative powers.⁴ He told me, as he was composing these two pieces, that he was not writing them to please himself: he was trying to tailor them to ASKI's needs. Perhaps he merely misjudged his audience. However, it is also possible that his creative energies were declining in his last months of life. At one point during the rehearsals of *Ra Ngandel* even he expressed doubts about the worth of the piece.

Rather, I have chosen to present this piece for three reasons: first, for completeness of documentation. This piece is not included in the compilation of Pak Marto's gendhing published by ASKI (Martopangrawit, 1983); this is its first appearance in print.

Secondly, I chose this piece precisely because I knew so much about its background. Pak Marto composed it while I was in Solo. At that time I had weekly conversations with him, in the course of which he sometimes brought up the topics of ASKI or the pieces they had commissioned

from him. Thus I was in a position to learn his opinions on these subjects.

Finally, given the context I have sketched above, we can perhaps hear in *Ra Ngandel* Pak Marto's musical comment on the issues of tradition, modernity, and creativity—issues discussed at ASKI Surakarta and many other institutions of musical training around the world.

As one might expect, Pak Marto's use of "modern" devices here is comparatively restrained. Colotomy, irama, and even traditional gendhing forms all appear. Aside from the first section, the piece is clearly in *sléndro pathet sanga*. The only departures from tradition are the (very sparing) use of new instrumental and vocal techniques (rhythmic speech for the *gérong*; bowing the *rebab* below the bridge), non-standard instrumentation (four *rebab*), and metrical irregularity (a three-*kenongan ladrang*; a fourteen-beat *pesindhén solo*).

Furthermore, although the piece falls into four clearly-marked sections, the transitions between these are always prepared by a signal from the *kendhang*; there are no "dramatic" transitions. Pak Marto deliberately avoided these (though they are common enough in the student komposisi) because, as he put it, startling experiences are rare in everyday life. He could imagine experiences that would correspond to the unprepared transitions of the more "modern" komposisi: for example, you are riding in a car on a long trip, half-asleep, when suddenly the car you are in collides with another. Nevertheless, he continued, since he himself had never had an experience like that, it would be hard for him to depict it in his komposisi, even had he wanted to.⁵

What is especially interesting, however, is that Pak Marto uses new instrumental techniques in the service of a very traditional purpose: to convey a cryptic message. Indeed, his use of a short, purely descriptive text with no obvious relationship to the title of the piece is reminiscent of some traditional gendhing.⁶

In preparing the English version of the score, I have relied on two sources: First, the score typed up by Sri Hastanto based on Pak Marto's written and verbal instructions, and secondly, the premiere performance, given at ASKI by a group of ASKI staff under the direction of Rahayu Supanggah.

Pak Marto gave Supanggah a free hand in arranging the piece, and he attended all of the rehearsals and agreed to all of the changes suggested by Supanggah. These ranged from small changes of *kendhangan* to the reassignment of parts and even modification of the repetition scheme.

I have relied on the first performance to amplify, elucidate, or (when necessary) revise the original score. All of the supplementary information derived from the performance is placed in square brackets in the English version. Where the original score and first performance do not agree, I have indicated the discrepancy.⁷ ▀

Notes to the Introduction

1. Personal communication, 11 September 1984.
2. Personal communication, 28 January 1985.
3. Personal communication, 3 November 1985.

4. That Pak Marto, in his old age, was still capable of composing classical gendhing of very high quality is shown by his *ketawang Mijil pélog barang*, written in 1984, and now used at the Mangkunagaran court to accompany the *srimpi* dance *Anglir Mendhung*.

5. Personal communication, 18 February 1986.

6. As an example, let me describe briefly Pak Marto's exegesis for one such gendhing, *Jangkung Kuning pélog barang*, taken from his manuscript of pesindhen notation (1981).

Little can be said about the origins of this gendhing. Legend attributes it to Sultan Agung, who reigned from 1613 to 1646 (Warsodiningrat, 1944:II,6). It is not, however, mentioned in the list of 157 gendhing names included in the early nineteenth century *Serat Centhini* (Martopangrawit, 1975:II,31-32; *Serat Centhini Latin*, 1986:II,89).

This piece is slightly unusual in two respects. First, its *inggah* uses double-time balungan in *irama wilet*; second, it has an *andhegan* (pesindhen solo) with the text: *nonah di ranjang pulang* (Malay for "[foreign] young lady on a couch returns home").

Furthermore, as is frequently the case with Javanese gendhing, the significance of the title is unclear. "Kuning" means "yellow; fair [of skin]", but "jangkung" is not so easily glossed. It may mean "tall and slim", in which case the title simply describes a good-looking person. But "jangkung" can also refer to a type of *keris*, a species of bird, and a legendary tree said to have grown from Adam's excrement (Gericke-Roorda, 1901). None of these possibilities has much to do with the homecoming of a foreign lady lying on a couch, however.

Pak Marto, however, interpreted it as follows (1981:45): "Jangkung kuning" refers to Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Dutch East India Company's Governor-General of Java (1618-1623). The pesindhen's text is a *sindhiran* (hint, allusion, veiled message), a *ramalan* (prediction, prophecy) concerning the future of the Dutch in what was to become Indonesia: "Besuk kalau sudah merasa enak (tidur di ranjang) di situ bangsa Belanda akan pulang." (When the Dutch feel comfortable here—when they "sleep on a couch"—that is when they will go home.)

7. I would like to thank Sri Hastanto and Supanggah, who provided key information about this piece, and Alan Feinstein, who read an earlier draft of this paper and suggested many improvements. I, of course, am solely responsible for any errors in the contents.

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Program Notes (by Sri Hastanto) ¹

The Javanese phrase *'ra ngandel* means "to disbelieve, to be skeptical." Pak Marto says that he does not believe that people who claim to be honest are [always] really honest, since truly honest people demonstrate their honesty in deeds, not in words. Through this composition, Pak Marto states that, although many people may seem honest and decent, in fact many of them are dissimulating their real intentions, which are usually egotistical. Furthermore, such people do not hesitate to exploit others to reach their goals. He compares these people and their victims to the *kapok* and its seed. When danger threatens—for example, when the true nature of the "kapok" is about to be exposed—it can fly away, carried by the winds, while the "seed" falls, suffering, to the ground.

Another type of person brought into view by Pak Marto is the self-confessed blackmailer, who uses threats to reveal other people's secrets for his personal gain. Pak Marto calls people like this "squirrels" [*bajing*]², and their presence can be sensed a little in the singers' text.

Besides these three types, Pak Marto feels that, even in this disordered world, there is another type of person, though its numbers are small: the true *ksatriya* ["knight"; man of honor] who works quietly, confidently, and honestly. But even this type of person cannot escape from the world's unrest. These four groups struggle to maintain their existence in the same place and at the same time.

[However,] Pak Marto focuses on the first two groups: the false, somersaulting "kapok", and the suffering "seed".

Ra Ngandel falls into sections, numbered by Pak Marto from one to four. The first section states that there are four types of people; the second and third sections express the turbulent struggles of these groups; and the last section is the story of the *kapok* and the seed, reinforced by a sung text.

Performance Instructions (prepared by Sri Hastanto)

This score contains those notes for the performers which would not be comprehensible apart from the notation. In what follows, the course of the piece will be described from its beginning, passing quickly over the matters already contained in the score.

The first section is sufficiently described in the score. The second section, begun with a drum "signal", [the *buka* for] *ladrang kendhang kalih irama tanggung* drumming, is then played loud-style [*soran*] with *kendhang kalih* drumming in *irama tanggung*. This section is also played using *ciblon* drumming, maintaining the same *irama*. The *ciblon* starts playing after the first *gatra* of 2A. If, at that point, the drumming changes to *ciblonan*, continue as in 2B [i.e. play 3635 instead of 3235] and return to 2A. Repeat 2A as long as necessary; 2B is not played again.

When the *kendhang* plays the signal for *Sampak* [starting] on the second beat of the last *gatra* of 2A, proceed to the third section. [As notated, the tempo doubles between sections 2 and 3. If the transition were to be notated keeping

a constant pulse, it would look like this:

. 2 . 3 . 2 . 1 . 6 . 5 . 3 . ⑤ 6565 652① etc.]

This *Sampak* does not use the large gong, but only the *gong suwukan*. The *kendhang* plays its *salahan* before the gongs on 6 and 5, while the other gongs (on 1 and 2) are not preceded by the *salahan*. The signal to proceed to the fourth section is that the *kendhang* omits its *salahan* before gong 5 (see line 3B).⁴ When that happens, the gong does not play at the 5; only the *kenong* plays, and the piece continues to 3C, the transition to section 4 (slow, *irama dados*).

This fourth section requires two groups of vocalists, male and female. The women sing the upper [notated] line, the men the lower. At the asterisk (line 4C) the gamelan stops [*mandheg*] without a change of tempo [i.e. without slowing down]; what follows is a *pesindhen* solo, indicated by "ss" in the score, and accompanied only by *kempul*.⁵ After the gong (at the words "theng-theng cèr") the *pesindhen* solo continues in *irama lancar*, but, with the *kendhang* signal leading up to the gong of line 4E the *irama* [slows], changing to *irama dados* and returning to the beginning of section 4.⁶ This section is repeated as necessary.

It is possible to return from section 4 to section 2, via 4F, which is played directly after the gong of 4E. The *kendhang* starts by playing the signal for the *suwuk*, but at the second *gatra* changes to + + p b .bp .bp and the performance returns to section 2. However, if the *kendhang* plays the normal *suwuk* drumming, the performance ends at the end of 4F.

[The first performance lasted slightly under twelve minutes. The sections were repeated according to the following scheme:

1. Section 1 once
2. Section 2 4 times (*kendhang kalih*); 4 times (*ciblon*)
3. Section 3 6 times
4. Section 4 3 times
5. Section 2 once (*kendhang kalih*); 4 times (*ciblon*)
6. Section 3 3 times
7. Section 4 once.]

Key to the Kendhangan Notation

- b *dhah/bem* (*kendhang ageng*); *dhen* (*ciblon*)
- p *dhung*
- + *tak*
- o *tong*
- , *ket*
- l *lung* (*ciblon*)
- d *dhang* (*ciblon*)
- B *dhlang* (*ciblon*)
- h *hen* (*ciblon*)

Section 1

Rebab I: Strings tuned to 6 and 2 [i.e. normal tuning], play the open strings with long, slow, steady bowstrokes. After a while, accent the upbow by making it loud and short [*ngegèt*], [leaving a pause after it; then] continue with the long bow-strokes, as before.

Rebab II: Strings tuned to 5 and 2, enter immediately after rebab I's *ngegèt* stroke, and continue with slow, long, repeated bowstrokes.

Rebab III: Strings untuned, enter any time after rebab II starts, bowing in the rhythm *xxx. xxx. xxx.* in fast tempo, playing arbitrary tones produced by pressing the strings with the mid-portions of the fingers, to make the tones unclear (cf. Sundanese rebab-playing, which uses this technique).³

Rebab IV: Strings untuned, enter after rebab III starts. Bow the strings below the bridge using arbitrary tones, rhythms, and tempo.

Note: During this section, the singers intone—without definite pitch—the words “ja gela” [from *aja gela*: “don’t be disappointed”, “don’t sulk”], in 3/4 time [with a pulse of ca. MM 180]. All of the above stop as soon as the *kendhang* gives the signal to begin the second section.

Section 2 (Loud-style playing)

Kendhang signal [*kendhang kalih*]

+ + p b .bp .bp
⑤

2A. Irama 1/2 [*irama tanggung*]

3̣ 2̣ 3̣ . 3̣ 2̣ 3̣ 5̣
.bp .bp +pb p +p
i 6 5 6 5 3 2 i̇
p p p b p .pb p
2 3 2 1 6 5 3 ⑤
bpb pbpp bp.b.pb (*kendhang kalih*)

To end the *ciblon* section and proceed to [section 3]. *Sampak*, [speed up starting at the *gatra* 5321 and use the following drum signal]:

3̣ 2̣ 3̣ . 3̣ 2̣ 3̣ 5̣
i 6 5 6 5 3 2 i̇
2 3 2 1 6 5 3 ⑤
Bpppp score
d+d+d+db . B . . Supanggah

2B. To start the *ciblon* section, after the gong of 2A play [the following pattern] and then repeat 2A [using *bonang imbal*].

3̣ 2̣ 3̣ . 3̣ 6̣ 3̣ ⑤
+ d b pld b . + pld *ciblon*

Section 3 (Sampak)

3A.

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

3B.

i 6 i 6* 5 3 2 ⑤

3C. Transition to irama 1/4 [*irama dados*]

*5 3 2 5̇ 2 3 5 2
5 3 2 3 5 6 i ⑥
+ + p b kendhang kalih

[3C was played by the *balungan* instruments only; the *saron panerus* did not use its usual doubling technique, but played in rhythmic unison with the other *saron*. Supanggah's transition to 3C was as follows:

3 2 5 ⑥ i 6 i 6
d + d b + +hd +

As notated above, the pulse of 3C moves at half the speed of the pulse of 3A. Were the transition to be written out using a constant pulse, it would look like this:

325⑥ i6i6 .5.3 .2.5̇ .2.3 .5.2

The rebab, followed by the other “soft-playing” instruments, entered after the re-entry of the *kendhang*.]

Section 4

Slow [*irama dados*], with two-part *gerongan* [*ketawang, kendhangan kendhang kalih*]

4A. Women's (upper part) and men's voices.

2̇ 2̇ . . 2̇ i 6 5
. 2̇ 2̇ 2̇3̇ 2̇ . 2̇3̇ i̇ . 2̇ 6 5
Ka-puk ran-dhu mo-bal ma-bul
. 2 5 6 6 .xx .xx .xx .xx
Ka-puk ran-dhu mo-bal ma-bul mo-bal ma-bul

4B. Women's (upper part) and men's voices.

i 6 5 6 5 3 1 ②
. 2̇ 2̇ 2̇ i̇ 6 i̇ 5 3̇ . 2̇ 5̇ . 3̇ 2̇
a-nge-la- yang mi-der bu-mi
6 6 6
mung ning-gal

4C. Men's and women's voices together.

[ss: = solo sindhen]

6 6* . . [6 6 . .
(ss:)
. 6 6 . . 2 2 6 . 2 2 6 . 2 2 6
klen-theng dhu-dhu ring wik wik jing puk puk bul
[b .p+] ciblon

4D.

6] ⑤
· 6 6 5
theng theng cèr

4E. Solo sindhen, irama 1/1 [irama lancar]

· · · 2 · · 3 5 6 2 · · 3 ⑤
ya ngo-no ning ja ngo-no

ciblon as notated:

B + B + B +p bpb p b

Supanggah played:

B + B + d+pb . . p b
[ciblon] [switch to kalih]

4F. Suwukan [very slow irama tanggung].

· 1̇ · 2̇ · 5 · 2
Ci- lik a- tos
p · p · b p · b
p · p · + + p b

1 6 3 ⑤
tan- pa ga- wé

...o...o...o...o suwuk drumming
· b p · b p to return to section 2

[In 4A, the words "mobal mabul" in the male singers' part were spoken, not sung; represented here by "xx."

4F, marked "suwukan," was not used exclusively for the *suwuk* (ending). It was played by the full ensemble.

The vocal line written for 4F was also played by the balungan instruments. The instruments played the line as written; the singers altered the rhythm of the first two notes — instead of · 1̇ · 2̇ they sang · · 1̇ 2̇.

Supanggah's actual drumming was as follows:

· 1̇ · 2̇ · 5 · 2 1 6 3 ⑤

to repeat section 4:

p · p · b p · b · .p.pb p b

to return to section 2:

p · p · b p · b + + p b .bp .bp

The suwuk drumming was played as notated in the score.]

Translations of the Texts

Section 1: *ja gela* (gerongan). From *aja gela*, "don't be disappointed; don't sulk."

Section 4:

Kapuk randhu mobal mabul

Angelayang mider bumi

Mung ninggal klentheng

Dhu dhu ring/Wik wik jing/Puk puk bul/Theng theng cèr

Ya ngono ning ja ngono

Cilik atos tanpa gawé

The randhu tree's kapok-tufts scatter,

Riding the winds around the world.

But the kapok-pit remains behind.

That's how it is, but don't be like that:

Small, hard, and useless.

This text deals with the kapok tree, *Ceiba pentandra* (Gaertn.), whose seeds [klentheng] grow inside seed-pods filled with tufts of cotton-like fibres [kapuk]. When ripe, the seed-pod detaches from the tree; the kapok is carried by the breeze, and the seed falls to earth. (This kapok is usually used to stuff mattresses.)

The untranslated three-syllable lines are not in ordinary Javanese, but employ a common kind of word-play in which the words of a phrase are represented by their final syllables only. Usually the full form of the words is clear from the context. This is the case with two of these lines: *puk puk bul* undoubtedly represents *kapuk kapuk mabul*, "the kapok-tufts scatter," while *theng theng cèr* abbreviates *klentheng klentheng kecèr*, "the kapok pits spill down."

Wik wik jing is not so easily elucidated; it may derive from *uwik-uwik*, "to keep picking at (a scab)" and *bajing* (here probably a euphemism for *bajingan*, "scoundrel, bastard"). Sri Hastanto felt this line suggests the blackmailer worrying his victim with constant threats.

The first line, *dhu dhu ring*, is even more obscure. *Dhu* probably represents *randhu*, "the kapok tree"; but what, then, is *ring*? Possibly Pak Marto introduced it merely to rhyme with *jing* in the following line.⁷

Notes to the Program Notes and Score

1. According to Sri Hastanto, he had to rewrite these notes five times. Pak Marto rejected each draft in turn, saying they were "too high-flown" [*terlalu tinggi*].

2. Pak Marto insisted that Sri Hastanto write *bajing* here and not *bajingan*, "scoundrel, bastard," feeling that the reader would understand his implied meaning.

3. In the first performance, this part used what sounded like harmonics, very high-pitched, indistinct, and fast. However, according to Supanggah, the important thing is simply that this part play unidentifiable pitches with a non-normal tone color.

4. In the first performance, Supanggah played a specific kendhang pattern for the transition to 3C (see the score). 3C was played by the balungan instruments only (without bonang, kempul, or—until its re-entry—kendhang); the saron panerus played the same part as the other saron, i.e. without its characteristic doubling. As notated in the original score, the tempo halves upon entering 3C; were it to be written with a constant pulse, it would look as rewritten in my note to the score.

5. In the first performance, the section marked "ss" was in fact sung by all the male and female singers together. Only 4E was sung by a solo pesindhen.

6. In the first performance, the players never went directly from 4E to the beginning of section 4; rather, they always played 4F first.

7. I would like to thank Bapak Padmapuspita of Yogyakarta for his advice on the translations of the text. I, however, am solely responsible for any inaccuracies or infelicities in the translations. ▀