

SCORE

Waton by Komang Astita

by Elaine Barkin

Waton was the work which really engaged Komang's versatility and creativity during his residency at UCLA. *Waton* — from the Balinese word *watu*, meaning stone — refers to "the foundation of a structure." The work owes its very being and originality to Komang's talent in architecture, which he studied at KOKAR, and to the unusual choice of instruments. He used Javanese gender, gongs, and pelog saron; Balinese gangsa, kajar, calung, ceng-ceng, and kendang; plus Chinese temple bowls, various sizes of rain sticks, Aboriginal clapsticks, guiro, Tibetan bells and bowls, and colored plastic whirlies (which I'd bought over the years in toy stores and Chinatown, and cut to different lengths to produce a wide range of tones and partials).

For *Waton*, Komang made a graphic score — a first for him — which underwent numerous changes before it became the score we used in performance. The first version would have taken 25–30 minutes to perform; our final concert version was 18 minutes.

Komang acknowledged a tripartite form, fluid in its actual sound and execution. Here are his program notes. "Pure geometric shapes — triangle, square, circle, etc. — were the inspiration for this work and also served as the source of the sound configurations. The shape of the piece kept changing during rehearsals and will probably change again at another performance.

Much of the composing and choice of tones and tunes was done on the spot, participants joined in with suggestions, instrumental combinations were explored. Difficult passages — and there were several — needed lots of work. Order and duration of sound-events were often unpredictable at rehearsals' ultimately we really needed to memorize the order of events, since content was easier to recall once we knew where we were. The mid-way turnaround was marked by a gender-kendang duo played by Komang and Nyoman Wenten, giving us an authentic taste of exuberant virtuosity.

Waton's sound is shimmering and clacky, at times

strongly "pulsed" beleganjur style, syncopated or interlocked; meditatively freer at both the opening and the close. Lingering timbres shift and resonate throughout *Waton's* essentially palindromic design (yet the durations differ). Downbeat and "end gong" feelings and senses inhabit the work, albeit one at a time.

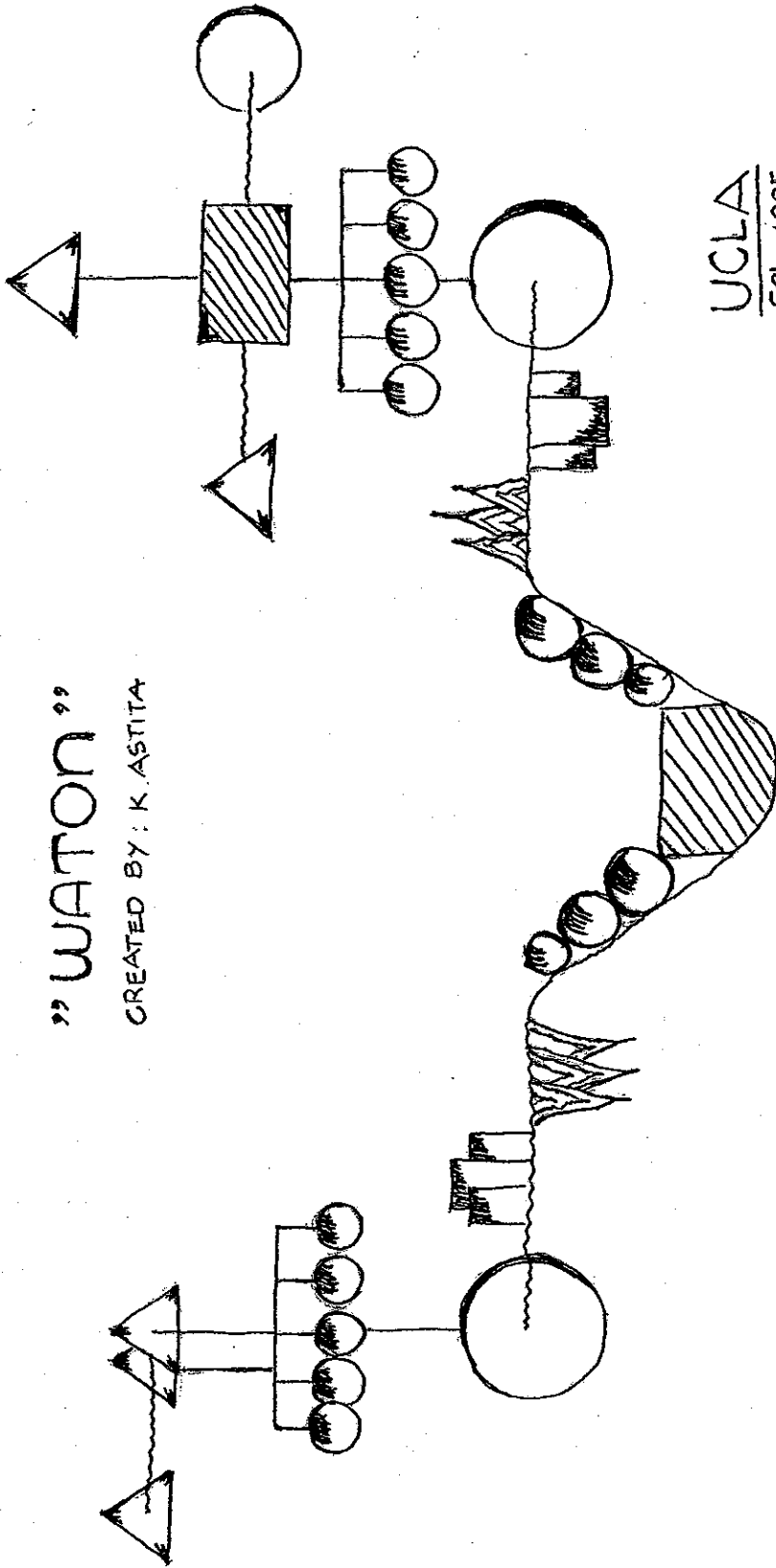
As *Waton* opens, a listener might feel a bit uncertain as temple bowls, Tibetan bells, kempul, clapsticks, guiro, and whirlies softly and dreamily bounce and click off one another. After a few minutes, high gangsas join in, rippling and glissing; a slow, unhurried yet filled in *jam karet* [lit. "rubber hour" in Indonesian, refers to a relaxed attitude toward time] sound. After several more moments, an underlying, at first in audible sense of order subtly and gently begins to make its presence known as sarons enter in, *sotto voce* but *there*. And, soon thereafter, as bowls and whirlies recede, the underlying (foundational: *waton*) beat gradually makes itself more evident with the entrance of a *pokok*, or trunk melody on the calung, followed with a high, slow gangsa kotekan and a *lotano*-like rumbling of kendang. Erratically struck bowls re-enter, the entire multilayered ensemble gushes for a moment, and just as suddenly dissolves, fades out.

This description is of just the triangles and five shaded circles at the beginning of the score; it took us four minutes and 40 seconds to play that opening stretch. The very next passages — large circle, cityscape, and squeezed hanging triangles — are fast, loud, and regularly patterned on the saron and gong, syncopated on the ceng-ceng, with kendang and kajar as strong presences.

At every moment, *Waton's* continual ebb and flow, lows and peaks, unboundedness and regularity, patterns and unpredictability, its *rwa bhinneda* and Ivesian simultaneity, its *ramai*-ness and occasional solitariness, were stunningly cultured and textured. *Musik campur* [lit. mixed music], bits and piece, from here and there, of now.

"WATON"

CREATED BY: K. ASTITA



UCLA
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Left to right: Komang Astita, Sue Carole DeVale, Ken Fowler and Loren Nerell with whirlies and rainstick, Linda Burman-Hall at the gangsa. Other ensemble members were Patrick Bagacina, Elaine Barkin, Richard Meyer, Nicole O'Bryan, Jane Peckham, Michael Toyoshima, and I Nyoman Wenten. Photo by Elaine Barkin.

Komang had brought from Bali a plastic bag of holy water which he and Wenten sprinkled during the pre-concert blessing of the gong. We supplied fruit and rice. Komang told me that he had spent much time praying, meditation, and asking for *taksu* [inner spiritual power through connection with the gods] the night before. There is no doubt that his prayers were answered. ▶