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Innovations in Contemporary Gamelan Music for Jegog Ensemble

Innovations in *Gamelan Jegog*, a large West Balinese ensemble made up mainly of timber bamboo, are helping to preserve traditional music. Some of these innovations include modifications in the construction of the instruments, the addition of choreography, contemporizing compositional styles, and creating collaborative projects with other contemporary musicians/styles.

The development of *Jegog* is divided into four periods. After the founder, named Kiyang Geliduh, there was a local artist who was born named Pak Suprig, then there was Pak Genjor, and lastly and most famously Pak Jayus. Through the mid 1980s, the version created by Jayus was universally used. Genjor used music alone, Suprig added *pencak silat* martial art choreography with traditional songs, and Jayus added a new dimension and dance by transcribing *Gong Kebyar* (the most popular traditional music in Bali) music to the *Jegog* so they traditional Balinese dances could be performed with the *Jegog*. Jayus's music was still very traditional, since he simply transcribed traditional works. Then Jayus's older brother, I Ketut Suwentra, innovated beyond what Jayus had been doing by creating original compositions and choreography.

Construction of Instruments

The ensemble of *Jegog* instruments is divided according to construction and musical role. There are the melody keepers, rhythm keepers, and bass keepers. The melody keeper is called *barangan*, rhythm keepers are called *suir* and *kancil*, and the bass keepers are *undir* and *jegog*. *Barangan* are the three instruments located in the front row of a *Jegog* ensemble. The second row is made up of the *suir* and the third row is made up of the *kancil*. In the third row there are *celuluk* (meaning Rangda) on the left and right sides of the *kancil*. Originally *celuluk* instruments were called *kuntung*. The *celuluk* are the melody keepers. In the fourth (back) row are the bass keepers who play the *undir* and *jegog*. *Gamelan Jegog* instruments were first created very simply and made from wood by a man named Kiyang Geliduh from Sebuah Village in Negara, Jembrana (just north of Sangkar Agung Village). The instrument's foundation was a rectangular wooden frame with keys like a xylophone, which were also made from wood. The story is that in 1912 Kiyang Geliduh slept in the forest and heard many sounds from the branches of the trees, which inspired him to create the instruments. In Jembrana, bamboo forests are plentiful, so Kiyang Geliduh eventually decided to make his instruments from timber bamboo instead. The instruments were low to the ground, so the musicians sat while playing the *Jegog*.

The decorations of the instruments of the *Gamelan Jegog* offer rich additional symbolism. In about 1920 Kiyang Geliduh added ornate carvings representing the

forest flora and fauna (seen and unseen). The legs on the instruments were shaped like deer's legs, horse's legs, and snakes. Given the demonic associations of the name *celuluk*, these instruments on the left and right of the *kancil* have carvings of Rangda's face. The largest of the instruments is the *jegog*, from which the gamelan gets its name. It is decorated with the face of Boma, the son of Siwa the creator. Boma is the protector of the forest, and Balinese believe you must ask his permission to cut any trees in the forest, otherwise he will become angry and may wreak havoc on you.

In 1986, Ketut Suwentra made a critical innovation. He extended the legs of the instruments so musicians could play while standing. This innovation created a more powerful presentation of the instruments and music. Standing gave the players the freedom to move their entire body and enhanced the musician's physical relationship with the instruments, creating a more energetic sound and performance. Until now, I Ketut Suwentra's style of *Jegog* remains the standard across the island of Bali and beyond.

Diagram of Gamelan Jegog set up for performance

(audience)

	<i>Barangan</i>	<i>Barangan</i>	<i>Barangan</i>	
	<i>Kancil</i>	<i>Kancil</i>	<i>Kancil</i>	
<i>Celuluk/Kuntung</i>	<i>Suir</i>	<i>Suir</i>	<i>Suir</i>	<i>Celuluk/Kuntung</i>
	<i>Undir</i>	<i>Jegog</i>	<i>Undir</i>	

New Directions

Prior to 1990, the innovations of Pak Suprig, Pak Jayus, and Pak Suwentra helped to preserve traditional music by increasing popularity of *Gamelan Jegog* among the Balinese, tourists, and populations abroad. Pak Suprig's addition of *pencak silat* to his performances popularized *Gamelan Jegog* amongst the Balinese people by increasing its entertainment value. All of the people in Bali know about *Gong Kebyar* as well as most foreigners who are familiar with Balinese Gamelan music. Therefore, Pak Jayus' adaptation of *Gong Kebyar* music to *Jegog* ensembles broadened the *Jegog* audience and raised the interest of those who were already familiar with both *Jegog* and *Gong Kebyar*. Finally, Pak Suwentra's extending of the *Gamelan Jegog* legs opened dramatic possibilities and new horizons.

When I was young, the government had instituted a rule that directed educators to offer Balinese music and dance in schools. All students were required to learn at least a minimal amount of traditional Balinese music and dance. Although they still have this requirement, the globalization of Bali is causing more and more young Balinese people not to pay as much attention to traditional music. Teenagers and young children like western bands thinking they are more exciting to play, listen, and dance to. In general, Western music is easier to learn than the traditional and newer styles and complex interlocking patterns of traditional Balinese music.

From the 1990s, with the pressures of modernization increasing, *Gamelan Jegog* has accelerated its rate of change. Following the simple addition of *pencak silat* in the 1960s, Pak Suwentra has more recently created original choreography beginning in 1986, and his continuing experiments are celebrated worldwide. The performing and touring ensemble of Pak Suwentra is Suar Agung, founded in 1986. In the 1990s and first decade of the current century, Suar Agung made significant cross-cultural collaborations with the Ghanaian drumming ensembles named Dou Dou n Dye Rose, the Japanese pop music ensemble Gontiti, playing guitars and standard western rock instrumentation.

My own innovation in contemporary *Jegog* extends the horizons established by Pak Suwentra. Pak Winda, the most famous living Balinese composer, suggests a composer should play with dissecting the normal configuration of a Balinese song. Balinese music is normally constructed by composing the head, the body, and then the foot of the piece, with bridges between. My 2007 major work for *Jegog*, 'Mebarung', follows this advice in that I found the way to extend the expectations for a *Jegog* composition by thinking as a Balinese. Since performers stand, I introduced dance motions for the players themselves as well as letting the ensemble split into two competing groups in contest to best the opponent group in sheer volume and energy. 'Mebarung' and other pieces in this vein have been performed during the last 7 years in Bali, Jakarta, Japan, and The Netherlands. In years to come, it will be my pleasure to bring this piece and others that extend the scope of *Gamelan Jegog* to new players and new audiences in years to come as a major contribution to the future of West Bali's signature ensemble.

