**Musical Modernism in Bali and Java**

Andy McGraw

Musical modernism was not domesticated within Balinese or Javanese culture to the extent that it was in other parts of Asia. Although a handful of composers have engaged the specific languages of Western musical modernism, more common is a distinctly Indonesian approach combining modernist philosophies regarding innovation and art’s role in society with developments in local musical styles.

**Overview:**

Although Western musical genres—primarily Christian liturgical and colonial military musics—had slowly diffused throughout the Indonesian archipelago since the late fifteenth century, Western classical music was not widely domesticated in the Dutch East Indies colony, being primarily limited to upper class Dutch and mestizo communities in Batavia (Jakarta), Central Java, and Surabaya, East Java. In the early twentieth century these communities overwhelmingly preferred light classical song (*seriosa*) over classical or modernist styles.

Between the 1930s-1950s a polemic concerning national culture known as the *polemik kebudayaan* largely opposed nativists—those that argued that local expressions should form the basis of Indonesian culture—against cosmopolitan thinkers who advocated the adoption of “universal” expressive forms primarily associated with Western culture. The nativist group included intellectuals such as Ki Hadjar Dewanatara, Soetomo and others associated with the Taman Siswa nationalist school system and the Theosophical movement. Cosmopolitan thinkers included Alisjahbhana, Dungga, Manik, Pasaribu and Wirjasutha. The latter conceived Indonesian culture as comparatively static and feudal and in need of the catalyst that Western culture was perceived to provide.

The composers and critics J.A. Dungga, Liberty Manik and Amir Pasaribu argued vigorously that Indonesian music was woefully underdeveloped and needed to look to the West as its guide. While Dungga and Manik preferred the composers of the Classical Era as the potential basis for local developments, Pasaribu was the first to publically argue for a modernist approach. Pasaribu (1915-2010) studied cello in Batavia and later at the Musashino School of Music in Tokyo, returning to join the Dutch Radio Orchestra and direct the music department of the national radio system (RRI, *Radio Republik Indonesia*). In a series of articles and lectures Pasaribu advocated the adoption of modernist music as the basis of Indonesian high culture while railing against the widespread adoption of Western style popular musics.

During president Sukarno’s reign from 1949-1966 (the “Old Order”), the inclusion of modernist forms within national aesthetic movements was complicated by Sukarno’s antipathy towards Western culture generally. By 1963, a group of artists uneasy with Sukarno and the communist party’s subordination of art to politics voiced their opposition through a cultural manifesto (*Manifes Kebudayaan*) espousing a Western oriented universal humanist approach. Following the 1965-1966 fall of Sukarno’s regime, the mass execution of communist party members, and the installation of the pro-Western regime led by Suharto (the “New Order”), Western modernism slowly gained footing in Indonesia. Pasaribu’s lasting influence was dampened, however, by his need to flee the nation in 1968 for his long association with the Indonesia communist party, after which his music was banned from performance. Nevertheless, Pasaribu’s example reminds us that musical modernism was not an aesthetic regime imposed upon the colony and postcolony by a top-down Western imperialism, but was actively adopted by an, albeit miniscule, section of the population genuinely enraptured by the style.

Musical modernism gradually expanded following the tumultuous years between the Old and New Eras. The Javanese clarinetist, composer, and conductor Suka Hardjana returned from study in the West to found chamber ensembles in Jakarta in 1971. In 1976 the Javanese composer Slamet Abdul Sjukur returned to Indonesia after fourteen years in Paris where he had studied under Olivier Messiaen and Henri Dutilleux. Upon his return Sjukur began teaching modernist composition at the newly founded Jakarta Arts Institute (*Institut Seni Jakarta*) alongside the Javanese modernist pianist and composer Frans Haryadi. That year the New Zealand composer Jack Body began teaching composition at the Indonesian Academy of Music (*Akademi Seni Indonesia*) in Yogyakarta (Central Java), where he would stay for two years.

In the mid 1970s traditional composers working in the Central Javanese town of Solo (Surakarta) were deeply influenced by cosmopolitan dancers including Sardono Kusumo and Gendhon Humardani. Humardani (1923-1983), an aristocratic Javanese intellectual, doctor and dancer, studied modern dance in Martha Graham’s company in New York in 1963, later becoming an influential director of the Indonesian Arts Institute in Solo (STSI Solo). Rather than the specific languages of Western modernism, Humardani absorbed and inculcated in his students an abstracted set of ideas about art and its relationship to society clearly indebted to modernist aesthetics. This entailed an interest in abstract over representational expression, the interest in rapid change and development, the experimentation with new timbres, forms and techniques and the further reification of the autonomy of the artistic field, already underway during colonialism. Humardani’s most significant students included the Balinese composers Pande Madé Sukerta (1953-) and Wayan Sadra (1953-2011) and the Javanese composers A.L. Suwardi (1951-) and Rahayu Supanggah (1949-).

In 1979 Hardjana founded the annual Young Composers Week (*Pekan Komponis Muda*), an influential new music festival that brought together young composers working in both traditional *gamelan* idioms as well as those working in modernist and experimental forms. Sjukur’s, Humardani’s and Body’s students figured most prominently in these festivals, held annually between 1979-1988 and which mark the most significant events in the development of New Order Indonesian contemporary music. Importantly, these events brought together composers of various ethnicities working within widely divergent styles and media, serving as a venue for the forging of a distinctively Indonesian modernism.

Since the end of the Suharto regime in 1998 and throughout the subsequent era of reform, the handful of contemporary Indonesian composers directly engaged with modernist approaches appear to have shared the Philippine composer Jose Maceda’s interest in provincializing the ostensibly universal aesthetics of musical modernism, an approach that seems to have placed them in an ambivalent relationship to the Asian Composers League, dominated by East Asian composers working primarily in a Western modernist style. The most significant of these composers include: Franki Raden (1953-), Yazeed Djamin (1952-), Tony Prabowo (1956-), Ben Pasaribu (1956-2010), Michael Asmara (1956-) and Wayan Yudane (1964-).

References and further reading

Dungga J.A. and L. Manik: Musik di Indonesia dan beberapa persoalannya [Music in Indonesia and several issues] (Jakarta, 1952)

Hardjana, Suka. ed. 1986. Enam tahun Pekan Komponis Muda (1979–1985) [Six years of the Young Composers Festival]. Jakarta: IKJ.

Notosudirdjo, Franki Suryadarma (Franki Raden). 2001. *Music, Politics, and the Problems of National Identity in Indonesia.* Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Pasaribu, Amir. 1986. *Analisis Musik Indonesia* [Analysis of Indonesian Music]. Jakarta: PT Pantja Simpati.

Rustopo. 1990. *Gendhon Humardani (1923-1983) Arsitek Dan Pelaksana Pembangunan Kehidupan Seni Tradisi Jawa Modern Mengindonesia: Suatu Biografi* [Gendhon Humardani (1923-1983) Architect and Instigator of the Modern-Traditional Javanese Arts: a Biography]. Tesis Sarjana S2 (M.A. thesis). Yogyakarta: Universitas Gajah Mada.

Sadra, I Wayan. 1986. *Tinjauan Karya-karya Baru* [Goals of the New Music]. Surakarta: ASKI.