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A Journey with Fruitful Challenges and Without End: A German Musician's Decades of Engagement with Southeast Asian Music and Culture

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Abstract

This paper utilizes an autobiographical framework to examine intercultural issues between Southeast Asia and Europe. It provides an analysis of my life and career as a German composer working frequently in Indonesia. I begin with a discussion of my practices in rock and jazz, with early psychedelic electronic influences, and my conservatory studies in Freiburg, Germany. I then consider the ways in which my first trip to Bali in 1978 led to a complete turnaround in my philosophical outlook and approaches to music-making. I further draw on my experiences working as an exchange lecturer from 1992 to 2007 in Indonesia, and my later professional and artistic activities up to and including the present, to elucidate cultural differences between Europe and Southeast Asia. Woven through this narrative is an examination of the root causes of misunderstandings between practitioners on both sides. I conclude with a discussion of the challenges currently facing artists, teachers, and students working in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Bali, composition, Indonesia, intercultural issues, music education, Southeast Asia

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How it Began

“Non-European Tonal Systems” was the title of a seminar by my teacher Brian Ferneyhough in 1977 at the University of Music Freiburg. Nobody had a concrete idea what that meant, and as we recognized later, Ferneyhough himself did not have one either. Composition students at that time had other points of orientation. Most of my colleagues had been fully focused on the middle-European tradition; the line Bach-Beethoven-Brahms-Schönberg-Stockhausen and so on. Even in our own cultural realm, almost nothing else was regarded as worthy enough to be accepted. Strawinsky was just admitted as the so-to-speak populist opponent of Schoenberg (regards from Adorno!¹). From America, Cage was well-known, but he was accepted because of his ideological concepts rather than his compositions. Just a few – and at that time, I was perhaps the only one – came from the realm of experimental rock music and jazz. At the University of Music Freiburg, such a background was very far from any kind of advantage; in fact rather the opposite, the burden of the “naïve ignorant” had to be carried around, whether one wished it or not.

Then suddenly, that topic “Non-European Tonal Systems” popped up, and it was alien to devotees of any orientation. Why Ferneyhough had chosen that topic (without being in contact with a single non-European music culture) and why in particular I was given the topic “Balinese Gamelan Music”, belongs to those accidental surprises that under special circumstances may turn one’s life upside down. At least this is what happened with me. Did my background in rock and jazz ultimately play a role?

Today, when I recall that exciting time from a reasonable distance, I am convinced that there was a connection, though perhaps not a musical one. The main advantage of my personal musical and cultural background was exactly that which made it difficult for me to study at a university with a traditional reputation. In contrast to my colleagues, I never felt a kind of historical burden of my own cultural tradition (as the dialectic basis of new composition). I loved to dig into my tradition, and managed to do so without falling into the trap of a latent exaggerated

¹ See: Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der Neuen Musik*, Frankfurt 1972

intellectualism, where the mental pervasion of a music was apparently regarded as more important than an emotional or passionate musical experience or a similar musical expression. I could not (and today still cannot) understand that a new musical work is only deemed worthy when its theoretical and ideological frameworks seem to be ‘correct’, while the actual sounding result is considered of secondary importance. Phenomenological aspects, even spiritual ones, in their widest sense were always of higher interest for me. Anything that I did not understand attracted me exactly because of that. It was and still is more important to me, rather than some smart written concepts, theories and argumentations. Therefore, it would not be wrong to speak about a “magic” nuance that removes itself from any rational understanding. On the other hand, I am in no way a kind of ‘new age dreamer’, romantic fantasy boy or even an esoteric ponderer. In contrast, for me, a clear relation to reality has never been in contradiction to that spiritual-phenomenological approach. At least as seen from that point of view, I was probably more open to another music culture. This is my view today after achieving some temporal distance.

A last aspect was my continuous isolation at the University of Music in Freiburg and the potential possibility suddenly to ‘own’ something only for myself which the others did not have. Regarding my own culture, I felt like I was ‘running behind’ during my entire studies. I was able to fulfill everything that was expected, and I even established a kind of positive consciousness for it (if not, I would not have received my jobs later), but I had the inevitable ideological mark from my cultural environment. There is nothing more difficult than decomposing existing prejudices, even if one is already ten steps ahead. I certainly do not want to blame someone. However, the fact that my situation today is not really different compared with the late 1970s is an indication that the euro-centrist attitude that I was facing then, especially at German academic music departments, is still alive. There is no malicious intention behind it, nor a kind of racism. In my opinion, the reason is exclusively the overwhelming importance of historicism (or the belief in it) and the responsibility towards one’s own history as a *conditio sine qua non* for music composition.

The preparations and the execution of my presentation about Balinese gamelan music were satisfying. Admittedly, I received unusual support by the then leading European academic institution: the Department of Musicology of the University

of Basel/Switzerland (at that time under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Hans Oesch), and just by chance I had the opportunity to listen to a concert of *gamelan semar pagulingan* from Teges². But all that did not change the nebulous-spongy insecurity or alien feeling regarding this new material. Why, and despite all obstacles, I finally decided to travel to Bali, I do not remember anymore. It was due at least in part to some sarcastic remarks by Dr. Danker Schaareman (then the assistant of Mr. Oesch) about me as a “typical theoretician”. And finally, in the summer of 1978, I flew to Bali, believing myself – I had read a lot of books – to be well prepared. I also thought the language problem would be easy to overcome.

Via various contact addresses, I finally came to the village of Saba, a village with about 800 inhabitants, one-and-half kilometres from the beach (if one drives to Gianyar/South Bali and turns right in the village of Blahbatuh). At first sight, I was deeply impressed by the new atmosphere. Nature was breathing, pulsating, and the people seemed to be friendly and helpful. It was a healthy holiday from civilization for me because there was only a nasty field-path for the last six kilometres, no electricity nor phone. Although Saba had already been visited various times by Westerners³ and the village gamelan had even performed in Germany in 1976⁴, I still felt like an ‘exotic person’ (turning a common classic upside down recalling that Europeans called people from other cultures the “exotic” ones!).

Quite fast it became more than obvious that my knowledge from books was almost useless, and my complete lack of the local language was a serious obstacle.⁵ Furthermore, it was clear that an individualistically educated person (though from a very petty bourgeois realm) was not likely to be integrated automatically. How shall one behave if, just because of natural curiosity, about ten young boys end up

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMp7jc0pTmA>

³ See: John Coast, *Dancers of Bali*, London 1952 and Urs Ramseyer, *Kunst und Kultur auf Bali*, Bern 1979.

⁴ It was the first collaboration with the German rock- and event musician Eberhard Schoener. The result was the famous cross-over album *Bali Agung* (1976).

⁵ At that time, Bahasa Bali was the official language in the village and less Bahasa Indonesia. About 70% of the male and 30% of the female could communicate in Bahasa Indonesia. Nobody spoke English. Therefore, learning both languages as quickly and as well as possible was the immediate challenge of the day.

sitting around you the whole day and continuously try to pluck your body hairs or at least to touch your strange white skin? At least it was clear for me that an aggressive pushing away would certainly be the worst, though deciding this did not help me much. The unfamiliar local food did not cause me much difficulty. More problematic, however, were the nights. For reasons I did not know, I was given an open *pondok*⁶ on a fishing lake next to the farmhouse of a family. They decorated the *pondok* with temporary white cloths so the sides wouldn't be completely open during the night (my *pembantu*⁷ loved to pull these cloths up at 5am. What a time, why cannot he just let me sleep?!).

Today, I would pay a lot to stay once again in such a *pondok*. But at that time in 1978, the continuous loud soundscape of wind, water, small animals, and everything else made me more than desperate. Even more crucial was perhaps the fact that I had no one to discuss all my new experiences. I was forced to deal exclusively with myself only and was not at all used to that. The “highlight” of that affair was one night, after countless nightmares, when I ran yelling through the village. I intended to give up everything and fly home at once.

Perhaps the Balinese would have been happy if that “strange birdy” would have left them as quick as possible (it's possible that for some it was really like that, who knows?). But what happened was almost the exact opposite. Villagers took care of me and supported my activities until I overcame my psychological crisis – and then stayed some weeks more.

Years later, when I already so-to-speak belonged to the family⁸, the head of the family I Gusti Gêdé Raka sat together with his older sons and me conducting our usual long evening discussions. At one of these occasions, I came back to that “incident” and expressed my appreciative astonishment regarding their behaviour at

⁶ A small hut (3,5 x 3,5m), open to all sides.

⁷ A *pembantu* is a kind of servant who cleans the room, brings food, cleans clothes etc. The term slave would go too far, but in Indonesia, even the smallest household of a student has a *pembantu*. This was one of the few things that I could never accept while living in Indonesia.

⁸ Which was more or less proven for example by the fact that they did not serve me daily food separately, I just went into the kitchen like everyone did and took what was available.

that time.⁹ But I also asked why they had reacted like that. The answer was simple as well as typically Balinese: That *pondok* which I had been given as a room to stay was famous in the whole village as a place for black magic and they assumed that a Westerner like me would be immune to such influences. But their “joy” was even bigger that I also reacted (at least in the eyes of the Balinese) to the influences of black magic as the Balinese did. They did not wonder at all. In fact, this incident worked to my advantage and helped me to be accepted.

I have described this example quite extensively because it had a strong influence on me, almost like nothing else. Only through this incident did I begin to understand my Western life up to that moment as an unconscious conditioning process in my very limited realm. I became aware that modern cultural developments in Germany have not completely widened our horizon, in fact rather the opposite is the case. I felt that the insidious seemingly global availability through media, books etc., supported a kind of Fata Morgana of knowledge. Suddenly I recognized my own limitations (and the richness of the Balinese!), and until today I consider that experience as something extremely positive.

Two further experiences seem to be relevant in this context. The first example had again serious implications regarding my opinion about my own European cultural realm, while the second one is in close connection with my pedagogic activities, especially during the 1990s in Indonesia.

During my one-year study project in Bali (1981/82), I tried to behave as much as possible like a member of the village. Consequently, I participated in most preparations for rituals, ceremonies and meetings. During a ritual, the so-called *odalan* (birthday of a temple), one of the responsible priests asked me, how I – a Western Christian (*orang Kristen*) – could pray in a Balinese temple during a Balinese ritual?¹⁰ While I was still looking for an adequate answer, he gave it himself: “Sorry for such a stupid question. If there is really something godlike, then it is the same for

⁹ In Germany, I would have been sent straight away into a clinic for psychos!

¹⁰ It seemed that it was clear to him that every Westerner is Christian. Although that was not correct in my case, I did not want to open a discussion about that.

everyone!” I was deeply impressed by this answer, and until today I cannot remember having heard a similar answer by priests of my cultural realm in Europe.

The second example is related to the learning process of Balinese gamelan. During my first visits (1978, 1979 and 1980), I always worked with I Gusti Gêdé Raka¹¹, learning some easy *pokok gending*¹² via the process of demonstrating (Raka) and imitating (me). During that one-year stay 1981/82, I worked almost daily with Nyoman Kumpul from the neighbouring village Pinda. Until today, the *gamelan gong kebyar* Pinda is one of the leading orchestras of that dynamic and virtuoso style. Why this is the case, although the much richer village of Saba is culturally more important, I have already explained in another text.¹³ Nyoman Kumpul¹⁴, a humble rice farmer and an outstanding musician, was able to play any part of every gamelan piece that he knew and with an unusual preciseness. The teaching and learning method was always the traditional one of demonstrating and imitating. In the beginning, the verbal communication was subordinate, not only because of my weakness in Balinese, but also because for Nyoman Kumpul, a causal approach did not exist. Even when, after a long mutual adaptation process, some causal talking was possible, Kumpul often asked about the different difficulties in my music-learning process (compared with Balinese), as well as what had been easy for me. Until 1986 (which means after further short-term visits) we did not come to terms regarding solo drumming, but I still remember that summer day in 1986. I had just arrived and Nyoman Kumpul showed up at once – quite excited which was unusual for him. He told me that he had a new idea for teaching solo drumming. The first lesson on the next day was in fact like a revelation for me. The direct success was satisfying for us both.

¹¹ He was perhaps born in 1916 in Saba and died in 2000.

¹² Core melodies that can be compared with a cantus firmus in Western music.

¹³ See Dieter Mack, *The Gamelan Gong Kebyar of Pinda*, in: Danker Schaareman (ed.), *Balinese Music in Context*, Forum Ethnomusicologicum IV; Basler Beiträge zur Ethnomusikologie, Zürich 1992. An edited version will be published soon in the forthcoming book: *Zwischen den Kulturen – Gesammelte Schriften von Dieter Mack*, Oliver Korte (ed.), Hildesheim 2022.

¹⁴ He died in 2018 at the age of 75 under quite degrading circumstances (wrong treatment by local doctors). Fortunately, his legacy is successfully continued by his son Nyoman Kater.

What Occupied Me and What I Learned

The significant aspect of the last example is the fact that Nyoman Kumpul instinctively understood that my situation was a different one than his own or those of the Balinese. For the Balinese, the learning of gamelan is always a **contextual** process, while for me it was a **non-contextual** one (and still is today). Non-contextual learning processes require a different method or approach, whereas contextual processes are somewhat “reconstructed” or simulated. When I teach about Balinese music in Germany, for example, I realize simple patterns with the voice or everyday tools. In this manner, I simulate something contextual. If I only tell the theory of it, and my students memorize that, I am on a non-contextual level that cannot create any kind of understanding.

Putting this issue in a broader Indonesian context, and after many years of activities in the Indonesian educational sector in schools as well, I would say that this is the core problem of Indonesian educational policy. It is the dichotomy between contextual and non-contextual learning in schools. At least today it is 100% clear that this problem has nothing to do with any kind of inability. Rather it is an overall cultural problem resulting from that big process of shifting from an agrarian *adat*-culture¹⁵ to a modern, internationally-oriented society.

All my experiences with Nyoman Kumpul und Gusti Gêdé Raka, my spiritual and cultural teachers, are invaluable to me. I would like to thank them here, along with the others involved for their gratitude and effort. Hopefully I was also able to give them back something of interest.

My working process with my German gamelan group in Freiburg (founded in 1982) was always based on the same methods as I had experienced in the years before in Bali. Until today I am fully convinced that it was worth it to accept all the obstacles over the years and not to use any kind of notation. My experiences teaching and performing gamelan in Germany is a topic for another article. At least

¹⁵ *Adat* is the non-written common law of the Balinese.

I am sure that the practice of Balinese gamelan in Germany has a high educational value. Therefore, I deeply regret that it is still almost impossible to integrate such experiences in the curricula at German music departments. Fortunately, my 18 years at the university of music in Luebeck have been an exception. I had my own room and gamelan was officially accepted as one possible ensemble for students to join. I can only hope that in the near future similar developments will be established all over the country. Regrettably, so far, such activities depend almost exclusively on individuals. No wonder that gamelan practice stopped in Luebeck at the very moment when I retired in 2021. I can only hope – and this was one of my main aims as vice-president for international affairs – that after the pandemic it will be possible to invite guests from our partner universities for guest courses and semesters to teach about their local music cultures.

I had learned as well that the often-claimed statement that Western culture is individualistic and Asian culture is collectivistic is in fact wrong; or at least, not nearly so ‘black & white.’ In Bali, I have experienced as much individual behaviour as in Germany; it was just different. This became especially clear in gamelan playing. If we consider all players as individuals, then the main role of rehearsals is to bring the individuals into a collective via continuous repetitive practice. In Europe, we need thousands of laws to organize our living together. In Bali, everyone can behave freely, based on the grown and culturally immanent common ground that has developed over centuries (called *adat*). No Balinese would complain, for example, if neighbours produce banging music via ‘mad’ amplifiers and loudspeakers during a ceremony. In Germany, people would call the police after five minutes.

Another Key-Experience and its Consequences

From 1978 – 1988, my relationship to Indonesia was limited to Bali. That would change soon and drastically. Again, a mere accident caused the consequence that in 1988, I was able to tour in Southeast Asia (with a focus on Indonesia) via the Goethe Institut in order to present my music. I was accompanied by a six-piece ensemble, consisting of young but committed musicians (students) which I had selected from my university. The tour – which in the weeks before was almost about to fail – became a big success and was completely opposite to the negative expectations

of almost all people involved. After all, it was contemporary music! Beside the high quality of my ensemble (they had practiced half a year and almost played without parts like a gamelan ensemble) but also my ability to moderate the concerts and workshops in Bahasa played a significant role. Moreover, I got in touch with all those academic institutions for art education like ISI-Yogyakarta or ASTI-Bandung¹⁶, and also many leading Indonesian artists including Slamet A. Sjukur, Suka Hardjana, Harry Roesli, and Rahayu Supanggah. It was a completely new environment and a different scene. I had experienced Bali as a so-called traditional but continuously growing and changing society with all its facets. Despite many negative aspects of tourism, modern development has not left behind any serious damages, except in the geo-political area. But now I was confronted with modern urban Indonesia, with the nation as a whole, its role in the international exchange of forces, and with the problem of cultural diversity. A new encompassing background for my coming work and behaviour was born: the ternary network of forces of traditional culture, national obligations and international influences that still permeates every realm of life. These experiences had been quite new for me because in Germany – I have to admit – until that time, I had not been politically active. Beside my teaching obligation at the University of Music, Freiburg, as a composer and as leader of a Balinese gamelan group, starting in 1988, my occupation with culture and policy in context with Indonesia received a new and central rank in my activities.

Two two-month projects in 1988 and 1989 provided new experiences for me, and hopefully also for the participating Indonesians. Both projects ended with two collaborative concerts that were open to the public. Although my experiences were positive, it became clear to me through this work that collaboration, if taken seriously, is not as easy as one might at first expect. The reasons are manifold. Beside the obvious administrative obstacles, problems can be traced back to a fundamental contradiction. Given the immense diversity and vibrancy of local art forms, the number of art academies is low. Consequently, the few art academies cultivate a kind of elite consciousness. At the same time, the status of these institutions becomes more marginal year by year because the interest of the Indonesian public is continuously decreasing (this is true perhaps with the single exception of Bali).

¹⁶ Today this is called ISBI-Bandung.

Unfortunately, nobody at these academies likes to talk about this issue openly. Further, a kind of dichotomy is developing, with an indifferent public on the one side and a strong determination among artists to be significant and successful on their own terms on the other.

Many Indonesian musicians insist without compromise on the unchangeable tradition and categorically refuse anything else. Some others try to adapt themselves in a popular manner, either via more tourism-oriented activities or via music forms that are more market-orientated. No wonder *Pop Sunda* is one of the most nationally popular music genres.

Only a few artists are searching for new paths. These new paths are those of high esteem in intellectual circles and outside Indonesia, but almost no one can earn a living from this kind of creative work in their own country. In Indonesia and in most other Southeast Asian countries there is no subsidized cultural system as there is, for example, in Germany.¹⁷ Furthermore, such artists are not celebrated by society in Indonesia as much as they are in Germany. In this regard, the situation of other Southeast Asian countries is sometimes better. In Thailand in particular I have witnessed better national support and a more intensive ‘pervasion’ of art academies into the society. This important field of work, involving both cultural policy and the role of mass-media, merits more attention.

On the other hand, the idea of an “artistic mission” is quite a Western concept. This idea is rooted in the romantic consciousness of the nineteenth century. Its central characteristic is the individual urge to express one’s self, either in form of typical Romantic ideas or in the sense of a critical reflection of the current time, or even as a vision into the future, as can be found beginning in the early twentieth century with composers such as Stefan Wolpe and Hanns Eisler. A concept of so-called *critical composition* is connected with the latter, and was used recently by composers such as Mauricio Kagel, Helmut Lachenmann, Nikolaus A. Huber and Matthias Spahlinger. Such concepts were quite alien for most Indonesians, at least until the early twenty-first century.

¹⁷ To be honest, even in Germany it becomes more and more difficult.

The situation in fine arts, literature and theatre is different. These art forms are generally more political. Even in Europe, music was always slightly behind the development of the other artforms. This may be due to the high degree of abstraction in music. And, if one leaves that abstract realm in favour of agitation, the step to agitprop, or even pure state art found in totalitarian nations, is obvious. In other words, most musicians in Southeast Asia are less political. People like Harry Roesli in Indonesia are the exception¹⁸. To my knowledge, the only country where contemporary music has a strong political streak is the Philippines. A significant amount of José Maceda's, Ramon Santos' and Jonas Baes' work cannot be separated from their cultural political engagement. It should come as no surprise to those familiar with Jonas Baes' work to learn that he studied with Matthias Spahlinger.

In Indonesia, the situation is quite different from the Philippines. Conflict has to be seriously questioned because, at least on the surface, Indonesian society is consensus-oriented. This is an issue that, since 1989, has caused me endless difficulties as both a composer and music educator working in Indonesia.

In the following paragraphs, I draw on my experiences from 1992 to 2007, with a particular focus on 1992 to 1995, when I worked at UPI Bandung as a DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, "German Academic Exchange Service") lecturer, to elucidate cultural differences between Europe and Southeast Asia.¹⁹ My intention here is not to be a judge but to attempt to question and examine the issue with an eye to addressing the challenges of musical and cultural exchange. I believe that this matter merits further consideration both in Indonesia and Southeast Asian more broadly.²⁰

Argument as a mode of communication and as a motor for progress is a typical feature of intellectual life in Europe. It is perhaps only understandable as an outgrowth of European cultural history. Foundational features of Western culture, such as scientific progress and Western understanding of democracy, are strongly

¹⁸ Listen to his challenging piece "Orang Basah" from 1990 regarding corruption in Indonesia.

¹⁹ Then still called IKIP-Bandung.

²⁰ Please note that I only dare to speak about Indonesia. Although I have worked a lot in the whole of Southeast Asia during the last 15 years, I do not dare to evaluate cultural and political affairs, except Indonesia where I feel familiar with.

connected to that history. Could one imagine the style of a German parliament debate in Indonesia? I think not. There would be a significant uproar all over the country if this were attempted. This does not mean, however, that our social manners are immune from criticism. My intention here is only to highlight the differences.

A composition of Karlheinz Stockhausen, for example, is only fully understandable if one has knowledge of the cultural and historical development of middle-European culture. Progress is also not only the invention of something new. It also implies the critical evaluation and questioning of possible implications. Sometimes it is necessary for things to be turned back, and I regret that in the West a lot of necessary and acknowledged turn-backs have not taken place recently. This is especially true with respect to environmental issues.²¹ A positivistic attitude regarding all novelty is dangerous. The culture of critical exchange, debate and argument has therefore been developed to serve as a kind of controlling institution. Unfortunately, this European system does not work as well as it could all the time.²²

The situation in Indonesia is different. On the one hand, Indonesia wants to participate in the “cake of modernity” but it wants to grab hold of it within a fraction of time that the West has needed. However, there is not yet enough of the control mechanism of causal argument in operation. Such debate and argument does take place between some intellectuals, and their numbers are growing. But the old consensus culture, a more phenomenological consciousness as opposed to a causal one, hierarchic moments dating from feudal times (or today called the *Bapak*-principle), the importance of the representative etc. remain dominant in Indonesia. All these factors, which in various traditional contexts have meaning and importance, hamper a critical evaluation of the targets for the future that have been formulated. In other words, the whole cultural framework and the conditions

²¹ Unfortunately, we face a very negative turn-back at the moment. I must admit that I could not imagine that Europe falls back into Cold War behaviour and rhetoric atrocities of unreal dimensions. Wladimir Putin has turned Europe back to the 1950s without any reason except his personal weirdness.

²² See my article: *Bemerkungen zur Musikkritik aus der Sicht eines Komponisten*, in: Dieter Mack, *Zwischen den Kulturen, Schriften und Vorträge 1983-2021*, ed. by Oliver Korte, Hildesheim 2022, p. 538-550.

under which such targets have been developed in their cultures of origin (Europe and America) and which may function only there (or not, see above!) are not taken enough into consideration. Without a critical approach, the material results themselves are nonetheless mostly adapted and sanctioned.

I will now provide some specific examples. Let us start with the idea that language, or the use of language, is a kind of reflection culture. I became aware over the years and in my work teaching, giving seminars, and writing articles and books in Bahasa, Indonesia, of some interesting facts. Temporal relations and causal connections are very difficult to articulate precisely in Indonesian. When I tried to express these things, I was often told that my Indonesian is not good enough. But when I insisted on a precise argument, it became clear in many cases that I did not produce grammatical mistakes. The problem was the form of expression itself.

A teacher's paper about ethnomusicology at ISI-Yogyakarta who had been in a Master-program "Performing Arts" at UGM (Universitas Gajah Mada Yogyakarta) had the title: "Aesthetics of Balinese Music."²³ The paper starts with a rough description of European history of aesthetics from Alexander g. Baumgarten, via Johann J. Winckelmann until Immanuel Kant (read: mostly philosophers of the 18th century). The introduction ended interestingly with a digression to Augustinus and Thomas von Aquin. Their principles then became the starting point for further investigations. It struck me as strange that European theoreticians were presented, given that the topic was Balinese music. But more problematic was the way time and temporality were treated by the author.

Let us now turn from time to causality, which is a closely related concept. Causality implies a linear understanding of time. But such an understanding is relatively unimportant in Indonesian culture. History is rarely understood as causal (including all raptures) or as a linear sequence of events. Rather it is understood as an encompassing bowl of events.²⁴

²³ I think it was in the early millennium.

²⁴ Once again, this is nothing with minor value. My point is that it is different, and the reasons are rooted in the still present notion of oral tradition, which is a great achievement as well, but with other implications.

Consequently, the Indonesian language tends to lend itself more towards statements free from causal relations or causal chains of argument. This is especially evident in so-called *penelitian* (research) at universities, where *penelitian kuantitatif* (quantitative research) – mostly statistic comparisons with complex formulas – dominate. The external form and shape of the paper is more important than the content. A fantastic music analysis done in the late 1990s by a teacher that I supervised which, after many revisions, was signified by causal arguments and actually could not be written differently, was rejected by the official evaluation institution (*lembaga penelitian*) with the comment that it was not scientific enough.

However, today the situation seems to have improved. Criticism and feedback tend to be more individual, and novel approaches and expressions are more tolerated. I am convinced that this is mostly due to the increasing number of unique projects in the Southeast Asian region, especially seen at competitions and festivals, as well as, for example, the annual international symposiums at PGVIM. Such events create an ongoing exchange and argument, if one does not want to dive into post-modern arbitrariness. I strongly support the continuation of such events wherever they are possible.

The activities discussed above have been my work in Indonesia over the last 20 years, and also my occupation in other Southeast Asian countries. I have asked myself almost daily whether my point of view is correct. Or do I inappropriately intrude too much into the affairs of others? In most cases, I have come to the conclusion that my involvement is no interference in a negative sense. Rather my understanding is one of being a catalyst; an agent that unravels the incredible potential of the region, a potential that, when realized, is an important contribution to the world outside of Southeast Asia. Individualism, collectivism and the ability to engage in discourse and argument are all closely linked, and this connection should be examined independent from any specific culture. Cultural differences are found more in the substance of exchange and discourse and less in the concept.

The Ups and Downs in Politics and Cultural Tendencies

I would like to return now to some aspects of my work in Indonesia in order to discuss aspects of my work that are perhaps relevant in other countries as well. The Indonesian musicologist Suka Hardjana once said,

One of our main problems in our musical development and the role of gamelan music for the young Indonesian generation is rooted in a cultural conflict that touches our youngsters directly. A young Indonesian experiences his/her local culture because it is the closest one. Secondly, he/she experiences the national cultural policy with its superior targets and thirdly there are international influences as they are present in the daily conflict of a modern Indonesian with the whole world [...]. Finally, there exists a network of influences with high complexity and full of cultural friction surfaces.²⁵

Suka Hardjana describes the situation precisely. But how can we deal with these frictions? The way out is the already mentioned: open and critical discourse. If this does not take place, it might have serious consequences for the individual self-understanding of a single person. In this case, music is only one single level; but Hardjana's three-dimensional picture can be transferred easily to anything else.

This brings me back now to my occupation with Indonesian art (music) education which had been my focus, particularly between 1992 and 1995, and on a minor level until 2007. Before 1990, I did not take care of art education because I assumed that such a rich and highly developed musical culture would be taught in formal school education as well as informally. Unfortunately, the opposite was (and still partly is) the case. I became aware of that when the then about twelve-year-old son of my host family in Saba/Bali, a fantastic gamelan player, approached me shyly and asked for help. He showed me his school exercise book where I could read a neatly written D-flat Major scale. When I questioned him as to what this meant, he

²⁵ Suka Hardjana, *Permasalahan Komposisi Karawitan Untuk Anak-Anak – Karawitan versus Musik*, text of a lecture given at the 2nd International Gamelan Festival, Prambanan, December 1995. Translation by the author of this text.

answered quite desperately, that this was exactly what he wanted to know from me. The teacher has written the scale on the blackboard and explained it would be the *teori musik*. I could hardly believe that, and it opened my eyes!

Music education at public schools was based then, and still partly is today, on Western music theory, or at least what was taken to be Western music theory. Additionally, singing and memorizing the national anthem and national propaganda songs that had been composed during the independence fight was obligatory. All of this was written in a Western idiom.

We have to ask why the rich traditional music culture is completely neglected during the entire formal school education.²⁶ When in 1992 I began a DAAD- long-term lectureship at UPI-Bandung, a national seminar with lecturers from all educational institutions was organized. I used that opportunity to receive an overview on the whole educational situation at these specialized universities followed by the schools. In short, I can summarize the result as follows:

1. Because of the cultural diversity of Indonesia, the Indonesian authorities came to the conclusion that none of the local cultures could be treated as an obligatory national music culture for all. Social tensions would inevitably result. Therefore, Western music, which was so-to-speak equal (equally alien!), was chosen as the basis for national music education.

2. Western music seems to be *the* international music, and parallel to the attempt to move beyond “Third World-Status” Indonesia has to adapt to so-called international values. It should be noted that this curriculum decision dates back to the 1950s!

3. Traditionally, Western music culture has a cultural value in Indonesia. This is evident, for example, in *Batak* music. In this regard, it is interesting to know that most music departments have been led by *Batak* people.

²⁶ Or at least until 1993. Although it sounds quite absurd, only through my involvement in the National Curriculum Commission in Jakarta, I was able to influence the new curriculum significantly regarding Indonesian music cultures. No wonder that I did not get new friends immediately!

4. The national anthem as well as the national songs (*lagu perjuangan*) use a Western music language. Again, it is worth mentioning that most of these composers are *Batak* people and of Christian faith.

Until today I have never understood why the national principle “Unity in Diversity” (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) does not lead to the treatment of Indonesian music diversity as a kind of unity. Fortunately, nowadays many Indonesians think critically about this disconnect as well, although their political influence remains quite marginal.

Here I would like to add: My comments above could lead one to believe that I object to Western music education in Southeast Asia completely. This would be a misunderstanding of my position. Certainly, there are high-quality institutions for Western music in Singapore, Manila and Bangkok, just to name a few places. I am always very happy when I see and hear what these institutions are able to create. And I am equally happy that from time to time, I am able to contribute a little to their work. But this form of high-level professional education is not my target at all. My criticism is aimed at the music education in formal public schools and the neglect or even disdain for one’s own cultural heritage.

My experiences at UPI-Bandung were mostly positive. The responsible persons at that time had already reflected on the unbalanced situation, albeit without finding a decent solution. This was one of the few music departments led by a local, a Sundanese. Compared with the experiences of many colleagues, the collaboration, and even the support offered by the administration, was very satisfying. Despite some difficulties, I always felt there was an effort to achieve mutual understanding and to problem solve.

Yet, to this day, beside the teaching materials, the teaching methodology remains a significant problem. I needed almost the entire three years to convince my colleagues that an open dialogue is crucial. I needed just as long to prove to them that I am *not* the ‘big guru from Germany’, but a partner to the local teachers and to the students as well. And with that, the circle of my Indonesian experiences comes to an end, because I am again back at the issue of contextual and non-contextual learning.

The Opening to the Region

A prognosis for the future is not necessary. With regard to potential and cultural diversity, Indonesia is one of the most interesting countries of the world. I can only hope that the country's potential richness is able to develop in an adequate way and is not destroyed by a misunderstanding of progress and mere imitation of the skin of other cultures, especially an imitation without knowledge of the other culture's history. The courage for critical debate is needed on all levels, horizontally – with other cultures and people but also internally/vertically – between hierarchical levels. Critical discourse is not threatening, but rather a vital necessity. And this process should start in the region, with neighbouring countries, because they are different but also because there exists more significant common ground compared to European countries. I adore all activities in the region that foster such dialog and cooperation. My approach to working in the region since around 2005 has been characterized by an effort to open to the region and support, and sometimes even initiate, the creation of network-like structures. Happily, the current responsible persons of the Goethe Institut in the early 2000s were aware of the necessity of this.²⁷ They switched from a primary presentation of German culture to the support of new intercultural networks and artistic collaborations in the region.

Where Are We Today?

Although this question is important, it is difficult to give a satisfying answer. Two years of the Corona pandemic have caused a set-back, despite all efforts. And the current war in Europe, caused by some irresponsible and anti-human authorities in Russia, has further complicated the situation. Happily, digital formats have been used quite intensively during the past few years, and I have been happy to see that at least something of artistic and pedagogical value has been strengthened. But we all know that especially in music, the essence of it can hardly be transported without direct in-person contact. This is true of teaching as well as of performing. Only the tension between the practising artist and the listener creates that unique aura which

²⁷ I have to say it like that because later, with new responsible persons, such activities had been reduced significantly.

can be called the essence of music as art. The most important aspect of a musical work lies in the moment of that mediation, not in a score and not in a recording. Under difficult circumstances, everyone has done their personal best to keep art alive. The time of my generation is almost finished. We had unbelievable luck. Which other generation has had the advantage to live in peace for so long? I fervently hope for the young generation—a generation which has been made to feel insecure. During my last two semesters at the university of music Luebeck, sometimes I had the impression that we need more psychotherapists than music teachers. I can only hope that the pandemic has been a lesson for all of us, and that we all, especially us in the older generation, have finally learned that it is already “a quarter past twelve”. What the war will finally bring us in Europe, or perhaps the whole world, we do not know. We can only hope.

This pandemic, the war, but also other global problems like climate change, the reduction of resources and the increased density of population, are creating for the first time a reality in which we all are sitting in a big boat—a modern Noah’s Ark. Unfortunately, the current Noah’s Ark is the earth itself. We are not able to flee to shelter. Space technology is not yet so advanced as to be of help, and it will not be in the near or even distant future. Ultimately, we are on our own. Let us see how we manage.

I do not feel able to formulate a vision of the future. The future is too ‘foggy’ for me because of these serious global issues. Finding solutions for coming generations is only possible by our own effort and through legitimate and earnest cooperation. It is less important in which area one starts. And therefore, my journey does not have an end. This journey will soon be finished for me personally but not for humankind. Let’s continue doing something and let us each deliver our own individual contribution to the greater good.

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