

Central Javanese gamelan – a group review of CDs

An expanded version of an article written for Vol. 13, no. 3 of *Seleh Notes*, the UK gamelan newsletter (www.selehnates.co.uk)

Recordings of the central Javanese gamelan have been made in all media formats from wax cylinders onwards. This review will focus on CDs, usually issued as part of a larger 'world music' series. A few cassettes will be mentioned, but most cassettes have been transferred to CD anyway. With one major exception and a few minor ones, these recordings were issued by companies outside Indonesia and are currently available via the retail trade. I have deliberately omitted items that readers have no real chance of obtaining – both private recordings and regular Indonesian releases.

For serious gamelan-lovers it is worth mentioning that some privately made field recordings are accessible in specialist libraries, not without a few hurdles to overcome. For example, the National Sound Archive, now part of the British Library, lists 18 cassettes and one Beta tape from Jenny Heaton, 42 cassettes from Sarah Bilby (mostly of different regional types of *wayang*), and 170 VHS tapes from Jean Jenkins, of which some relate to central Java. See www.bl.uk/catalogues/sound.html.

Numbers and full track listings for the recordings mentioned below are available on the Discography page at www.gamelan.org.uk.

Recording quality

Indonesian recordings, even if they were easily available, would often disappoint gamelan enthusiasts in the West, who will expect to hear every strand of the gamelan texture: Javanese recordings are balanced for Javanese taste, and many of them are also technically poor.

One Indonesian told me that you need eight microphones to record a gamelan. (Of those, two would no doubt be devoted to the *pesindhèn*, and quite possibly none to the *balungan* section.) On the recordings listed here, the *gong ageng* can be over-recorded. Sometimes there is actual distortion on the recording: if not, the volume level of the *gong ageng* may still cause discomfort to the amplifier or loudspeakers. I wonder if recordists have forgotten that directional microphones (though otherwise very useful) suffer from an inherent drawback, due to the physics of sound; that they boost the very low frequencies if placed too close to the sound source.

Among the various recordings, two distinct types of venue can be identified. Recordings from the royal palaces, and a few others, were made in a large traditional *pendhâpâ*. Although these structures have three or four open sides, the volume of air within the steep part of the roof provides reverberation and adds a magical bloom to the sound – something that has benefited even those of us who have attempted primitive field recordings. Studio recordings cannot match this quality of sound, and some have a rather dead acoustic. They also lack the 'noises off' (children playing, the arrival of the royal 4×4, contributions of various kinds from the bird population living under the Mangkunegaran's enormous roof) that are very much part of the ambience of Javanese performances. Another advantage of recordings made in large *pendhâpâ* is that the instruments are usually well spread out, giving a clearer stereo picture.

For the benefit of anyone who has seen the Dartmouth listserver traffic on the subject of the recent Lokananta CD releases (remastered versions of material that was originally issued on cassettes), it is worth saying that all the CDs mentioned here are pressed CDs, not dye-based CD-Rs.

The earliest recordings

Among the earliest recordings still available are several by Jacques Brunet. (Jean-Pierre Chazal has recently posted a discography at http://gamelan.fr/disco_jb/jb_accue.html, covering the LPs recorded by Brunet in several parts of Indonesia and issued on various labels.) Four CDs come from Ocora (Radio France) under the

title *Java: Palais Royal de Yogyakarta*, containing recordings from the early 1970s. They do not correspond to earlier LP issues, although there are some overlaps. As has often been observed at the *kraton Yogya*, the performances are not always of the highest standard, with some shaky starts. There are other things to criticise: the notes, though extensive, contain misspellings, mistranslations and factual errors, and I need convincing that the pieces have been fully and accurately identified. Brunet invites us to think that these recordings document a sort of Yogyanese golden age, after which performances ossified or lost their character. This is at least questionable. Certainly one can hear *garap* that is generally considered as Solonese.

On Vol. 1, *Les danses de cour* (Court dances), the major item is the accompaniment for *Srimpi Lobong*, which includes the first half of *gd Lobong sl m* and other pieces, all beautifully sung. This is preceded by a *gangsaran* – *ladrang* sequence, an accompaniment for a *lawung* (lance) dance, not one of the best tracks. The first track is one of the court's 'signature' pieces. Volume 2, *La musique instrumentale* (Instrumental music) starts with *ldr Dirâdâmetâ sl 6*, lacking the *suwuk gropak* that would be expected in a *wayang* context. The next track, *gd Lintang karahinan*, is an example of a *gendhing soran* – a rarely recorded category, though not rare in itself (but not the same thing as *gendhing bonang*). The volume level wanders, which could easily have been corrected at the digital remastering stage. The other two tracks are classic *gendhing bonang*. *Taliwangsâ* (which the Solonese play as a *gendhing rebab*) offers the only example here of the traditional *Yogya* treatment of *âdângiyah*, where the *saron* section takes part as well as the *bonang barung*.

On Vol. 3, *Le spirituel et le sacré* (Spiritual and sacred), the first track is a purely instrumental *gendhing* with its preceding *racikan*, played on a *gamelan sekatèn*. The second is a *bedhâyâ* dance suite including *gd Gambirsawit*. The title of the disc begs the question of whether spiritual or sacred gamelan music really exists in central Java – a topic for another occasion. Of the four discs I think the average listener is likely to find this one the least rewarding. The singing causes me discomfort, although the problem may be with me rather than the *pesindhèn*. The extreme austerity of the *sekatèn* style is difficult in a different way. Vol. 4, *La musique de concert* (Concert music), has three tracks, the second being lighter in style than anything else on the four discs. The final track is another of the signature pieces. None of the content strikes me as very interesting or appealing.

In my early years as a gamelan player, the well-known recordings in the Nonesuch Explorer series were more or less unobtainable. The announcement a few years ago that the whole series was to be re-released on CD was very welcome, especially because the Javanese items were among the first to appear. There are three discs under the title *Java: Court Gamelan*, the work of Bob Brown (see *Seleh Notes*, Vol. 10, no. 3). His plan was to present major items that show off the differing styles of the four courts, and to include their respective pairs of 'signature' pieces. (The *kraton Yogya* has two such pairs, of which more later.)

The transfers to CD are all successful. The first disc, originally without a volume number, was made at the Pura Pakualaman, *Yogya*, in 1971, and is technically the least satisfactory, with a higher hiss level. As with the other discs in the series, no apology is needed for the content. Of the two main items, the first consists of the core of a *bedhâyâ* suite, although not performed exactly as it would be for dance. It includes a long stretch of wonderful mixed *bedhayan* singing, and *pinjalan* in places. The other item is a *gendhing rebab* without chorus, followed by a *ladrang* with a *suwuk gropak*; a good contrast. At one point on this disc there is a loud click like that of a cigarette lighter. Before I ever attended one of these Pakualaman performances, I suspected that a *balungan* player was lighting up. Having now been present at many of them, I am now certain of the explanation.

Under the title *Java: Court Gamelan Vol. II* comes the 1976 recording from the Pura Mangkunegaran, Solo, with its awesome performance of *gd bonang Babar layar pl 5* on gamelan *Kyai Udan arum*, which possesses eight *saron*, four *demung* and two *slenthô*. My continuing regret about the performance is that the *mérong* is only played once, so that we miss the solitary occurrence of the note 7 in the piece. The other major item is the fascinating *gd Elâ-elâ Kalibeber*, another well-chosen contrast. This and the signature pieces are played on the usual gamelan, *Kyai Kanyut mèsè*.

The third volume is devoted to the *kraton Yogya* and was recorded in 1976 and 1978. The longest item is a dance suite for *Golèk Lambangsari*. Anyone familiar with the usual Solonese version of *gd Lambangsari* may be surprised by the version heard here: there are variant sections within the *dhawah*, one of which is usually called a *ladrang*, but it must then be analysed as having a quadruple-density *balungan*. Of the other pieces, *ldr Sumyar* is interesting because it shows what happens when a piece is taken into *irâmâ wilet* while remaining in the *Yogya* loud style. There was to be a fourth volume to cover the *kraton Solo*. It was recorded but never issued, and we are told that this was because the producer was obliged to use a certain artiste who was simply not up to standard.

The notes with the CDs mention the fourth volume as ‘recorded but not yet released’: after Bob Brown’s death last year, presumably we can no longer hope to see it. His notes throughout the series are very useful, but I disagree with several of his translations of Javanese titles.

Also in the Explorer series is a single CD called *The Jasmine Isle*, recorded by the Dutch scholar Bernard Suryabrata and David Lewiston, apparently in the late 1960s. There are just six central Javanese items (all in *sléndro*) among the ten tracks, including a *gendèr* solo. With some distortion and a duration of only 33 minutes, this disc can only be recommended to completists.

Drama and dance

Wayang kulit presents a few problems as material for recordings. A full traditional performance would fill six or seven CDs, but within that time many of the ‘filler’ elements – *ayak-ayakan*, *srepegan* and *sampak* in the various *pathet* – would be played several times: on the other hand, a recording would be unsatisfying if it did not cover the whole course of the story. The average Westerner would get nothing out of the long narrations in unfathomable Javanese. Any government messages or content related to the occasion, even if they could be understood, would be irrelevant later. However, if the text were translated into English, the jokes would pall on repeated hearing.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, no extended recordings of *wayang kulit* are to be found. However, the character of the musical elements is well caught in a couple of CDs. *Shadow Music of Java* from Rounder Records consists of extracts from a 1991 performance given at the Smithsonian in Washington DC by (mainly) Javanese forces. Besides the usual filler pieces and *sulukan*, the tracks include *jineman*, *dolanan*, and other pieces of various types up to *gendhing*. This is a good digital recording, like most that have been issued since about 1990, and can be forgiven for receiving electronic treatment to make it more *pendhâpâ*-like.

Dance-dramas are of a more practical length for recording. The two well-filled discs called *Java: Langen Mandra Wanara* from Ocora, which I have not heard, represent the episode *Senggânâ Obong* from a long cycle. This is another of Brunet’s recordings from the 1970s. The two extracts on *Java: Music of the Theater* on Auvidis (which again I have not heard) are a little earlier: one comes from another Yogyanese *Langen Mândrâ Wanârâ* performance and the other from the Solonese *Langendriyan*.

The timescale for the *srimpi* and *bedhâya* dances of the palaces is also unfamiliar for Westerners. Originally the lengths would run to between one and two hours, largely as the result of repeating one section with different stanzas from long verse texts. Present-day performances of most suites are much shorter, usually well under an hour, but perhaps still too long for some listeners. Those of us who can cope with ‘heavenly length’ will savour these performances. Others may not. The presence of the *keprak* on most of the recordings of *srimpi* or *bedhâya* accompaniments suggests that there was an actual dance in progress.

Gamelan of Surakarta from JVC is an all-dance recording made by STSI Solo performers in 1992. The first track is a minimal excerpt from a *srimpi* suite that will not test anyone’s attention span. Similarly the second track, a fight dance, is too short to be anything but an excerpt. The third track may be a complete suite for another fight episode. The English notes, apparently thinner than the Japanese, say nothing about the pieces heard, but players will recognise many of them.

A full suite for *srimpi Pandhelori* figures in *Yogyakarta: Gamelan of the Kraton* from Celestial Harmonies. Anyone who has not heard one of these *pélog* dance suites played in the Yogya style should prepare to be surprised by the presence of Western instruments: in this case, trumpets (and clarinets?) are heard in the *gendhing* as well as the entrance and exit pieces in the special *gati* form. This is a superb recording from 1997(?), made within the palace walls but outside the *kraton* proper, and undoubtedly the best advertisement for the Yogya loud style. The first item, *gd soran Lintang karahinan*, makes an interesting contrast with the same piece as recorded by Brunet: here the performance is tighter throughout, and the players take the faster option for the *demung imbal* in the *dhawah* section. On the other tracks, palace musicians play in about the most unbuttoned style that will be met within the palace precincts.

The Celestial Harmonies disk benefits from very good notes by Prof. Roger Vetter, who was also responsible for one of the finest of the analogue recordings, called *The Sultan’s Pleasure*. This derives from his PhD fieldwork in 1982/3, when he documented the musical life of the *kraton Yogya* for an entire year. The longest item is another *gendhing soran*. It is preceded by a *sekar ageng*, magnificently sung, and by shorter instrumental and vocal

pieces including another *gati*; also by the two *kraton* signature pieces not included on Bob Brown's recording. Issued first as a cassette and then as a CD by Music of the World, this recording is now only available as a download from www.emusic.com.

A miscellany

This heading covers various recordings that do not fit elsewhere. The term 'street music' in any case covers a variety of musical styles. On *Street Music of Java* from Original Music, most of the tracks are devoted to *kroncong*, *dangdut*, and *langgam jawa* performed in *kroncong* style, all of which are outside the scope of this review. (Anyone interested in these forms should also try Volume 2 of the Smithsonian/Folkways *Music of Indonesia* series.) Tracks 13 and 14 are both excerpts from *ronggèng* dance performances accompanied by reduced gamelan ensembles, the second of them having a stronger *karawitan* feel to it. The next track has a rather different sort of ensemble playing for one of the trance dances, *kuda lumping*. On the final track a *siteran* group with three *pesindhèn* performs *Gambirsawit*. The recordings (made around Yogyakarta in 1976 and 1978) actually come from Kiwi Pacific and involved Jack Body, the New Zealand ethnomusicologist and composer. Kiwi Pacific has issued a cassette under the title *Music for Sale: Street Musicians of Java*, but I have not heard it, so am unable to report whether any of the material is the same.

Java – vocal art on Auvidis, another Brunet recording from between 1969 and 1977, also belongs more or less in the 'street' category. It starts with a *mâcâpat* extract sung without accompaniment, a reminder of an important source of raw material for *karawitan*. The second track is unusual, with a singer accompanying himself on the *siter*. The last track is almost too civilised to be considered 'street': *gd Gambirsawit* performed by a group that has three *siter* in different roles, together with a *gong ageng* rather than the usual *gong bumbung*. A famous Yogya *pesindhèn*, Niken Larasati, is joined by a male singer singing in *gérong* style, then the two of them combine to sing *bedhayan*-style in the *ladrang* that follows. The finest *siteran* performances as they might normally be heard on the streets or in hotel lobbies are to be found on *Street Music of Central Java* from Lyrichord. This is another very good recording by Roger Vetter, made in 1975. It was issued as a cassette, then reissued in a digitally remastered version. Regrettably there are no signs of a CD reissue. The notes provide a useful introduction to *siteran* style for those who have never met it, but contain misprints and other errors.

Apart from *jineman* and *dolanan*, the recordings discussed here do not contain many recent compositions. The major exception is *The Music of K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat* from CMP Records. The composer, more often called Pak Cokro, is well known in the West because of the years that he spent in the USA during his 'retirement'. The digital recording was made in Yogya in 1990, before he returned there permanently. I have only heard the cassette, which is unimpressive in sound: perhaps the CD is better. The contents include two of Pak Cokro's 'political' pieces, *Inc Orde baru* and *Inc Penghijauan*.

The book *Gamelan: Traditional Sounds of Indonesia* deals with several areas of Indonesia – its author's main interest seems to be Sunda – but there is one point of special interest for the central Javanese enthusiast. The CD accompanying the book has a substantial recording of *ldr Pangkur pl 7*, and the book provides a timed analysis, more detailed than any to be found elsewhere.

Too much enthusiasm?

Most recordings of gamelan are due to a few dedicated enthusiasts. In recent years the most assiduous issuer of CDs of central Javanese gamelan has been Giovanni Sciarrino, under various aliases. He is now responsible for eleven discs from three companies, with apparently more in the pipeline. I only wish that I could be more enthusiastic about them. While Westerners are not entitled to describe Javanese performances as right or wrong, we can point out what is typical or otherwise. Too many of Sciarrino's recordings contain things that would never be heard in regular performances in Java. For example, there are items with only a fraction of the usual instruments, vocal pieces without their vocal lines, and choral lines sung by a single voice. We hear two *pesindhèn* singing independently, three separate *rebab* parts in a *pathetan*, and an 'improvisation' on four *kemanak*: none of these has any theoretical basis in *karawitan*.

After all that, it must be said that Sciarrino gives reasons for what he does, and some of the items are

interesting. Also it is good to read that any profits from these CDs will be fed back to support central Javanese music. Any track where the ensemble is reduced in order to allow focus on a particular instrument could be useful to a player at a certain stage in the study of that instrument. The notes for these discs vary in extent, but some of them include an invited 'review' from an outsider.

Seven discs under the collective title *Gamelan of Central Java* have been issued by Felmay. (The discs also carry the name of Dunya Records: the relationship between Felmay and Dunya is unclear.) These are all digital recordings, mostly dating from between 2001 and 2004, mostly from a studio environment and mostly without technical problems.

On *Vol. I: Classical Gendings* we hear a pair of *gendhing* with opposite connections: one to summon rain, the other to prevent it. The first, *Anglirmendhung*, normally uses a female *bedhayan* chorus, but here it is sung by a single *pesindhèn*. The other two tracks have a single *pesindhèn* where usually two or more women would sing in turn.

The second volume, *Ceremonial Music*, is welcome because it collects in one place recordings of all four types of ancient ceremonial gamelan, which are increasingly inaccessible to the casual visitor to Java. The first two tracks consist of unnamed pieces played on *gamelan sekarèn* at the *kraton Solo*, and the other gamelan are represented by one piece each, recorded at the Mangkunegaran in 1996. On the *kodhok ngorèk* track I do not hear counter-melody instruments, but perhaps this is standard Mangkunegaran style. This disk has some distortion.

In *Vol. III: Modes and Timbres* the main focus is on individual lead instruments: *rebab*, *gendèr* and *bonang*. A remark made earlier applies once again to *Vol. IV: Spiritual Music*, but at least there is one track here that is indisputably religious music. However, the performance recorded does not belong to the gamelan repertoire and, as the producer describes, only happened by accident. There are two further *sekatèn* performances, but played on regular gamelan – which some listeners will feel is a pointless exercise, so different are the *gamelan sekarèn* in pitch, sonority and volume.

The fifth volume, *Gaya Yogyakarta*, is the only disc devoted to the 'other place'. Recorded in the rather congested studios of RRI Yogya, it even includes some of the comic verbal interludes that feature in the weekly *Månåasukå* broadcasts. There is a little-known *gendhing bonang* as well as a version of the well-known *Tukung* for comparison with performances on other discs mentioned here.

On *Vol. VI: Kraton Surakarta* we have *Tukung* again, and another so-called *gendhing bonang*. Does any vocal *gendhing* (*gd Dånåråjå sl 9* in this case) become a *gendhing bonang* if played without soft-style instruments and vocal parts? Supposedly there are no *gendhing bonang* in *sléndro sångå*. (The same is said of *pélog nem*, but *gd bonang Undhuk* in *Vol. V* is classified as *pélog nem*, so perhaps we are seeing the usual confusion between *pl 5* and *pl 6*.) The second track is a regular piece, but again sung by only a single *pesindhèn*.

The title of *Vol. VII: Edge of Tradition* is curious because it would actually be more appropriate for most of the other discs under this heading. The first item, Martopangrawit's experiment with triple time, fits the description. On the second track the duetting *pesindhèn* are the unusual feature. The third piece, *gd bonang Glendheng pl 5*, is neither modern nor unique: it seems to be mentioned in a 200-year-old document, and belongs to a group of pieces of that vintage, all sharing unusual melodic features. The gamelan sounds a little anaemic by comparison with those used for *gendhing bonang* or *gendhing soran* on other recordings.

From Arion comes a three-disc set also under the title *Gamelan of Central Java*. Although a fairly recent release, this set seems to be unavailable from the usual retailers at the time of writing. The first disc, *Flowers*, contains four pieces united only by the fact that they include one of the Javanese 'flower' words in their titles. The first track consists of *ktw Puspåwarnå* extended so that all nine stanzas of its text are heard. To avoid tedium, the *garap* is varied, including treatments that would not normally be heard (even *bonang imbal*). Another track is *gd bonang Kembang gempol*, classified as *pélog limå* although it has a strongly *pélog nem* character. The third disc in the set, *Colours*, is another one devoted to individual instrumental colours. So is the second disc, *The Meditative Gendèr*, but in this case we hear the instrument in a good cross section of its many roles. This disc also challenges the listener to try to detect the differences between male and female playing styles. The extensive accompanying notes include texts (in translation only) and much other interesting material.

Not to be confused with the above is the single disc *Gamelan from Central Java* from Arc Music. Even without the distortion and compression present at least on early copies, this disc seems to me unlikely to win many fans: the content is just too bitty, with much material (e.g. ceremonial gamelan) that is better heard on other recordings. Some tracks were recorded by Javanese musicians on Sciarrino's own gamelan in Italy: one such is *ldr*

Gadhung mlathi, here shorn of the other pieces that usually surround it. The ‘stone gamelan’ of the Pacitan cave may make an interesting comparison for anyone who has played musical rock formations in the limestone caves of Yorkshire’s West Riding or encountered the story of the ‘world’s first rock band’, heard in the late nineteenth century in the Lake District of England. The last track is a composition by Joko Purwanto, with York University’s trademark water-filled *kenongs*.

... much missed

Under this heading is a collection of nine CDs issued by King Record Co. of Japan in their ‘World Music Library’ series. Though unavailable for several years, they demand to be included in any group review. One entitled simply *The Javanese Gamelan* stands out from the rest, by its early date and its non-Solo focus. It is of course also an analogue recording, but a good one on most tracks. The best item is a fine performance of *gd Mâdyâlatri sl 9*, a Yogya piece with a typical *lâmbâ* opening. The second track is a dance item accompanied in *srimpi* style. The first three tracks were recorded at the *kraton Yogya* in 1972. The others were recorded in other parts of the island in the previous year. A brief *wayang kulit* extract in central Javanese style performed in Jakarta includes *ldr Moncèr sl m*. One minor track is a snatch of music for the *réog* trance dance of Ponorogo in East Java, which is performed in a monster mask; street music again.

The other eight discs are fine digital recordings made at Solo in the early 1990s, and performances are uniformly very good – even polished, which is arguably not a virtue, because *râså* (see below) is more important. The volume called *Court Music of Kraton Surakarta* consists of the accompaniment for *srimpi Sangapati*. (The final piece is *ketawang Longgor lasem*, not the *ladrang* as the notes say.) *Court Music of Kraton Surakarta II* is a *bedhâyâ* accompaniment that switches between *sléndro* and *pélog*. The main item is *gendhing kemanak Durâdasih*. *Durâdasih* is only a variant spelling of *Dârâdasih*, but this is not the *gendhing rebab* that is usually notated under that name. Between them, these two discs illustrate most of the range of vocal styles used for the court dances: various solo singing and female *bedhayan* chorus (with or without a *balungan* line) in both; *gérong* with a repertoire of *alok* for the *srimpi*. The *bedhayan* singing in *ktw Durâdasih* is exceptionally beautiful.

Two discs are devoted to *gendhing bonang*. *Music of Mangkunegaran Solo I* adds a further three such pieces to the one on the Explorer disc, and are played on the same gamelan or its *sléndro* counterpart. *Gendhing Bonang*, *Court Music of Surakarta III* brings two more, using an equally suitable large gamelan at the *kraton*. (After the first piece, *gd Bremâra pl 5*, one of the large, noisy lizards (*toké*) comments appreciatively.) *Langendriyan*, *Music of Mangkunegaran Solo II* brings a fine sense of drama to an extract from a longer form.

The other three discs are all at least a little odd. *Chamber Music of Central Java* uses a *gadhon* ensemble consisting of *rebab*, *gendèr*, *suling*, *slenthem*, *kendhang*, *kethuk* and *gong ageng*, but without any singers. Normally a *gadhon* performance throws increased emphasis on the vocal parts, but here the effect is the exact opposite: very strange. *Rebab and female singing of Central Javanese Gamelan* is similar, the ensemble gaining a *gambang* but losing the *kethuk*, and a *pesindhèn* joins in for only one of the three tracks.

Klenèngan Session of Solonese Gamelan I uses a conventional ensemble, but one of the two pieces, *gd ktw Karawitan sl 6*, is unusual *klenèngan* fare: it is more commonly heard at the start of a *wayang kulit*. The first track is *gd Kembang mâra pl 5*. (The name of the piece suggests a connection with *gd Kombang mâra pl 5*, and there is one. *Kombang* means ‘bumblebee’ and *kembang* means ‘flower’, symbolising respectively bridegroom and bride.) This disc therefore includes two *laras-pathet* combinations, and its title implies that there were more to come. Another two CDs could cover the remaining four *laras-pathet* combinations.

The notes for the King Records discs are on the brief side, and English-speakers are at a disadvantage, because the Japanese notes seem to be longer: for example, a Javanese text may be translated into Japanese but not English.

Checking the status of the discs in June 2006, I found that King Records still has a Web presence and a ‘world music’ list. Four of the Javanese gamelan CDs were shown on the website, with new covers and new numbers, but nothing indicated that they were available outside Japan. Nor has anything come of hints that the discs might reappear on other labels. So for the time being these are CDs to be begged, borrowed, stolen, or at least sought on the second-hand market.

Favourite performers

Some gamelan players and singers have become well-known to Westerners because they tend to be involved at high-profile events or because they have given private tuition to students from the West. Familiar names can frequently be found listed among the performers on the recordings discussed here.

For example, the much-admired *suling* playing of Pak Tarnopangrawit, who died recently, is preserved in various recordings of Solonese performances. Nyi Cendanilaras, described by one of the note-writers as having a 'Western-ear-friendly' voice, is often among the *pesindhèn*

heard. (There are other *pesindhèn* to whom that description would not apply.)

However, performers are not always named in the notes: singers, especially *pesindhèn* and male singers of *bâwâ*, are named more often than players.

With their 30-year span, the recordings listed here offer material for anyone trying to detect changes in performing practice over the years. There is also enough material to start discussion of differences between Solonese and Yogyanese styles for *sindhènan* and possibly *gendèr*-playing.

Wot, no ...?

When I compiled a discography for *A Gamelan Manual*, it was the first time I had seen a full list of recordings in one place, and it was a rather depressing sight. They did not present a realistic picture of the context in which most players and listeners experience the gamelan, nor of typical performance styles; not even of typical repertoire. There was no evidence of the relaxed late-night sessions where musicians, often of very mixed abilities, are simply enjoying themselves; the flirtation, ribaldry and musical jokes among the players, perhaps with one player trying to trip up the others. Pete Smith described in *Seleh Notes* (Vol. 3, no. 3; Vol. 4, nos 2 and 3; Vol. 5, no. 2) that sort of atmosphere at an all-night *wayang* performance, but it is equally typical of *klenèngan*/*uyon-uyon* sessions, and has occasionally been captured in field recordings. I do not underestimate the difficulty of making such recordings. When I tried to capture the atmosphere of regular Saturday night sessions with my *kampung* group, I asked for *ldr Gonjing miring 'komplit'* – in other words, with all the usual *garap* variants and extra elements that I was used to hearing. The result was a huge disappointment. The group was inhibited throughout, and the wild *kinthilan* decoration from the *saron* section, normally a highlight of the end of the piece, simply did not happen.

Taking an overview of the repertoire on the recordings above, there are some extraordinary omissions. We have three (atypical) performances of *gd Dånåråjà*, but not a single one of *gd Gambirsawit* played in regular style, as against the special *bedhåyå* style or *siteran* performances. Without *gd Loro-loro géndhong* and the *ingguh* section of *gd Lobong*, we are missing two of the finest choral parts in the repertoire. Some of the most popular pieces of all, such as *gd Kututmanggung*, *gd Onang-onang*, *gd Randhu kèntir* and even *ldr Wilujeng*, are absent. With their concentration on the more refined and serious end of the repertoire, the recordings also underplay other common types of programme item, such as complicated treatments of *ladrang*, or suites starting with a *gendhing* and continuing with a sequence of shorter pieces. *Langgam* and other popular pieces often feature in such sequences, not only in *wayang* accompaniments.

The recordings also offer only a partial view of the dance repertoire. Several of the dance forms – both female (*gambyong*, *bondhan*) and male (*gandrung*, *topèng*) – are absent altogether. Among the various dances that portray fighting, the highly stylised and refined *srimpi* is well represented; the more dramatic dances (*beksan wayang*) less well; the stylised male warrior dances hardly at all.

It must also be admitted that the regional focus of the recordings is very narrow: there is almost nothing from outside Yogya and Solo, and the Pakualaman is represented by only one recording. Brunet's LPs included performances in the central Javanese style recorded elsewhere. However, the rest of the swathe of country where something clearly related to the central Javanese style is supposed to predominate, terminated by Banyumas in the west and Banyuwangi on the east coast facing Bali (two areas where very different styles rule), is virtually unrepresented on CDs.

In this situation I started planning 'fantasy *klenèngan*' – programmes of pieces using the appropriate sequence of *laras* and *patet*, such as I was used to playing and hearing at sessions attended by real enthusiasts in Java. Each programme would take up three or four CDs. I wondered if I would ever have time or money to realise these fantasies.

A final complaint

Recently a four-CD boxed set has arrived from France, and goes some way towards addressing my concerns. *Gamelan de Solo: le jeu des sentiments/Solonese gamelan: a garland of moods* comes from the Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris on its Inédit label, and more specifically in the lower-priced ‘Terrains’ series of ethnomusicologists’ field recordings. The recording, made at the home of Rahayu Supanggah in 2003, does not have the scale of a court *pendhåpå*, but is correspondingly more typical of the average performance environment. The first three discs form a sort of *klenengan*, although only four *laras-pathet* combinations are covered. At last we hear a regular performance of *gd Gambirsawit*, supplemented with *palaran* that take its duration to nearly an hour. Shorter pieces are also included: two *ketawang*, plus a long version of *ldr Pangkur pl 7* and *ldr Gégot* with its *gobyog* section. The fourth CD is, like the Rounder Records disc, a collection of elements that might be heard in a *wayang kulit*, but in this case the performances were not in an actual *wayang* context, and therefore some of the *garap* is not as would usually be heard there. *Råså* (feeling, mood, etc.) was the subject of Marc Benamou’s PhD thesis, and is also the focus of the liner notes credited to him and Rahayu Supanggah (although they are not responsible for the inadequacies of the glossary and the photos). These are outstandingly good notes, revealing what is really going on in the performances, and giving timed cues so that anyone can follow the progress of the music. At its price, the Inédit set is the bargain of the century.

This admirable release still leaves me wanting much more. Anyone reading this review presumably thinks central Javanese gamelan is an important musical culture. How sad that it should be so poorly represented on commercial recordings. Many of us know what needs to be done. Is there anyone out there who will help to make it happen?

Richard Pickvance, July 2006

(This review will be kept up to date with new releases as they are received)