



(LYRCD 7460)

Gamelan of Java

VOLUME FOUR: PUSPA WARNA

This CD was designed mainly around one concept: to show how classical Javanese gamelan music—*karawitan*—has intrinsic and remarkable capabilities of regenerating itself through internal variations. I am not referring here to novelties that result from external commissions to creative musicians, as with recent Yantra productions such as “Gendhing Kombang Mara” for two *pesindhen*, “Gendhing Budheng-Budheng” for three *pesindhen*, and also the nine-stanza rendition of “Ketawang Puspa Warna” on Track 5 of this CD. I am rather referring and it is of course worth greater attention—to variations that are factually observable/listenable in performances, and that result from novel renditions of a given piece of music by professional musicians. I am referring to variations that go beyond the freedom of *cengkok* (musical treatments by individual musicians) and of recombining a repertoire of *gatra* (musical phrases within a measure). This writer’s personal view of how gamelan classical music in Central Java may have

been somewhat constrained by dictates of authoritative masters is further developed in the PDF booklet attached to the CD.

Two compositions in the present CD are repeated in two different performances. I like to think that most of the listeners will not be annoyed by the repetition. I like to think that the “expert” listener will be interested in the differences and enjoy the possibility of comparison, while the person fairly new to gamelan might even feel as if he or she is listening to different pieces altogether.

Ketawang PUSPA WARNA *slendro manyura* on TRACK 1 was performed in September 2008. The musicians of ISI Surakarta chose to play five of the nine stanzas comprising the famous composition, with interesting changes among the stanzas. They also decided to have the *bawa* (male solo sung poetry) MINTA JIVA, which in the best tradition precedes the *ketawang*.

The performance of PUSPA WARNA on TRACK 5 was recorded in 2002. In this case the ISI musicians were asked to play all nine stanzas, and to do specific variations of instrumental and vocal parts in the various stanzas. Thus, roughly described, the first and last stanzas are for *tutti*, the second has a leading role for *pesindhen* and *rebab*, the third for *pesindhen* and *bonang*, the fourth favors the *gender* and reduces the *gerong* to one singer, the fifth has the *siter* solo, the sixth the *gambang*, the seventh brings the *kendhang ciblon* to the foreground, and the eighth introduces a second *rebab* to play the part of the *gerong*.

Although many of the musicians are the same—and the three excellent *gerong* voices are the same—the characters of the two performances of PUSPA WARNA are quite different, and, of course, the change of *pesindhen* adds to the difference. Vocal timbre, melodic flow, and artistic temperament of Nyi Cendaniraras and Nyi Yayuk Sri Rahayu are all so different that the listener, for this element alone, should not find the double presentation boring.

A similar comparison is proposed with *Ladrang* SEKAR GADHUNG *slendro manyura*, where we have a 2002 performance (*pesindhen* Cendaniraras) on TRACK 2 and a 2008 performance (*pesindhen* Yayuk Sri Rahayu) on TRACK 4. No special request was made to the musicians for these performances; the differences in the musical product are therefore totally natural and authentic—and, I hope, excitingly interesting.

The third piece in the program is *Ladrang* GADHUNG MLATI *slendro sanga* on TRACK 3. This music, which has legendary and mystical connotations, is rarely played. It was not difficult to have it performed in 2008 at ISI because of the more “liberal” context of a music conservatory with respect to the Courts. And this time we were able to have Ibu Pringgo Hadiwiyono play the crucial *gender* part. In the *pesindhen*’s role we enjoy here a different set of vocal qualities— those of Nyi Sri Suparsih. Her being a

faculty member of ISI is reflected in the well-trained and precise singing, challenged by the difficult and outstandingly beautiful melodic contour of the piece. *John Noise Manis*

Puspa Warna and Sekar

Gadhung

Program note by Sumarsam

Considered as one of the most popular pieces, PUSPA WARNA is a composition whose identity is contained in the *gerongan* (the part sung by the male chorus); i.e., the piece is composed on the basis of the *gerongan* melody. There are nine verses or stanzas of poetic text originally written for this male chorus. Usually, out of the nine verses, only three are sung. Lack of evidence prevents us from knowing with certainty whether all nine verses were ever sung in a single performance. It is possible that the nine written stanzas were enjoyed solely as literary work by literary circles at the time the piece was composed (i.e., the nineteenth century, which was known as the period of literary renaissance). The collection of poems that PUSPA WARNA belongs to is contained in a manuscript titled “Sendhon Langen Swara,” attributed to Mangkunegara IV (1853-1881).

The collection includes nine poems: *Langen Gita*, *Wala Gita*, *Raja Swala*, *Sita Mardawa*, *Puspa Warna*, *Puspanjala*, *Taru Pala*, *Puspa Giwang*, and *Lebda Sari*. Each poem has a different number of stanzas, with *Langen Gita* having as many as twenty.

SEKAR GADHUNG is rarely played. It is one of the very few pieces with introductory melodies played by the *gambang* (wooden xylophone). Unfortunately, its origin and background are difficult to trace.

The piece incorporates several elements of song texts: the generic *wangsalan* (a poetic design that works as a riddle, thus of apparently obscure meaning), *isen-isen* (a filling-in line used by the *pesindhen*), the *kinanthi* meter, and some verses from children’s stories. It is curious that in the composition the words “*merdiko salaminya*” (“free forever”) are added as an ending-line to the *kinanthi* text. Does “free” point to the freedom to master individual life, as an interpretation of the text might suggest? Or does it refer to “Free Indonesia,” i.e. Indonesia independent from colonialism? All things considered, SEKAR GADHUNG is really a unique piece.

Gadhung Mlati

Program note by Sarah Weiss

Ladrang GADHUNG MLATI has an interesting connection with the *gender*. The piece is a sacred song for the principal court of Surakarta and its coming to the court is intertwined with some of the oldest Javanese traditions regarding the authenticity of the Central Javanese courts as power centers.

The piece was brought to the court by the gender player Nyai Jlamprang who was a court musician of the ruler, Paku Buwana. Although the story is told in several versions in manuscripts from several different centuries, this retelling captures most of the important aspects of the tale:

Nyai Jlamprang had been struck down by the plague that was being spread around Java by Nyai Lara Kidul, Goddess of the South Sea and eternal consort of the rulers of all four of the courts of Central Java. Nyai Lara Kidul would habitually populate her undersea realm with the souls of those who died during the plagues she caused on land. On her arrival to the undersea palace, Nyai Jlamprang insisted that she be returned to her home and to the Paku Buwana. Nyai Lara Kidul refused and, in an effort to entice Nyai Jlamprang to enjoy her stay, offered to teach the young *gender* player one of Nyai Lara Kidul's own *gender* pieces, Ladrang Gadhung Mlati. Nyai Jlamprang dutifully learned the difficult piece, by all accounts rather quickly, and insisted once again that she be returned to the land of Paku Buwana. Nyai Lara Kidul tried several other lures but failed and in the end allowed Nyai Jlamprang to return to her home. For the journey back, Nyai Jlamprang was provided with turmeric and ginger roots as provisions.

As her family was washing and preparing her body for burial, Nyai Jlamprang suddenly returned to her corporeal existence. Her shocked family rejoiced as her body shuddered and life returned.

The provisions provided by Nyai Lara Kidul miraculously turned to gold and silver which Nyai Jlamprang gave to the Paku Buwana before she played for him the new piece from Nyai Lara Kidul. To this day the performance of Ladrang Gadhung Mlati requires a raft of special offerings prior to its performance. Many Javanese musicians decline to play the piece when asked, citing its sacred nature. The importance of the *gender* and female *gender* players in Central Javanese culture is reflected in their centrality in a story that confirms the historical legitimacy of the rulers of Central Java.

Bawa MINTA JIVA

(The Javanese text is included in the attached PDF booklet)

TRANSLATION:

Beauty is in the behavior of the one who restrains love to a lady whose love is not matched [who is] increasingly in distress her sadness very deep causing her profound lovesickness. [The song] was composed in one day arranged using flowers as allegories representing the variety of behaviors.

Gerongan of Ketawang

PUSPA WARNA

(The Javanese text is included in the attached PDF booklet)

TRANSLATION:

- 1. Flower of the kencur plant, always spoken of with admiration, her body is well-shaped and her movements graceful, she is so charming in speech, that one feels carried away.*

- 2. Flower of the starfruit tree, when picked soon comes back; she shines sweetly indeed like a precious jewel, she is the queen of flowers and the essence of women.*

- 3. Flower of the durian tree, one stops to look at it amazed at her shape; her sweet smiles and her elegant speech embrace the senses.*

- 4. Flower of the sugarpalm bends over the durian branches; whenever I am looking at you and thinking of the flower, I become wistful.*

- 5. Flower of the banana tree hangs down over a pond; it is fitting for those of noble descent to have a demure expression and unaffected manners.*

- 6. Flower of the teak tree, scattered around the house, I stand and look out, waiting for you endlessly, not knowing if I will match.*

- 7. Flower of the betel palm opens fragrantly in the evening; I am overwhelmed to receive your visit, hoping that you will grant your favor.*

- 8. Flower of the cotton plant, constantly cut, I strongly desire to adore you, to fulfil your wishes unresistingly.*

- 9. Flower of the pandanus plant, scattered on the floor, when you come down to my place do not be anxious, I will surrender.*

Tracks and Timings:

1 Ketawang PUSPA WARNA slendro manyura, five stanzas, pesindhen Yayuk Sri Rahayu, bawa MINTA JIWA sung by Darsono (14:01)

2 Ladrang SEKAR GADHUNG
slendro manyura, pesindhen Cendaniraras (11:43)

3 Ladrang GADHUNG MLATI
slendro sanga, gender Bu Pringga; pesindhen Sri Suparsih (11:26)

4 Ladrang SEKAR GADHUNG
slendro manyura, pesindhen Yayuk Sri Rahayu (15:27)

5 Ketawang PUSPA WARNA
slendro manyura, nine stanzas, pesindhen Cendaniraras (22:11)

Chorus and Musicians

Gerong (male chorus): Darsono, Rustopo, Waridi

Niyaga (musicians): Al Suwardi, Darno, Hadi Boediono, Joko Purwanto, Nurwanto, Nyoman Sukerna, Panggiyo, Prasadiyanto, Rusdiyantoro, Sarno, Sigih, Sigit Astono, Slamet Riyadi, Sriharta, Sri Joko Raharjo, Sukamso, Supardi, Suraji, Suyadi, Wakijo

Gamelan: Kyai Gedhong Gedhe

CREDITS:

Gerong (*male chorus*): Darsono, Rustopo, Waridi

Niyaga (*musicians*): Al Suwardi, Darno, Hadi Boediono, Joko Purwanto, Nurwanto, Nyoman Sukerna, Panggiyo, Prasadiyanto, Rusdiyantoro, Sarno, Sigih, Sigit Astono, Slamet Riyadi, Sriharta, Sri Joko Raharjo, Sukamso, Supardi, Suraji, Suyadi, Wakijo

Gamelan: Kyai Gedhong Gedhe

Recordings made in 2002 and 2008 at ISI

Surakarta by John Noise Manis and Iwan Onone

Musical design, mastering, and photos: John Noise Manis

Cover photo originally taken in Tasikmalaya by Daniel Patrick Quinn.

An out-of-the-ordinary presentation of works, well-known and highly esteemed in classical Javanese gamelan music. Puspa Warna, sent into space with the Voyager, is presented here in two separate performances with different interpretations

and internal ensemble variations. Sekar Gadhung is also performed in two different renditions, allowing two pesindhen (female singers) to compete for excellency. The rarely-heard, mystical Gadhung Mlati is sung here by a third outstanding pesindhen.

Printed CD notes include contributions by Bapak Sumarsam and Dr. Sarah Weiss, while full notes in an attached PDF file expand on the subject of variations occurring in actual performances by Javanese musicians.

Recorded in 2002 and 2008, ISI Surakarta

by John Noise Manis and Iwan Onone

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