



(LYRCD 7461)

## Gamelan of Java

### VOL. V: Cirebon Tradition in America

Founded in 1369, the ancient Javanese kingdom of Cirebon is an important cultural area located on the *Pasisir*, or north coast of the island of Java in the modern-day Indonesian province of West Java. In the 1400's a string of a dozen or so kingdoms was established along the Pasisir by the Wali Sanga, nine Sufi saints who are credited with introducing the Islamic faith to Java—in part through teaching and performing the traditional arts of gamelan, *wayang* (puppet theater) and *topeng* (masked dancing), which they imbued with mystical symbolism and philosophy. To this day these traditions are regarded as a sacred inheritance from these spiritual teachers, and many Cirebon artists trace their lineage directly to the Wali Sanga. Cirebon is the last of these Javanese Pasisir kingdoms still in existence today. Its palaces are inhabited by the descendants of their first Sultan, Sunan Gunung Jati. For this reason Cirebon is sometimes referred to as the “Grandfather of Java’s royal houses.” Cirebon was an important early influence on the development of Javanese art—including gamelan—

throughout the island, but its arts are little known in modern Indonesia. I was lucky enough to be introduced to this fascinating, yet neglected, cultural center on my first trip to Java in 1976, and it has been my passion ever since. I have studied Cirebon music with master musicians in the city's royal courts, as well as in the rustic villages surrounding the city the real strongholds of this ancient tradition. In both the court and village these teachers opened their homes and their hearts to share their cultural treasures with a student from California. Some of the music they entrusted me with has now become rare or even extinct in Cirebon, and my lesson tapes have become valuable source material for a younger generation of Cirebon artists. It is to the young generation of Cirebon gamelan players that this recording is dedicated.

The pieces included on this CD were performed in Seattle and Santa Barbara between 1992 and 2009 by primarily American gamelan musicians. All five classical Cirebon *genres* are represented: the three ancient (possibly pre-Islamic) ensembles *gong renteng*, *denggung* and *gong sekati*, as well as the two forms of "gamelan proper," gamelan *prawa* and gamelan *pelog*, which are thought to have developed into their present form in the seventeenth century.

Tracks and Timings:

1. *Jipang Walik (gamelan prawa) 7:45*
  2. *Bayeman (gamelan pelog) 11:42*
  3. *Kaboran (gamelan prawa) 6:28*
  4. *Sekaten (gong sekati) 6:41*
  5. *Bale Bandung (gong renteng) 4:46*
  6. *Denggung - Wawa Bango (denggung) 6:59*
  7. *Rangsang (gamelan pelog) 6:50*
  8. *Pacul Goang (gamelan prawa) 8:42*
  9. *Monggang (gamelan pelog) 3:58*
- Cover: A Cirebon Mega Mendung batik design*

*TOTAL TIME: 63:53*

ANNOTATED TRACKS

#### TRACK 1

**Jipang Walik** (*gamelan prawa*) is played to formally open a concert of the five-tone *gamelan prawa* in Cirebon. It is preceded by three strokes of the large drum, leading up to the powerful sound of the large gong. The shifting tempos and lively melodies serve as a warm-up for the musicians, and are said to shower blessings on the audience.

#### TRACK 2

**Bayeman** (*gamelan pelog*) is traditionally the first piece played in a performance of the seven-tone *gamelan pelog* in Cirebon. “Bayem” is a meandering vine, and the melody of Bayeman winds through several *patut* or musical modes within the *pelog* scale. The music slows down into a freeform *kebonan* section, before transitioning into the boldly asymmetrical *Bayem Tur* (“Thorny Vines”) melody.

#### TRACK 3

**Kaboran** (*gamelan prawa*) is a classical overture piece played for the elaborate all night *wayang kulit* shadow puppet theater in Cirebon. Often played before the audience arrives, Kaboran is played for the entertainment of the spirits—and for the enjoyment of the gamelan musicians. This is a very brief version—a complete rendition of Kaboran can last more than 45 minutes.

#### TRACK 4

**Sekaten** (*gong sekati*) *Gong sekati* is the most sacred form of music in Cirebon and is played in the royal palace only three times a year to celebrate the Islamic holidays Idul Adha and Idul Fitri, and Muludan. The original instruments were brought to Cirebon from the north coast kingdom of Demak in 1521, and exude an atmosphere of delicate but impressive spiritual power. (A related but distinct form, *gamelan sekaten*, is played in the south central Javanese courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta). Gamelan Sinar Surya performs the *gong sekati* music with special permission from the Cirebon royal family.

#### TRACK 5

##### **Bale Bandung**

(*gong renteng*) *Gong renteng* (literally “gongs in a row”) is a village ensemble formerly found all over West Java, and features lively, syncopated melodies played in parallel octaves by three musicians on a five-tone single-row *bonang*, accompanied by various time-keeping instruments. *Bale Bandung*, meaning “Return of the Honored Guest,”

is often played at the beginning of a *gong renteng* performance. This ancient style of music is rapidly disappearing and the tradition is in danger of being lost.

#### TRACK 6

**Denggung - Wawa Bango** (*denggung*) *Denggung* is a ritual ensemble found in the three royal palaces of Cirebon, and may represent an ancient form of the well-known *degung* ensemble played in Sunda today. The palace instruments are considered to be magically powerful and, accompanied by incense and special prayers, are played in times of drought to bring rain for the rice fields. *Denggung* is now rarely played. The two pieces performed here were taught to me at Kraton Kacirebonan in 1981 by the late P. H. Yusuf Dendabrata.

#### TRACK 7

**Rangsang** (*gamelan pelog*) meaning “passionate attraction” is a rarely heard old piece sometimes played to accompany the refined dance of a noble character in the Cirebon *wayang cepak* rod puppet theater, thought by most scholars to be the ancestor of all other rod puppet forms found in Java and Sunda. The melody is long, calm and elegant

#### TRACK 8

**Pacul Goang** (*gamelan prawa*) meaning “the chipped rice hoe” is a charming melody played near the end of the all night shadow play as a gentle reminder for the farmers in the audience to get ready for a new day of work in the verdant rice fields that surround the city of Cirebon.

#### TRACK 9

**Monggang** (*gamelan pelog*) is a closing piece, played to evoke the style of the archaic *gamelan monggang*. It is played to bless the audience, and to accompany them as they exit the performance with the sound of gamelan music still gently drifting in the air.

--Richard North, Santa Barbara, CA, 2010.

*I am forever grateful to my late teacher Pangeran Haji Yusuf Dendabrata, who devoted his life to the preservation of Cirebon arts and culture. (rn)*

**Richard North** has taught gamelan at UC Santa Cruz, San Jose State University, Hawaii Loa College and North Seattle Community College. He was Guest Editor of the December 1988 issue of *Balungan Journal* devoted to the arts of Cirebon. He currently directs Gamelan Sinar Surya, a Cirebon gamelan group in Santa Barbara, and is working with gamelan musicians in Cirebon to help revive lost pieces from the classical repertoire. *Bio by Chad Bailey Nielson*

### **Yantra Productions**

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RELEVANT WEBSITES:

*www.CirebonArts.com* Devoted to the arts of Cirebon.

*www.GamelanSB.com* Gamelan Sinar Surya's site.

*www.gamelancirebon.org* Illustrated list of Cirebon gamelan instruments and gamelan glossary.

RECORDINGS: Masahiro Fukudome, Scott McLeod and Jesse Snyder (*Seattle*), and Chad Nielson, Scott Cazan and Constantijn Sanders (*Santa Barbara*).

RE-MASTERING: John Noise Manis. **Gamelan Sinar Surya—Seattle group** Masahiro Fukudome, Julija Gelazis, D. Harper-Jones, Siobhan Harper-Jones, Maggie McKelvy, Scott McLeod, Lee North, Frank Roberto, Jesse Snyder.

### **Gamelan Sinar Surya—Santa Barbara group**

Magenta Arrunategui, Olga Broiles, Michelle Bobadilla, Scott Cazan, Felicia Danon North, Donn Howell, Edmundo Luna, Margarita Ramirez, Nayelhi Ramirez, Vickie Schlegel, Joshua Smith.

### **GAMELAN SINAR SURYA**

Richard North, *director*

Deni Hermawan, *Indonesian guest artist*

*VOLUME FIVE: CIREBON TRADITION IN AMERICA LYRCD 7460*

*Gamelan music is one of the most fascinating and beautiful orchestral traditions in the world, found mainly in Indonesia and Malaysia. The Javanese, the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, have many regional styles*

*of this alluring music. Most recordings of Javanese gamelan have thus far centered on Surakarta and Yogyakarta in south central Java. But there is another, earlier style of Javanese music that is little known: the traditional music of Cirebon. Even the most seasoned lovers of Javanese gamelan might be surprised at what they hear in this CD. All five of the classical Cirebon genres are represented, performed by Gamelan Sinar Surya, a dedicated American ensemble that effectively helps keep that tradition alive. In the liner notes, GSS director Richard North describes the well thought-out and enjoyable program.*

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