

Earlham Javanese Gamelan Ensemble
Music of Blessing, Protest, and Contemplation
Earlham Center for Visual and Performing Arts, Lingle Auditorium
7:00 p.m., Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Program (See glossary for translations)

1. Lancaran **Kebogiro (Shrieking water buffalo; adornment)**, laras pélog pathet barang
2. Ladrang **Wilujeng (Safe, out of harm's way, well)**, laras pélog pathet barang

From the poem *Serat Kâlâtindhâ* (Living in a time of madness), by Radèn Ngabéhi Ranggawarsito (1802-1873):

3. Sekar mაცპატ **Sinom (Young tamarind leaf)**, verses 1 and 3, lelagon Wénigonjing (based on the version of the tune as sung by Nyai Béi Mardusari, 1909-93), laras pélog pathet nem
4. Bâwâ sekar tengahan **Lonthang (Unburdened) Kasmaran (Smitten)**, dawah gendhing larasmadyâ **Sinom** (verses 5 and 7), laras sléndro pathet sanga
5. Gendhing bonang **Dhenggung Turularé (first word difficult to translate; second word: 'The child/ren sleep/s')**, kethuk 2 kerep, inggah 4, laras pélog pathet limâ

Program Notes

A gamelan is a collection of instruments made together as a set, originating from Java or Bali, in Indonesia; ours is from central Java. Most gamelans are primarily made up of tuned bronze percussion, but smaller ones emphasize softer-sounding instruments, such as a bowed string instrument, a flute, a plucked zither, to which are added vocalists. A complete large gamelan includes both of these types. The most important instrument is undoubtedly the large gong. Also key is the set of double-headed drums, called *kendhang*, which regulate the tempo and give signals to the other musicians. There is no visual conductor, but the drummer functions in a somewhat similar manner (there are other musical leaders in the ensemble). One unique characteristic of gamelans is the notes they are tuned to, which do not match those of a Western scale (there are no Western half steps or whole steps in traditional Javanese or Balinese scales).

The two tunings characteristic of Java are called sléndro and pélog (see glossary under “laras”).

A note about titles of pieces and poetic meter: do not expect there to be any clear connection between the musical character of a piece or song and its title. In most cases, no one knows for sure why a particular title was chosen a long time ago, but that doesn't stop Javanese musicians from the fun of speculating about title choice.

Kebogiro

We always begin our concerts with *lancaran* Kebogiro because it is the quintessential piece to welcome guests to an event—and because we love the piece!

According to the royal gamelan musician and chronicler, Warsadiningrat, who was active in the mid twentieth century, the title is a play on words. Seemingly about an angry water buffalo, the title actually refers to something unrelated. The key is to understand that the Low Javanese word for ‘water buffalo’ is *kebo*, whereas the High

Javanese equivalent is *maéså*. On the other hand, the verb *maèsi* means to adorn or to prepare a bride's forehead as part of the traditional wedding attire (the hairline and eyebrows are shaved then adorned with black make-up in a special pattern). Again according to Warsadiningrat, the word *giro* can also mean 'power' or 'influence'. His interpretation of the title is thus "a powerful, influential ornament used in a ceremony." (1987 [1943]: 51)

Wilujeng

Ladrang "Wilujeng" is possibly the most commonly performed piece in the traditional gamelan repertoire. It is certainly the most common piece to study when one is ready to learn the harder, "front-row" instruments and vocal parts. The title is high Javanese for 'safe', 'out of harm's way'.

According to Warsadiningrat (1987 [1943]: 166), "Wilujeng" was composed at the palace of the grand vizier of Surakarta, during the tenure of Sårådingrat IV (who held the position from 1889 to 1916). It is usually played at the beginning of a concert, to bring well being to all present. Heri Purwanto, who has taught and performed at Earlham several times, says he has often heard musicians at events with live gamelan music say, "let's play Wilujeng first, so that the concert goes smoothly."

As in most traditional gamelan pieces, there are many ways of arranging "Wilujeng." We are doing a version that uses unison choral singing, a style borrowed from the sacred royal choreographed dance genres called *bedhåyå* and *srimpi*, in which four, seven, or nine young female dancers perform slow, exquisite choreographies on ceremonial occasions in the royal palaces—and, formerly, nowhere else.

The lyrics we have chosen for this are frequently used for various pieces done in the *bedhåyå* or *srimpi* style. They consist of a series of *wangsalans*—word puzzles comprising two lines of twelve syllables each. The first line contains clues to the unnamed solution to the puzzle, which is echoed in the sound of a word or words appearing in the second half. Because of

the complexity of these word games, we will not offer a translation, here.

Most *wangsalans* are self-standing, but these seem to fit into a string of related couplets. They may have a back story to them, or they may simply be related by the common theme of love. In any case, no Javanese listener would be able to follow such connections in real time. And, in traditional Javanese gamelan pieces, the music does not express the meaning of the words—the two are independent of each other. However, there may be a connection between these *wangsalans* and the original context of this text: *srimpi* dances are intended, among other things, to be abstract, highly refined representations of eroticism.

Sinom

The genre called *larasmadyå*—whose ensemble consists of unison mixed choir, frame drums of several sizes, a double-headed barrel drum, and a pair of tubular bells—dates back at least several centuries. It was once extremely popular, judging from the early-nineteenth-century encyclopedic novel in verse, the *Serat Centhini*. Since lyrics are independent of melodies, any text set in the chosen poetic meter can be used, although, in practice, almost all performances draw on two famous didactic poems. Tonight we are branching out and excerpting four verses from an 1873 poem by Rangawarsita, considered by most to be the greatest Javanese poet of the nineteenth century.

Sinom is one of about thirteen meters in the category called *måcåpat* (see *sekar måcåpat* in the glossary), and the entire poem titled *Serat Kålåtindhå*, is set in this one meter. Because this text was meant to be read aloud by singing it relatively quickly, and because the reading tunes used for *måcåpat* texts form the basis of so much gamelan and *larasmadyå* music, we will precede our choral rendition of verses five and seven by solo reading renditions of verses one and three (translation below). There are about twenty-six standard reading tunes for Sinom to choose from. We will be performing the one called Wénigonjing or Sinom Gonjing, using as our

melodic model a recording, by the great Bu B i Mardusari (1909-93), of a different poem.

The *Serat K l tidh * was written in a time of great upheaval in Java, when colonialism and modernity were disrupting Javanese ways, including the central place given to courtly poets such as Ranggawarsito. According to Nancy Florida, his father was “a brilliant scholar” who was forced into exile “at the height of the Dipanagara War (1825-1830), a bloody conflict . . . recognized as the last . . . stand of traditional Javanese authority against Dutch colonialism[.] [T]his war marked . . . the conclusive end of Javanese political authority and the beginning of high colonialism in Java.” (Florida 2019: 88-9). Florida has explored how this poem—verse seven of which is widely known in Java—simultaneously foretells the future and recalls the past. Successive generations of Javanese have found it to describe the troubled times they were living in (Florida 2019: 95). We leave it to you to make your own inferences, should you wish.

Larasmady  pieces are always preceded by a *b w * (solo vocal introduction). The only requirement in choosing a *b w * is that it be in the right melodic mode and that it end on the right ending pitch: the words need not have any connection to the piece it introduces. This one is an excerpt from an as-yet-unidentified story. It is the voice of one character, talking to their superior, about the superior’s son having to enter into battle [with the antagonist?] if the negotiations fail. You will hear EC senior Blaise Rzeszut in the solo vocals.

Serat K l tidh  (The Time of Darkness)

1. Now the glory of the realm
Is manifest an empty void.
The rule of rules in ruin
Because there are no models left.
Respectful ways forsaken,
The learned, the good are carried away,
Swept up in the time of darkness,
Silent, the signs of Creation,
A craven world flooded with woe.

3. Aroused are the tears
Of him the master poet,

Wrapped in heavy heart,
Afflicted with disgrace.
For secret schemes
Swirl about encircling [him],
Heartening with honeyed words
To seize advantage and get success,
Destroyed in the end is the will that’s caught
unawares.

5. The words of the *Panitisastra*
Teach with the warning that
In an age that is accursed
‘Tis the virtuous man who fails.
And so if one reflects on it,
What merit then in taking faith
In foolish senseless news?
Lest it break the heart,
Better to compose the tales of old.

7. To live in a time of madness
Is to know trouble in one’s mind.
To join the madness, unbearable.
Yet he who does not join
Will not receive his share,
And so goes hungry in the end.
And yet it is the Will of God—
However fortunate are they who forget,
More fortunate still are they who remember, who are
aware.

(Translation from Florida 2019: 92-4)

Dhenggung Turular 

This majestic piece belongs to the genre called *gendhing bonang*. They all have very long time cycles (up to 256 beats for each stroke of the big gong—in practice, roughly seven and a half minutes per time cycle—and there may be several of those that make up the piece, each of which may be repeated!). This piece has a time cycle of sixty-four beats, which may take up to two minutes to play before the large gong marks the end of the cycle. It is in two parts, each one a single time cycle long (it is thus one of the shortest *gendhing bonangs* in the repertoire, not counting the optional repetitions).

Gendhing bonangs get their name from the fact that the melodic leader in them is the *bonang*, a large, two-octave set of pot gongs set out in two rows and played by a single musician. In contrast, a *gendhing rebab* features all the softer, more

difficult instruments and relies on the *rebab* ‘bowed spike-lute’ as the melodic leader. The ensemble for *gendhing bonangs* uses only the loud bronze instruments and drums, giving it an austere, forceful quality.

According to the musician and ethnomusicologist Rahayu Supanggah, *gendhing bonangs* may have been composed mainly to help pass the time as people in a palace worked through the night to prepare the food and the physical space for a wedding or other large event. Nowadays they are sometimes played as openers of a music-making session, before the whole crew of musicians has arrived, because these pieces require fewer musicians. They also tend to be of a calmer, weightier nature, and thus fit into the beginning of the usual progression from calmer to more playful pieces that will be programmed on the spot, throughout the evening of music. A great many of these pieces (including “Dhenggung Turularé”) are in the *pélog lima* melodic mode, which is the most serious and contemplative of all six melodic modes. And yet, this piece, as do others, has momentary passages of dry humor, where the main melody goes into a brief bit of syncopation.

Several *gendhing bonangs* have titles beginning with the word *dhenggung*. No one knows for sure why, at this point. Sumarsam (2007) says he has heard that *dhenggung* might be related to the word *degung*, which refers to a West-Javanese ensemble (*gamelan degung*) that uses the same five pitches as these pieces (recall that *pélog* has seven pitches available). My own conjecture is that these pieces are used to begin a program, and the word *dhenggung* can mean ‘the one in front’ (literally, it refers to the first stone thrown in a children’s game).

This piece consists of several sections. The quiet opening played on the *bonang* alone, begins with an *adangiyah*—an unmetered, modal formula that begins all *gendhing bonangs* in the *pélog lima* mode. It then transitions from unmetered to metered during the introduction to this specific piece. After the sound of the big

gong, the piece proper begins at a fast clip, gradually settling into the calmest portion, which can go on for several time cycles. This section is called the *mérong*. To emphasize the calm feeling and the long wait until each stroke of the gong, the ensemble slows slightly right before the gong, then picks up the tempo again immediately afterwards. The piece then transitions to the more lively second half of the piece, called the *inggah*, by speeding up then slowing down. After several cycles at a medium-slow pace, it speeds up in stages, then slows down to end. As is usual in most gamelan pieces, the rest of the ensemble plays their last note after the last gong stroke, resulting in a feathered ending.

One source of beauty of these pieces thus lies in their gradual, terraced progression from calm and highly contemplative to highly invigorating, as the tempo waxes and wanes, slowly building to a furious climax that then subsides till the final stroke of the large gong. Pieces with large gong cycles are among the most conducive to using gamelan music as a tool for meditation (rare now, possibly more common in former times). Another source of beauty lies in the *bonang* instrument itself—its haunting timbre and subtle rhythmic and damping techniques, but also its delicate interplay with the medium-speed melody played by the *sarons* (single-octave trough-resonated metallophones) and *slenthem* (low-pitched, single-octave, tube-resonated metallophone).

References

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- Warsadinigrat. 1987 [1943]. *Wédha Pradangga*. Translated by Susan Pratt Walton. In *Karawitan: Source Readings in Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music*, edited by Judith Becker and Alan Feinstein. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.

Program notes by Marc Benamou

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Glossary (in the order of first appearance on the first page of the program)

- 1. lancaran** – a gamelan piece with a time cycle of 8 (or sometimes 16) beats
- laras pélog** (also applies to items 2, 3, 5) – one of two Javanese tunings, with seven pitches to the octave; most adjacent intervals are roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a Western whole tone
- pathet barang** (also applies to item 2) – one of three melodic modes in pélog, characterized by a high pitch register and usually a flirtatious, playful, cheerful mood (but in some pieces it is sad, calm, or majestic)
- 2. ladrang** – a gamelan piece with a time cycle of 32 beats
- 3 and 4. serat** – book, treatise (usually written in traditional Javanese verse called *sekar*)
- 3. sekar mǎcǎpat** – a category of traditional Javanese poetry that uses indigenous (as opposed to imported Sanskrit) poetic meters
- Sinom** – a *mǎcǎpat* meter that has nine lines per stanza, with the following pattern of syllables per line and final vowel in each line, respectively: 8a, 8i, 8a, 8i, 7i, 8u, 7a, 8i, 12a (that is, the first line has eight syllables and its last syllable uses the vowel “a,” etc.)
- lelagon** – each *mǎcǎpat* verse form has a few tunes associated with, which are used to intone that portion of the poem, and each of those tunes is called a *lelagon*; it is up to the singer to choose which tune to use (the *lelagons* often have moods associated with them)
- pathet nem** – of the three pélog melodic modes, this one has a medium pitch register; usually flirtatious, but may be sad or majestic
- 4. bǎwǎ** – an extended, unmetered vocal solo that precedes a gamelan piece
- sekar tengahan** – a category of traditional Javanese verse that shares many characteristics with sekar mǎcǎpat (less familiar than mǎcǎpat, there are many more meters to choose from); the name of this meter is Lonhang, and Kasmaran is the name of the lelagon (see above)
- dawah** – literally “falling to,” better translated as “continuing to”
- gendhing larasmadyǎ** – a piece for the *larasmadyǎ* ensemble, which consists of unison mixed chorus, frame drums called *terbang*, a *ciblon* double-headed drum, and a pair of tubular bells called *kemanak*
- laras sléndro** – a Javanese tuning that divides the octave into roughly five equal parts, each of which is bigger than a whole step but smaller than an augmented second
- pathet sǎngǎ** – of the three modes in sléndro, this one has a medium-high register; moods mostly commonly associated with it: solemn, imposing, sad, lovelorn
- 5. gendhing bonang** – a long gamelan piece that features the instrument called *bonang* (two-octave gong chime that acts as a melodic leader)
- kethuk 2 kerep** – an indication of the length of the time cycle; in the *mérong*—the first major part of a *gendhing bonang*—this means that there are two strokes of the *kethuk* (small, low-pitched pot gong), eight beats apart, in the unit marked off by the *kenong* (a large pot gong that marks off the end of either every quarter or every half of the time cycle); another way of putting it, is that the *kenong* unit is 16 beats long, and, in this piece, the entire cycle is 64 beats long
- inggah 4** – this means that the *inggah*, or second major section of a *gendhing bonang* has four *kethuk* strokes per *kenong* unit: they now come twice as frequently, within the 16-beat *kenong* unit
- pathet limǎ** – of the three pélog modes, this is the lowest in pitch, and the most serious and calm; often said to be weighty or supernaturally awesome (in the literal sense)

Other term (refer to the drawing for instrument names):

- balungan** – literally, ‘skeleton’ or ‘framework’: a melody, usually medium fast, played by the *slenthem* (single-octave, low-pitched, tube-resonated metallophone) and *sarons* (single-octave, trough-resonated metallophone), from which a knowledgeable musician can derive all the other melodic parts of the ensemble