

South Bank Gamelan Players with Wahyuningsih Widi Rahayu, dancer

7.30pm Oundle School Great Hall

Gendhing Bonang Siring kethuk 4 kerep, minggah 8
pélog barang

The *gendhing bonang* form is often used to inaugurate official court functions, hence its being played tonight as the audience enters. The sparse instrumentation (led by the *bonang*, towards the front of the gamelan) and the gradual but inexorable increase of speed and volume to a powerful climax, have their roots in the music of the sacred *Gamelan Sekatèn*.

Dance: Gambiranom

Lancaran Renâ-renâ, Ketawang Kinanthi Sandhung, Srepegan
sléndro nem

Drawn from the cycle of Javanese legends about the handsome and heroic prince Panji, this dance tells of the young king Gambiranom. He has fallen in love with the princess Déwi Titisari, and the dance depicts the young king in various stages of elation and distraction. This character is presented in *putra halus branya* style, a type of refined male dance style which may be danced either by men or women. The emphasis is upon the balance of refinement, grace and power.

Ladrang Gadhung Mlathi, Ladrang Ubal-ubal, Bubaran Nyutrâ,
Ayak-ayakan cengkok Gadhung Mlathi, Srepegan, Palaran
Asmârândânâ miring, Srepegan
sléndro sângâ

This instrumental suite centres around the sacred ladrang Gadhung Mlathi, a soft-style piece with *gendèr* introduction which is rarely performed and then only with special offerings to Kangjeng Ratu Kencânâ Sari, the Queen of the South Seas. It originates from the time of the Solonese King Paku Buwânâ IV (reigned 1788-1820). The King's most talented *gendèr* player, Nyai Jlamprang, was suffering from cholera fever and died suddenly; she was then miraculously transported to the Golden Kingdom of the Queen of the South Seas, where the Queen asked her to learn a *gendèr* piece called Gadhung Mlathi. The Queen played the

gendèr part to Nyai Jlamprang who memorised the piece and played it back note for note. Given leave to return to the Solonese court, Nyai Jlamprang was restored to life, bringing with her the *Gadhung Mlathi* suite and other gifts.

On her return to the court Nyai Jlamprang was requested to perform the suite of pieces she had learnt for the King. She played *ladrang Gadhung Mlathi* followed by *ladrang Ubal-ubal* which gradually built up speed. After this she was asked to add the lively *bubaran Nyutrâ* to which the King would ride his horse (the drum part here representing the horse's movement), and she concluded the performance with an *ayak-ayakan* for full gamelan.

Tonight's performance follows the structure of this original performance but the concluding *ayak-ayakan* is replaced by a shorter one which echoes phrases from *Gadhung Mlathi*. This leads into a faster *srepegan* played by the full gamelan. The *srepegan* is interrupted by a *palaran*, a vocal piece performed by the female singer (*pesindhèn*) accompanied only by the soft instruments, drum, *gongs* and *kenongs*. After the reappearance of the *srepegan* the music moves quickly to a vigorous climax.

Interval

Short Ride in a Fast Machine

John Adams (b.1947)
(arr. Symon Clarke)

John Adams wrote 'Short Ride in a Fast Machine' for the full forces of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, first performed in 1986. Making an arrangement of any 'western' piece for the gamelan means finding ways to realise the music using different pitches. The main features of 'Short Ride' in its orchestral version are rhythm and texture and both these elements work well on the gamelan.

Realising the thematic and harmonic structure of the piece on the gamelan requires some ingenuity and sleight of hand. Gamelan scales do not relate precisely to western pitches. Certain melodic phrases in the original are therefore realised approximately but cannot consistently use the same gamelan pitches throughout the piece. The trick is to create a convincing texture that still recognises the main harmonic, rhythmic and figurative ingredients of the original so that the inconsistent pitch relationships do not destroy the progressive logic of the original.

Another problem concerns register: the gamelan covers about five octaves, the symphony orchestra over seven. Compression is therefore required and this means that some material from the original is played one octave, or in some cases two octaves, higher or lower.

The piece is difficult to play in both versions and for the gamelan it is a particular challenge. It is a tribute to the South Bank Gamelan Players that they can realise this difficult score without a conductor.

Ketawang Kasatriyan, Jineman Mijil, Lagon Dendhang Semarang *sléndro sângâ*

This suite of pieces mimics the point in a *wayang kulit* (all night shadow-puppet play) when a young hero journeys into the deep forest. *Kasatriyan* the noble warrior, sets this scene as he journeys down the mountainside to seek peace, inner strength and a few answers to the great problems of the drama. He is accompanied by four clown-like servants, who are actually the guardian angels of the land of Java. While their master is off seeking enlightenment, they entertain themselves and their audience by asking the female vocalist in the gamelan to sing popular songs for them. *Mijil* is a tiny fragment, as simple as it is brief. The final piece *Dendang Semarang* is an ironic love song:

"Where does the leech come from? It is washed from the paddy field and flows down to the stream. Where does love come from? It washes in at the eyes and flows down to the heart."

Dance: Gambyong Paréanom

Ladrang Paréanom, Ladrang Sumedang, Gendhing Gambirsawit
Pancerânâ *pélog nem*

The light-hearted *Gambyong* was originally a flirtatious village dance. It was refined by the royal courts of Central Java, and is now used to welcome guests. The costume is less elaborate than that worn in most court dances, and consists of a simple *kain wiru* (batik cloth), a colourful chest-wrap, and a sash worn over one shoulder.

Gunungsari Kalibagoran

sléndro manyurâ

This piece is from the Banyumas area of Central Java, west of the royal courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta and east of the culturally distinct region of Sunda. Banyumas pieces are nearly always



lively, and contain an element of fun. Often adapted from folk songs, and drawing on many neighbouring traditions, the Banyumas style has a distinctively village character.

Gunungsari (meaning 'Beautiful Mountain' or 'the Highest Feeling') is central to the Banyumas repertoire but is unusual in starting off in a relatively refined style. However, it moves through several sections, each one livelier than the last, to finish with rhythmic calls and shouts adding to the excitement.

Wahyuningsih Widi Rahayu

Wahyuningsih Widi Rahayu trained and worked as a dancer in Central Java, and now lives in London with her family. In 2004 she appeared with the Sunarno Dance Company and the South Bank Gamelan Players in a Ramayana dance-drama at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London and in Italy.

The **South Bank Gamelan Players**, Ensemble-in-Residence at the Royal Festival Hall, was founded by Alec Roth in 1987. Most of the musicians have undertaken extensive study in Java and a number are tutors for the Royal Festival Hall Gamelan Programme. Working closely with dancers, puppeteers and composers from Indonesia, Europe and the USA, the group has established an international reputation both for its performances of traditional Javanese music and for its championing of new music for gamelan.