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Nyoman Windha's Catur Yuga

A New Concept of Contemporary Balinese Chamber Music? 1

Dieter Mack

The so-called *kebyar*-style of the 20th and 21st centuries is regarded as the basic stylistic frame of recent Balinese musical development; its influences are discernible in almost all other Balinese genres. Beginning in the 1960s, I Wayan Beratha created a model called *kreasi baru* (literally »new creation«) that soon became the prevailing standard for the development of almost all contemporary music. Nevertheless, that model still had its roots in traditional Balinese music, as described systematically and encompassingly by Michael Tenzer (2000).

Parallel to this ongoing practice, some younger composers have consciously attempted to go beyond the normative criteria of the *kreasi baru*. This can be seen in aspects of form (new process-orientated ideas, change of the gong function from end- to frontweightedness etc.), in the change of the functions of musical strata, but also in vertical sound organisation. Only a few composers have devoted themselves to a radical experimental approach, while most tend to favour a gradual extension of the Balinese musical language. Nyoman Windha's composition *Catur Yuga* from 1997 is a significant example of such a stepwise crossing of the normative borders of the standardized *kebyar*-style. This approach is demonstrated by an analytical discussion of several short examples from *Catur Yuga*.

Traditional Transformation or Developmental Change - Preliminary Remarks

In the realm of Western culture, tradition is generally regarded as a dynamic historical process rather than a more or less unchanging catalogue of rules. At any given point in history, contemporary art seems to spearhead this process. Contemporary art must by definition be in the vanguard, yet when examined closer it turns out to be based on the historical precedents and developmental processes which we call tradition. Even so-called »avant-garde« music or art, created with the intention of being radical and revolutionary and including works that set out to evade, contradict or even negate a certain tradition, can be seen as a logical consequence of a specific historical situation, at least in Western culture.²

With a more specific focus placed on music, we can say that Western art music is characterized by: a) an ongoing re-interpretation of traditional works, methods or styles based, in particular, on their inherited notation, and b) the composition of *new* music and the invention of a new, personal musical grammar – at least since the

- 1 Thanks to Andrew Timar, Toronto for polishing my English.
- 2 Examples are provided by Dadaism and Futurism in the beginning of the 20th century or Fluxus and Happening in the early 1960s.

early 19th century. Both practices: the ongoing re-interpretation of tradition and the composition of *new* music, are of equal importance and are cross-related in a sort of symbiotic existence. Neither of the two practices can be sacrificed in favour of the other.

A different perception exists in musical cultures³ that are not grounded on a thorough, long-standing tradition of musical notation but are dominated by oral tradition. Here, composing and performing in a traditional style is almost identical with preserving a tradition. Consequently, conscious change and deviation from existing norms of composition and performance is regarded as tantamount to the destruction of its core musical values, or at least as endangering the tradition. Although in such contexts changes can be noticed (particularly by outsiders) along with an adherence to orthodoxy, these cryptic or »hidden« changes usually do not occur consciously. Moreover, when two cultures of different origins meet (as Western and Balinese cultures do in the following case studies), we must further investigate what »contemporary music« is supposed to mean in this situation.

Contemporary Music in Bali

Musik kontemporer (contemporary music) is a term that still causes heated debate in Indonesian musical circles. The reasons are multifold. Let us examine a few salient ones: Because musicians from oral traditions do not consciously consider change and development particularly important issues, Indonesian composers have developed an idea of contemporary art music as completely divorced from their tradition due to somewhat arbitrary international contacts with Western artists. For decades, Indonesian art academies have supported this notion. In a composition exam at Indonesian music institutes, students are required to submit works in three compulsory categories:

- 1. a composition in a traditional Indonesian style;
- 2. a modernized arrangement of a traditional piece;
- 3. a contemporary composition.

In the last category it is *compulsory* to produce a work in an *experimental *style, without any relationship to a local tradition. It is no wonder that the resulting compositions in this category usually have no appeal to the local audience, nor even to most of the *advanced *artists.

In addition, to date there has been no comprehensive debate in the academies about the role of structure, content or aesthetics in music. Only during the last 15 years have these questions been faced more consciously, supported by the idea that change in contemporary music can be linked to a development of tradition.

These new tendencies are most significant among artists on the island of Bali. As a matter of fact, it seems that Bali was always less affected by the »anarchic experi-

³ For obvious reasons I cite examples primarily from Indonesian musical cultures, although the main issues which are discussed here can be transferred easily to other cultural realms.

mentalism« equated with »contemporary music« at the Indonesian art academies. In contrast to most of their other Indonesian colleagues whose idea of contemporary music is generally based on a juxtaposition of experimentally created sound patterns, Balinese composers seem to look more thoroughly into the parameters of musical construction, into structural development and into the extension of traditional musical grammars. Why can this tendency be observed almost exclusively among Balinese composers? First, the awareness of changes within local music traditions and contemporary practices has a longer history in Bali than in many other Indonesian regions. Second, the rise of a local music cassette industry since the 1960s has contributed significantly to the distribution of local styles and new musical developments and thus has increased the consciousness of musical change. These cassette recordings have been used in a similar manner as a written document or a score in the West, allowing for a precise re-interpretation of a recorded traditional piece after the fact.

During the last few years many composers have begun with startling creativity to present new ideas and aesthetic concepts based on the Balinese musical legacy.⁵ Following pioneer composers of the 20th century such as Wayan Lotring (1883?-1983) and Wayan Berata (b. 1924), a first generation of composers emerged that was trained in music academies, rather than by traditional masters. The Academy of Performing Arts (ASTI)⁶ in Denpasar, the capital of Bali, was where this generation of now middle-aged musicians and composers cut their teeth. Among them are composers such as Gedé Asnawa (b. 1955), Komang Astita (b. 1952), Nyoman Windha (b. 1954), Wayan Gedé Yudane (b. 1964) and Wayan Rai (b. 1956). Balinese artists of the same generation that have followed a more experimental path include Wayan Sadra (b. 1953) and Pande Madé Sukerta (b. 1953), who characteristically have both studied at the Academy in Surakarta (Solo), Java (Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesia⁷) and have made their careers in Java. Their essentially experimental and sometimes even anarchic artistic approach attracts less attention in the art scene in Bali perhaps than in Solo. All the composers I have mentioned were presented during the earliest years of the notable composers' forum Pekan Komponis Muda (»Week of Young Composers«).8 Today a younger group of composers such as Dewa Berata, Dewa Ketut, Madé Arnawa and I Madé Subandi, to mention just a few, have taken their place on the Balinese stage.9

From among all these worthy composers, I would like to shine the spotlight on 56-year-old Nyoman Windha. I am going to examine some excerpts from his piece

⁴ A thorough discussion of the reasons for the misunderstandings surrounding the question of what »contemporary« Indonesian music may be is provided in Mack, Zeitgenössische Musik in Indonesian, pp. 115–151.

⁵ In the following overview, I intentionally do not refer to the very popular *kebyar* style with its annual festivals. For a comprehensive study of this style see Tenzer, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar*.

⁶ Today it is called ISI (Institut Seni Indonesia).

⁷ Since 2006 also called ISI Surakarta.

⁸ This forum has been the only ongoing national festival for contemporary music. Initiated by composer Suka Hardjana (b. 1940), it took place annually from 1979 until 1985 and ceased because of lack of funds. Various revivals remained singular events.

⁹ For further general information on contemporary music in Bali see: Tenzer, Gamelan Gong Kebyar, Vitale, Balinese Kebyar Music Breaks the Five-Tone Barrier, Mack, Zeitgenössische Musik in Indonesien.

Catur Yuga, composed in Germany in 1997 during Windha's residency with my own Balinese gamelan group Anggur Jaya.

Catur Yuga by I Nyoman Windha

Windha's mastery of craft is never forced upon the listener, but makes itself felt in an ever-varied repertoire of phrase structure and metric design. As he readily admits, all his compositions are derived from melody, never from abstract rhythmic plans. The tune carries all, because within it can be felt all the other aspects of music such as rhythm and dynamics¹⁰

These words from Wayne Vitale, a long-time collaborator of Nyoman Windha, highlight peculiar elements of Windha's music. It is obvious that Windha has found his own path in-between populist aesthetics and experimentation for experimentation's sake.

The first thing I think about when I compose is *desa, kala, patra* [...]; my music has to use the right materials at the right moments to speak directly to the audience. I have to give them something new each time, using all the resources I have, but the results must sound Balinese.¹¹

Windha is apparently little interested in talking in detail about his music. During his residency in Freiburg/Basel, he could be observed walking around with a small piece of paper in his hand that contained sketches of melodic phrases, while connections between these phrases only existed in his mind. Windha was mainly concerned with notating melodic fragments of the piece that he was working on, not the entire structure. When I asked him about his ideas and artistic concepts concerning stylistic development in comparison, for example, with his colleague Wayan Sadra, Windha replied:

I don't want to go too far. It is still possible to create a lot with the conventional tools. We could compose new harmonies following the *kempyung* principle; *penyacah, calung* and *jegogan* could be played as [if they were a Western] choir. Besides I am especially interested in everything melodic. From melody, I can derive rhythms in different forms because rhythm follows melody. Without melody a piece is incomplete and does not work for me. 12

His composition Catur Yuga is one of the most significant examples of how Windha transforms and develops traditional Balinese musical principles without destroying them. Therefore, one might think of the Western term »classicism« to describe his aesthetic approach.

Windha's Catur Yuga project was an artistic collaboration between artists from Bali, Basel (Switzerland) and Freiburg (Germany). He was commissioned to compose the music for a modern dance called Break of Time, choreographed by the Basel-based Esther Sutter. The work consisted of the four sections Air, Fire, Earth and Water.

¹⁰ Vitale, Music of the Gamelan Gong Kebyar.

¹¹ Windha, quoted after Tenzer, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar*, p. 308. The Balinese phrase *Desa, kala, patra* roughly means »balance« in terms of »space, time and context«.

¹² Windha during an interview with the author on June 8, 2002 in Tunjuk, Tabanan, Bali.

After the initial dance production, Windha revised the music and created a concert version which is the basis of the following analysis. Beside the details that will be analysed, the composition also clearly demonstrates Windha's long-lasting pre-occupation with Javanese music traditions including the pre-eminence of melody.

Another important prerequisite of *Catur Yuga* was that Windha had been asked to use reduced Balinese gamelan instrumentation. This turned out to become a significant challenge for the composer. In his instrumentation Windha used:

- one *trompong*¹³ with 2 or 3 players (3rd person doubling on viola);
- two gangsa kantilan¹⁴; both players doubling on two kendang¹⁵;
- two jegogan¹⁶ and two calung¹⁷;
- two suling¹⁸ and vocals (vocals were used only in the dance version);
- one low-sounding Javanese gong ageng.19

It is evident from this list that Windha preferred to score for primarily high and low sounds, leaving the mid range barely present. This is the first sign of a new chamber-music-like concept. Windha did not just reduce the number of instruments, however. He intentionally chose a peculiar instrumentation that enabled him to deviate slightly from the traditional form of »stratified organization«. The use of the trompong – traditionally used for a single elaborated core melody performed by one player – instead of the reong is another example of an unorthodox approach in this work. Furthermore, the inclusion of a viola in the ensemble is not really an »Eastmeets-West« idea, since that string instrument is used in a manner resembling a Balinese rebab. 22

The following short analysis refers to the first part *Udara* [Air]²³: The beginning ostinato (Fig. 1) is based on the three main pitches (in Balinese notation) *dung-ding-dang-(ding)*, where *ding* is heard as the main pitch. In my notation²⁴ these are represented by the pitches F#-B-G-B. In this part, the *trompong* is played by only two musicians, performing a mixture of musical patterns combining figuration and traditional offbeat accents. The *trompong* texture tends to be complementary with the *kantilan* part.²⁵ This is especially relevant in the second part *Api* [Fire], where quite

- 13 Set of 10 small bronze pots played with two long panggul (mallets) wound with string.
- 14 The highest bronze metallophones with 10 keys played with a wooden mallet.
- 15 Two-headed drums played with hands or with ebony mallets.
- 16 Lowest bronze metallophones with five keys, played with thick cotton mallets.
- 17 Bronze metallophones with five keys, one octave higher than the *jegogan*, played with wooden mallets that have a rubber surface.
- 18 Bamboo flutes (circular breathing) with labium.
- 19 Very low »big« gong.
- 20 Tenzer, Gamelan Gong Kebyar, pp. 52-58.
- 21 The reong, a set of 12 kettle gong-chimes, is normally played by four musicians performing figurations or series of accents. For the figurations composed by Windha, the reong would have been the "correct" instrument in Catur Yuga. Because he preferred low sounds and different techniques, Windha preferred the lower trompong.
- 22 Two-stringed spike fiddle.
- 23 A more detailed analysis of Catur Yuga has been published as Mack, Der balinesische Komponist Nyoman Windha.
- 24 The score was transcribed by the author after having learned the whole piece orally directly from the composer. The composer cannot read Western notation.
- 25 A remark on notation: While the rhythmic notation represents the original music as precisely as in Western music, the situation is different with regard to pitch. The complicated concept of pitch organisa-

»dissonant« neighbour pitches sound together (dong/deng = C/D, ding/dong = B/C, and dang/ding = G/B). To my knowledge, this is an unusual sound in traditional music, except in rarely heard pre-Hindu genres such as gamelan selunding, gambang and luang performed by some Balinese orchestras from East Bali, where this »clashing of pitches« is called noltol pepaketan.²⁶

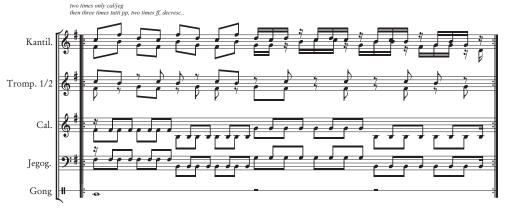


Figure 1: Nyoman Windha, Catur Yuga: I. Udara, beginning [score/transcription: Dieter Mack].

The calung and jegogan parts are even more unusual. Both pairs of tuned metallophones play in a figurative style, with the jegogan doubling the calung pitches one octave lower. However, because of the paired pangumbang / pangisep tuning²⁷ of these instruments, the resultant sound effect creates audible beats and seems to »shimmer« or »swim« to listeners due to the microintervallic differences. This sort of interlocking technique called norot originates in the West Balinese gamelan jegog. Structurally, the calung and jegogan parts can be explained as a figurative variation of the core pitches, but aurally they function more as an autonomous sound texture than as a core melody.

A third significant aspect of Catur Yuga is the role of the gong ageng. In this work the gong mostly marks the beginning of musical sections, rather than the ends as is conventionally done. (Sometimes a single gong stroke will mark simultaneously the end of one section and the beginning of the next.) This radical reversal of the function of the gong as compared to the entire corpus of gamelan music (Javanese and Sundanese included), is characteristic of the entire composition. According to the composer, this change was supposed to accommodate the choreography and the dancers' movements! Although this radical temporal »displacement« of the gong strokes would be jarring to any Balinese performer, when creating the instrumental

tion in Bali – where different microtonal shadings of the same gamut are tolerated – cannot be discussed here (see Tenzer, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar*, pp. 27–33). Nevertheless the pitches notated in this score represent one (!) accepted possibility of the so-called *selisir*-tuning (a *pelog* type) which is actually the basis for this composition.

²⁶ Schlager, Rituelle Siebentonmusik auf Bali, p. 38.

²⁷ In traditional Indonesian ensembles, paired instruments are tuned slightly differently which creates a beating effect: the *pangumbang* instrument is tuned a little lower than the *pangisep* instrument. If both instruments play the same keys, we perceive a pitch in-between the two sounding pitches with a regular beating effect.

version of Catur Yuga, Windha did not change the gong part to conform with traditional practice.

This short analysis proves that Windha did not leave the context of Balinese gamelan tradition in *Catur Yuga*. Almost every technique employed can be found in the tradition, yet Windha re-arranges them in new contexts where these elements appear new and fresh. Continuity and transformational development are in perfect balance.

The following example from the beginning of the first main section of *Udara* (Fig. 2) demonstrates the domination of linear aspects in Windha's work. One might say that this piece is the beginning of a »counterpoint à la Windha«, a technique that is even more obvious in the third part of *Catur Yuga*, entitled *Tanah* [*Earth*].



Figure 2: Nyoman Windha, Catur Yuga: I. Udara, beginning of the first main section.

Please note again the partly atypical vertical combination of the calung and jegogan texture: deng (D), ding (B) and dong (C), dang (G) are sounding together, creating a new timbral quality in the instruments' low pitch region. Such vertical combinations can usually be found in paired gong-chime instruments, such as reong or gangsa, but not in the low »inter-punctuating« instruments that are typically used to mark the musical structure. As in the first example (Fig. 1), Windha uses traditional techniques here, but puts them into a different context. The tendency towards a ternary rhythmical structure (»triple feel«) in the opening phrase is combined with a »subtractive« sequence as the last note before the gong has only two eighth-notes instead of three. The viola then enters together with the gong; thus the gong here again marks the beginning, not the end of a section.

The first beat in Figure 2 interlaces the end of the previous phrase (played by the *kantilan*) with the beginning of the next (played by the *calung* and *jegogan*). Note how the viola melody is echoed by the *jegogan* (second system). This is the first hint at polyphony in this piece. Finally, we may note the irregular beat structure (or shifting meters) of the sub-phrases in this section until the note *dang* (G) at the end of the third system. In the next gong phrase, the *jegogan* play a nine-beat transition²⁸ that opens out into a ternary tutti. Again we hear an unusual texture performed by the *kantilan*, in this case the contrary motion of the *polos* and *sangsih* parts.²⁹

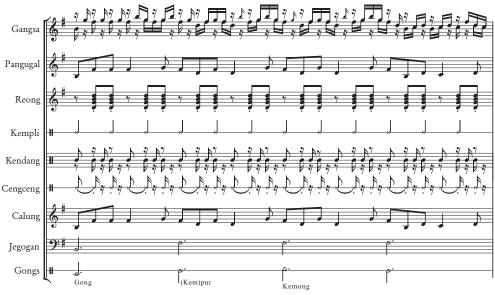


Figure 3: Wayan Berata, Purwa Pastima, waltz section [score/transcription: Dieter Mack].

²⁸ Even if we consider the *gong* beat on *ding* as the conventional end, the following eight beats have no »gravitation« towards the last eighth beat *deng* (D). The character of the music is completely additive, as the next texture starts completely separately on *dung* (F#).

²⁹ *Polos* designates the main voice, while *sangsih* is the additional interlocking figuration part. In unison playing there are some rules of intervallic distance based on a kind of pentatonic mixture (generally a distance of three pitches is maintained, sometimes of two).

Ternary elements are not unusual in contemporary Balinese gamelan. Although uncommon in traditional music, they have found a place in contemporary compositions since Wayan Berata introduced them in his *Purwa Pastima* (early 1970s) in a unique section recalling a Western waltz (Fig. 3), although the musical gestures remained completely Balinese in style. This provides another good example of how traditions may be transformed by foreign (Western) influences, while still retaining a unique identity. Windha's formal organisation features a continuous shift and change of metrical units that support his focus on melodic development. According to my experience, there is only one traditional Balinese genre where one may find a similarly irregular metrical organisation combined with a dominanting melodic content: the ancient courtly *gamelan gambuh*, rarely heard today, even in Bali.³⁰ And it is no secret that Windha is a committed admirer of that music. He does not, however, borrow from or imitate the *gamelan gambuh*, but rather finds analogous structural solutions necessitated by his irregular melodic organisation.

A third example from the first part demonstrates Windha's carefully designed instrumentation (Fig. 4). A specific colour is created here by the combination of calung and kantilan, later exchanged with a combination of viola and jegogan. This exchange causes a significant shift in sound colour because of the completely different overtone structures of the two sets of instruments.



Figure 4: Nyoman Windha: Catur Yuga: I. Udara, end of the first main section.

Conclusion

These few examples show that Windha has made a significant contribution to the development of Balinese music without leaving Balinese aesthetics. His music demonstrates multiple references to Balinese tradition, bringing old standards from different genres and styles into a new context. In *Catur Yuga*, we can discover traces of the ancient pre-Hindu Balinese gamelan genres *gambang* and *selunding* as well as re-

³⁰ One may find such elements also in the *gender wayang* repertoire and in some pieces of the ancient ensemble forms *gamelan selunding* and *gamelan luang*; but even here such elements are an exception, while they are typical in the *gamelan gambub* repertoire.

ferences to the ancient court music gamelan gambuh and to the gamelan jegog. Elements of Javanese and even Western musical styles can be found in this work, including counterpoint, ternary rhythmical structures and instrumentation. All of these elements, however, have been transformed into a new and unique artistic context. Along with several other works from his œuvre, Catur Yuga proves that a thorough study and knowledge of one's own musical tradition may successfully support the creation of new music.

A concluding example of a work by a composer of the younger generation shows that such transformations continue to be relevant in Balinese music today. The main focus of I Madé Arnawa's³¹ music is the transformation and extension of traditional form, using process-orientated structural devices such as continuously changing gong-cycles and even phasing-like interlocking of different ostinatos as developed by American composers since the 1970s, among them Terry Riley and Steve Reich. The following example from Arnawa's *Komposisi No. 3* for *gamelan angklung* shows the overlapping of a 6-beat and a 5-beat ostinato, creating a typical *phasing* effect (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: I Madé Arnawa: Komposisi No. 3, concluding section.

I Nyoman Windha and I Madé Arnawa represent two important tendencies within the diversity of contemporary Balinese music. Their work convincingly suggests that transformation and development of musical tradition and »contemporary« music need not be conceived of as conflicting or mutually exclusive but rather can be brought together in fruitful interaction.

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Musikhochschule Lübeck [University of Music Lübeck]

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