

AMERICAN WORKS FOR BALINESE GAMELAN ORCHESTRA

New World Records 80430

This recording is the product of a remarkable intercultural musical experiment. It contains five strikingly varied works, each one the fruit of musical cross-pollination between America and the island of Bali (part of the archipelagic Republic of Indonesia). The three American composers represented here, along with their peers in the Sekar Jaya ensemble, have since 1979 devoted an extraordinary amount of effort, intelligence, and talent to the study and performance of traditional Balinese music—and to creative endeavors that elude classification in cultural pigeonholes.

American composers have noted (and admired) Balinese music since the 1930s. Composers as different as Colin McPhee (1900-1964) and Steve Reich (born in 1936) were affected by it. But the three composers represented here differ from their predecessors by their eagerness to *perform* the music; by their intimate knowledge of it; and by the social awareness which united them in Sekar Jaya's cooperative venture, inspiring them to seek true exchange with Balinese culture.

Balinese Gamelan Music

For such a tiny island (about the size of Rhode Island), Bali maintains an enormous variety of music. It is best known, however, for the sort of orchestra heard on this recording. This specific ensemble of bronze gongs, metallophones, drums, and end-blown flute is known as *gamelan gong kebyar*.

The gong kebyar ensemble is tuned to a five-tone scale (*pelog*). Its music shares many features with that of other Balinese ensembles. It is largely cyclic (that is, the primary building blocks of the music are, or can be, repeated). It makes extensive use of interlocking (two instruments' parts are dovetailed together so that, by alternating strokes and rests, they combine to form a single rapid melodic filigree). There is little or no improvisation. Metrically, the music tends to use cycles of 4, 8, 16, or 32 beats, or multiples of these. The bronze instruments are built in pairs; each pair is deliberately detuned slightly, so that aural beating (at a precisely calculated rate) is heard when the instruments are played in unison—producing the gamelan's characteristic shimmering sound.

The kebyar style is relatively recent, dating from around 1915. It is fiery and showy. Modern kebyar compositions are fantasia-like, and marked by rapid shifts of tempo and mood. In the word's narrowest sense, a kebyar is an unmeasured phrase played in unison by the full ensemble somewhat as an entire orchestra plays a cadenza. This image may help suggest the mercurial bravura so important to the spirit of kebyar music.

Sekar Jaya

There are several gamelan ensembles in North America, but few have shown the endurance and sense of purpose of Sekar Jaya. Founded in Northern California by Michael Tenzer and Rachel Cooper, with the prodigiously talented Balinese musician Wayan Suweca as its first director, it built a loyal Bay Area audience from its first concert in February 1980. Their teachers over the years have included some of the finest Balinese performers, as well as the renowned composer Nyoman Windha. Sekar Jaya twice toured Indonesia at the invitation of the Governor of Bali, and participated each time in the Bali Arts Festival, in 1985 and in 1992. It was hailed in the Indonesian press as "clearly the finest Balinese gamelan outside of Indonesia."

Balinese music is community-oriented: Individual teachers and composers are honored, but the principal focus is the club (*seka*), whose members train in constant rehearsals to satisfy the formidable ensemble requirements of kebyar. Sekar Jaya deserves mention, then, not merely because it happens to perform three of the five pieces on this recording. Sekar Jaya was the formative matrix, the crucible in which Wayne Vitale, Michael Tenzer and Evan Ziporyn were shaped, the forum of their debates, and the occasion of their self-questioning. The existence of Sekar Jaya as a self-sustaining community-based arts organization in itself signals a new level in the ongoing American encounter with Balinese music.

Three American Approaches

These three American composers illustrate three different approaches to Balinese music. Roughly speaking, we can place them along a continuum. Wayne Vitale is the most immersed in Balinese tradition. Composing an idiomatic piece is, for him, a way of figuring out how the music works. Michael Tenzer adopts a much more self-consciously innovative stance; he uses traditional Balinese instrumental idioms, but within those limitations he tries to write music as different from Balinese music as he can. Evan Ziporyn is in some ways the most American of the three, yet he is the one who has been the most haunted by the ambiguities and conflicts of Sekar Jaya's cross-cultural experiment. He never felt he understood the language of gamelan well enough to compose in Balinese forms, yet he did not want to be simply a composer who happened to play gamelan. Uncomfortable with the locked doors between his different musical selves, he tries to reconcile them in his compositions.

THE COMPOSITIONS

***Khayalan Tiga* (1991) by Wayne Vitale**

The story of this piece starts with a gamelan group, Abdi Budaya, located in the isolated village of Peraan, in the Tabanan district. Vitale had admired their recordings since his earliest visits to Bali, and often wished he had been able to meet and work with the group and its composer, I Gusti Bagus Suarsana, who now lives in the national capital, Jakarta. Vitale visited Peraan in mid-1990, where he learned four complete compositions from the group. About six months later, Vitale proposed to compose a piece for Abdi Budaya to be presented at the annual Bali Arts Festival. They agreed; *Khayalan Tiga* is the result.

Though it has its share of innovative elements, this piece stays fairly close to the standard modern kebyar genre known as "new creations" (*kreasi baru*). The title can be interpreted either "Fantasy in Three" (a reference to the piece's use of 3/4 meter, rarely found in Balinese music), or "Three Fantasies" (Vitale's three dreams that came true; to visit Peraan and learn Abdi Budaya's music; to meet Suarsana; and to write a piece for the group).

***Situ Banda* (1989) by Michael Tenzer**

***Banyuari* (1992) by Michael Tenzer**

Tenzer regards *Situ Banda* and *Banyuari* as cousins, although in the latter piece he tried especially to reconcile the Western musical drama of organic development with the essentially cyclical substrate of Balinese gamelan.

Tenzer wrote *Situ Banda* for a group of students at the higher Balinese conservatory (STS). It is noteworthy for its introduction of South Indian rhythmic devices, and also for its semi-aleatoric sections.

Banyuari has many remarkable features, among them its unifying melodic motive, first heard at 1:35. Each time it reappears (2:42, 3:48, 4:21, 8:17, 13:08) it interrupts the steady tempo with its kebyar-like free unison. On its last occurrence, near the close, it changes slightly: Instead of ending with two wide leaps, it resolves with descending steps. There are also South Indian-style rhythmic compositions for the entire gamelan (at 8:50, repeated at 12:30 over a 13-beat ostinato), and metric modulations between meters based on 4 and on 5 (starting at 10:16).

Banyuari means "younger sibling of the river", that is, a tributary. Tenzer sees this composition as a small stream branching off from the great river of Balinese musical tradition.

***Kekembangan* (1990) by Evan Ziporyn and Nyoman Windha**

Kekembangan is an adaptation of Nyoman Windha's piece *Kembang Pencak* (for gamelan, male dancers, and singers), with a saxophone quartet substituted for singers. Ziporyn wanted *Kekembangan* to be a true "coming together" of musics. Sometimes the saxophones use alternate fingerings to approach the gamelan's intonation; sometimes they establish tonal contexts to frame the gamelan's melodies, prompting the Western listener to interpret the Balinese phrases in a shifting framework of Western modes.

***Aneh Tapi Nyata* (1992) by Evan Ziporyn**

Aneh tapi nyata ("strange but true") is the Indonesian phrase used to translate the English "believe it or not." Ziporyn assembled a grab bag of instruments for this piece; eleven Western instruments (played in equal temperament); and ten Balinese ones, taken from three different ensembles, playing in three different tuning systems. Ziporyn wrote the vocal text to address the issues embodied in the piece:

Apa arti dunia ini?

*Mengembara, cari Jamu Pantas
tamu untuk mengobati negeri.
Zaman Kami hilang tradisi,
mana beli?
Kalau bisa minta sisah dari banten
masih asli.
Baru tiba membuka kopor saya;
Di dalam selalu soal ikent jalan.*

*Aneh tapi nyata: lagu barat dinyanyi
diiringi campuran begini...
Berkumpul sampai terpisah
Sementara peleburan
Manis, asem, terserah penonton.*

What does it mean, this world
that I see?

Find a tonic for a foreigner
that can cure my anxiety.
These days my tradition is gone--

where can I buy it?
May I ask for the leftovers from your
authentic offerings?
Newly arrived, I open my suitcase;
All my problems have come
for the ride.

Strange but true: a Western son
accompanied by this mixture--
Gather together until forced apart
A momentary fusion
Sweet or bitter, it's up to you.

In a way, this piece is a portrait of Ziporyn's diverse musical experiences, and an attempt to make something of them. Yet it is also a portrait of Sekar Jaya; the parts were written with specific players in mind.

—Marc Perlman

Marc Perlman *is an ethnomusicologist specializing in the musics of Indonesia.*

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

McPhee, Colin. *Music in Bali*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Tenzer, Michael. *Balinese Music*. Berkeley: Periplus, 1991.

"Gamelan: Indonesian Arts in America" Special issue of *Ear Magazine*, volume 8 number 4, September/October/November 1983.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Animal Act. Ziporyn, Evan. CRI 645.

Bali: Gamelan and Kecak. A sampler; recorded by David Lewison. Nonesuch. 79204-2.

Kusuma Sari, Sading. Gamelan Batel/Wayang Ramayana. CMP CMPCD 3003.

Music of Bali: Gamelan Semar Pegulingan. Performed by the five-tone Semar Pegulingan ensemble of the village of Ketewel; recorded by Wayne Vitale. Lyricord Lyr 7408.

Tabuh-Tabuhan. McPhee, Colin. Eastman Rochester Orchestra, Howard Hanson, conducting. Mercury SRI 75116.

Sekar Jaya Personnel (*Kekembangan, Aneh Tapi Nyata, Banyuari*)

Gamelan: Tom Ballinger, Kate Beddall, Avi Black, Mariana Cherry, Rachel Cooper, Bea Dryfoos Deering, Tom Deering, Poul Eriksson, Carla Fabrizio, Raymond Fabrizio, Jim Finck, Dan Freed, Lisa Gold, Rocky Gaughiano, James Harding, Valerie Harris, Pam Hetrick, Jim Hogan, Maddie Hogan, Lars Jensen, Susan Jette, Steve Johnson, Todd Manley, Paul Miller, Susanna Miller, Jean Moncrieff, Zac Morrison, Mudita Ostrin Nisker, Chris Romero, Michael Tenzer, Wayne Vitale, Sam Wantman, Sara Willner, Nyoman Windha, Evan Ziporyn

Saxophones on *Kekembangan*: Chris Jonas, Randy McKean, Dan Plonsey, Evan Ziporyn

On *Aneh Tapi Nyata*: Tom Ballinger, gender wayang; Kate Beddall, voice and flute; Rachel Cooper, gongs; Tom Deering, ceng-ceng; Carla Fabrizio, cello; Jim Finck, violin; James Harding, clarinet and mandolin; Lars Jensen, mandolin; Susan Jette, triangle; Steve Johnson, kempli; Paul Miller, reong; Jean Moncrieff, kendang; Chris Romero, electric guitar; Sam Wantman, tingklit; Sarah Willner, viola; Nyoman Windha, kendang; Evan Ziporyn, bass clarinet

On *Situ Banda*: Wayan Gde Arnawa, Dewa Putu Beratha, Ketut Cater, Wayan Darya, Wayan Griya, Nyoman Mardika, Wayan Mudana, Wayan Muder, Wayan Nurjana, Made Parwata, Putu Sedana, Wayan Subandi, Putu Sudiastawa, Komang Sudirga, Wayan Sudirga, Michael Tenzer, Made Wardana, Pande Widara, Wayan Wija, Made Wiwa, Sarah Willner, Nyoman Windha, Made Wiryatnyana

On *Khayalan Tiga*: Seka Gong Abdi Budaya, village of Perean, Tabanan, Bali, directed by Nyoman Dibia

American Works for Balinese Gamelan Orchestra

Evan Ziporyn/Nyoman Windha

1- Kekembangan 15:31

Michael Tenzer

2- Banyuari 13:58

Evan Ziporyn

3- Aneh Tapi Nyata 13:50

Michael Tenzer

4- Situ Banda 12:03

Wayne Vitale

5- Khayalan Tiga 16:37

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Produced by Evan Ziporyn

Engineer: Wayne Vitale

Engineer: Greg Davids (*Kekembangan*)

Kekembangan recorded August 3, 1990 at the Cowell Theatre, San Francisco, California.

Banyuari recorded July 9, 1992 at Homestay Ketut Madra, Peliatan, Bali

(producer: Michael Tenzer).

Aneh Tapi Nyata recorded July 13, 1992 at Televisi Republik Indonesia.

Situ Banda recorded July 10, 1991 at Radio Republik Indonesia, Denpasar

(producer: Michael Tenzer).

Khayalan Tiga recorded September 20, 1991 in the village temple, Peraan, Bali

(producer: Wayne Vitale).

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Kekembangan and *Aneh Tapi Nyata* published by Airplane Ears Music.

Banyuari and *Situ Banda* published by Bridge of Monkeys Music.

Khayalan Tiga published by Wayne Vitale.

Banyuari was composed in honor of Dr. Robert and Jean Taymor

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