

Dieter Mack 2001

C r o s s c u r r e n t s

(revised 2003)

for Gamelan Degung and other Sundanese Percussion
Instruments (8 players)

" Crosscurrents "

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for Gamelan Degung and other Sundanese Percussion Instruments (8 players)

dedicated to the
EVERGREEN GAMELAN CLUB, Toronto/ Canada

Introduction

To compose for instruments of another culture (and originally of a completely different music as well) is not an easy task. On the one hand, one might even refuse only to think about it; and on the other hand, a composer may just try to compose in the original musical language of that culture in question. Both extremes seem not to be the ultimate solution, but the first position seems to me more understandable compared with the second, although this might be a typical European position.

As a composer who has lived quite a while in the local surroundings of Balinese and Sundanese music, I try to find another solution, to compose for instruments of a foreign culture. The artistic challenge of such a task may be seen in the fact that the instruments have a peculiar character (especially the tuning), timbre and technique but also something that goes beyond the local musical impacts of their respective origin. And it is especially this tension between these two poles that makes the compositional process a real challenge. How can I compose an autonomous music (based on my cultural consciousness) using instruments from another culture, without misusing those instruments? While the latter is always a subjective decision to a certain degree (is playing the violin on the edge of its wooden frame a misuse of the Western violin or not?), the first is more due to a quite non-compromising attitude in composing as a whole.

After a first composition for Balinese gamelan in 1997, this is my second one now for Sundanese instruments, and I would like to thank the musicians from the Evergreen Gamelan Club in Toronto, especially Andrew Timar, for their support in preparing this piece.

Although the piece has more solistic aspects (*suling!*) as most of my other music, the collective group consciousness is a main feature of the musical expression, coming out only during the process of realisation. In other words, one of the main elements of this music may only begin to be felt after a comparably long phase of preparational rehearsals. If therefore the score looks quite complicated (and sometimes probably even impossible! - f.e. the tempo of certain passages), it is up to the players to find a solution that is convenient for everyone. This means that certain deviations are possible due to the collective concept, but only after every player has managed his respective part. Therefore at least in the beginning it is inevitable that every player has the whole score to become aware of his individual position in the framework of the every textural situation.

The score is written in a fictive *degung* scale: **b - c - d - f# - g** with an additional *sorog* tone **e** (actually the pitch is a little higher more like **e#**, but it is always written as **e**) for the *bonang* and the *jengglong*.

The actual pitch of the instruments of the Evergreen Club is about a half-tone higher. The low **C** of a *gong* is an additional *gong* and should be slightly higher than the original *gong* (**B₁**) of a *gamelan degung* set.

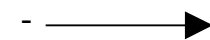

Instrumentation (referring to the 8 players)

- Suling - a Sundanese six-hole flute
- Peking - no specifications
- Panerus - no specifications
- Bonang - in all octaves the *sorog* tone must be applied additionally (!) and not exchanging. Therefore three small stands have to be made. The position may be arranged by the player to his personal convenience.
- Jengglong - a) Pot **f#** may be exchanged with the *sorog* tone **e**
 b) Pots **B, c, d, e** (*sorog*) and **b** should be turned over that they are sounding as open, bell-like bowls
 They are always played with *bonang*-like mallets on the edge (see special notation). Only pot **g** is in normal position.
- Bedug/
Slenthem
Saron 1 - The *bedug* should be with a deep "pressing sound" almost like a big Chinese (nailed) drum. It can always be exchanged with similar instruments from other origins.
 The *slenthem* is added here with a range from **B** to **f#¹** (European terminology)

The *saron* is ranging from b^1 - b^2 in this ensemble (same is for *saron 2*)

- Kendang/
Kulanter
Saron 2
- normal Sundanese *kendang* with three *kulanter*; two *kulanter* are to be added. In normal notation the five lines are used that the lowest is for the low *kendang* side, the next for the higher *kendang* side and the other three for the three *kulanter* going from low to high. There should be a continuous change of pitch character from low to high for all five drum heads. The same is due when the five *kulanter* are used. Take care that the pitch character does not have any tonal implications.
- Gongs
- There are the three normal *gongs* for *gamelan degung* with a big one (**B**) and two small ones (**f#** and **g**). Additionally there should be a big *gong* on **C** (or around that pitch relatively to the others) When the *gongs* are played on th edge (with a *bonang*-like mallet), different notation is used.

Notation

- accidentals are only valuable before the note they are written
- *m.v.* = *molto vibrato*, with the utmost intervallic range
- *s.v.* = *senza vibrato*, without any vibrato
-  always refers to a continuously changing process from one to another point/ situation
-  position on the drum skin where to play
- **x** notehead refers to a slab beat on the drum skin



- a) for suling: note to be sung while playing the suling
- b) for gongs: playing the gongs on the edge with bonang-type mallet
- c) for jengglong: the pots turned over; to be played at the edge with a bonang-type mallet.

- an accent in the note is referring to a rimshot.

Special Explanations:

1. The *suling* part often uses other pitches than the normal ones of the *degung* scale. Some might be easy to be produced, some might not, and even sometimes the fingering in a sequence may cause problems. Please note that most "out-of-scale" pitches are transitional or ornamental ones, while the normal scale notes are still the basic pitches. Therefore, to a certain degree, it is up to the player to find a convenient solution. One might slightly deviate from the actual "out-of-scale" pitches in order to achieve a fluent version, but hopefully without changing the overall type of this peculiar modality (or "free tonality" or "free atonality"). The typical Indonesian micro-variations within some tolerances might be applied here as well.
2. Especially during the long solo-sections of the *suling*, a certain "rubato"-like playing is possible. The other instruments have to adjust.
3. The long unisono-metal sections might be quite difficult in tempo. Therefore adjustments are possible for certain sections, as far as the relations are still kept as they are written. Please always try to have a clear, fluent and heavy metal sound. Basically each player has always two mallets in his hands. Besides the chords, also the fast passages may only be realised with two mallets. The potential resonances are always intended, except where a staccato point (or, less important, the rests) is notated. The damping must then be realised with the hands or even arms. Nevertheless the balanced flow of the whole texture is most important.
4. Dynamics and types of mallets are difficult to determine. Normally I write the dynamics of the actual acoustical effect. In all harmonic sections of the metal instruments, any adjustments in order to achieve a balanced sound are possible. And the same is the case with the mallets. Some advice is given, but mostly it is up to the players according to the respective characteristics that are always mentioned for a certain section.

Duration: about 15 - 17 minutes