

Bali Remixed and Revisited

The launch of the remix competition of a track David Attenborough recorded in Bali in 1956 generated a lot of interest from gamelan specialists. **Edward Herbst** visited the village to discuss the distribution of royalties and provides context for the music

PHOTOS RIO HELMI

The remix competition of a *gender wayang* track from Sir David Attenborough's *My Field Recordings from Across the Planet* album was announced on May 10, in partnership with PRS Foundation. Soon after, news spread to musicians, scholars and fans around the world (via Gamelan Listserv, an email list for *gamelan* enthusiasts). Among the reactions was concern that the anonymous musicians (or their descendants) were receiving neither recognition nor royalties for this reuse of their work.

The music and instruments in the 1956 recording were instantly recognisable to people who knew the repertoire of the village of Teges Kanginan (three kilometres from the much-visited town of Ubud). The four musicians recorded by Attenborough might have been Madé Gerindem, Madé Locong, Ketut Gerinding, and Wayan Nyampuh – musicians I later came to know and perform with.

Gamelan *gender wayang* is a quartet of ten-keyed metallophones that accompany *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre) and dance drama, as well as rituals of Bali's religious life such as tooth-filing, marriage and cremation ceremonies, for which a duo is often used. This music fulfills sacred

functions while also entertaining, and there is evidence that the genre dates back at least to the 12th century.

Each bronze key hangs above a bamboo resonator pitched to the key's tone, increasing its duration and resonance. Two lower-octave *gender* play different parts from each other, *polos* (simple, direct) and *sangsih* (differing, filling in), creating interlocking melodies that are doubled by two smaller *gender* an octave higher. Each musician uses two wooden mallets, playing the left-hand melody of *polos* and *sangsih* often in unison, while the right-hand parts mostly differ from each other, playing syncopated and interlocking rhythms.

Until recently, *wayang* shadow plays would begin around 10 or 11 pm and last for three to four hours, performed by a solo *dalang* (puppeteer-narrator-singer). The musical repertoire accompanies specific characters and scenes of the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana* epics that originated in India.

In the 1950s, Attenborough was travelling for a TV series called *Zoo Quest*, collecting animals with a team from London Zoo. He only recorded music incidentally to use as possible background music. But in the 60s, Attenborough filmed *The Miracle of Bali* in neighbouring Peliatan, including the gamelan *gong kebyar* Gunung Sari ensemble performing the *Olég Tambulilingan* dance. This was first broadcast in 1969 and it's a performance of great historical value as documentation of changing choreographic styles. It features Ni Gusti Raka Rasmi, who had performed the dance as a 12-year-old with Gunung Sari on a 1952 tour of the US, UK and France. In the opinion of dance teacher Ni Ketut Arini Alit, Raka's *Olég* movement in the 1969 film was supple, soft, and focused internally, in contrast with the *Olég* of today. Balinese and many other Indonesian performing arts, while steeped in tradition, have reflected innovation, creativity and change, most rapidly since the 19th century.

'Rébong', the piece excerpted in the 1956 recording, is played for amorous scenes. It may begin with a maidservant, attendants, princess



Wayan Sudat (left) and Edward Herbst (centre) performing *gender wayang* with musicians and temple members in Teges Kanginan

Left: royalties being handed over to Bendesa (traditional village leader) Wayan Sukaya

and male counterpart encountering one another; the second section expressing momentum building as the two lovers circle one another in flirtatious play. During this movement, the recording fades out. The final section would lead into livelier, impassioned dance supplemented by servants' comments and jokes.

The gamelan set Attenborough recorded in 1956 is presumed to have belonged to the village of Teges Kanginan for at least 100 years. The two lower instruments are intact and kept in the village temple.

On visiting Teges, I learned from Madé Gerindem's son, Wayan Lantir, that the two smaller *gender* had been sold to a local family long ago but kept in his household at least until his father's death in 1989. It is not uncommon in Bali for a private individual to buy such instruments, providing needed funds to a temple or village. But as long as the instruments were in use, they would often stay where the

village's musicians were using them. Gamelan activity remains largely collective in nature, and most instruments are still owned by temples, civic organisations or clubs.

Since the early 60s, Madé Gerindem was the most active teacher of *gender wayang* in Teges, and since 1969, the musical leader of the 25-musician *semar pagulingan* group Gunung Jati of Teges. I knew his fellow musicians Madé Locong, Ketut

Gerinding and Wayan Nyampuh well, and had played with them on countless occasions. I'd learned the Teges repertoire from Gerindem during a 12-month visit in 1972.

Before I returned to Bali in 1980, Wayan Nyampuh had passed away

and the group was a man short. So Gerindem would regularly ride his bicycle to my home in the village of Bedulu at 6am to tell me of an imminent *wayang* performance and make sure I could join them, always playing one of the higher-octave *gender*. I received the standard remuneration as the others: ▶

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Front row: (left to right): Komang Ongki, Wayan Sudat, Edward Herbst, Madé Windra, Wayan Budal
 Second row: (second from left) Nyoman Susila, Wayan Sukaya, Ketut Wirawan, Wayan Weta, Madé Balik, Wayan Karang
 Third row: (second from left) Wayan Sadia, Nyoman Marda (civic village head), Madé Gina, Komang Udis, Madé Lemboyasa, Nyoman Sudira



Madé Windra (right) demonstrating mallet technique of the old style of gender wayang phrasing



Herbst and Wayan Sukaya

a plate of rice, coffee, and a pack of clove cigarettes, but I always declined the betel leaf and chewing tobacco.

Though traditional nighttime wayang is now rare in modern Bali, daytime performances remain essential to many religious rituals. And over the past decade a widespread revival of gender wayang music has exploded among boys and girls as young as eight years old and into their teens, with competitions and festivals focusing on this one genre.

Since the birth of recorded sound – and especially in our era of digitised audio so easily duplicated and disseminated – the names and locations of singers and instrumental ensembles have not always been recognised. But the first published recordings of Balinese music, made by Odeon and Beka in 1928, did provide such identification. As part of the Bali 1928 Repatriation Project, I've been doing field research since 2003 with a team of Balinese scholars and performing artists to repatriate that music to the villages and larger society that created it. In the course of this work we've

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discovered the names of countless individual musicians and dancers in these recordings and archival films of the 1930s.

Our struggle against the pervasive anonymity of those who perform traditional music has informed and inspired us all – and the Balinese public, too. The effect of anonymity, while often unavoidable, is seen as an expropriation of sounds and images, often perceived as exotic, without the dignity of personhood. So, it's encouraging that these artists and their community's cultural heritage are now being credited.

In my recent meeting in the temple with village leader Wayan Sukaya, along with his staff and local musicians, we listened to the 1956 recording as Madé Windra, one of the current players, tapped out the basic melody on the gender and all the pitches matched. Everyone agreed Attenborough's recording was of their gender wayang,

based on each and every rhythmic and melodic phrase as well as the tuning. In Bali, despite a modern trend toward conformity, virtually every (older) gamelan is different, so that they can often be identified by the tuning.

Then the question arose concerning which musicians might have been playing on the track. I mentioned Gerindem, Gerinding, Locong and Nyampuh. Someone added Wayan Udek, the grandfather of Wayan Sudat, the 64-year-old gender player sitting next to me, and also Sudat's father, Wayan Mondong. I asked Wayan Sudat whether they and another player of Udek's generation, Déwa Ketut Kalé, were still alive during and after the massive 1963 volcanic eruption of Gunung Agung, and he confirmed they were. All agreed that there were at least seven skilled gender players in Teges during that era. Everyone was delighted that the 1956 recording was considered to be gender wayang of Teges Kanginan and that the royalties should go to the village.

I then learned that the *klian banjar* (a local official), knows which family has the two upper-octave gender. It was discussed if the two instruments were indeed still there and how essential it was to reunite them with the larger pair. There was quick unanimity that the royalties from the record and my fee for this article might be enough to re-acquire them.

If that were to happen, a gamelan smith would tune the keys slightly and do minor repairs on the bamboo resonators. Although there is a local dalang who can perform ritual

daytime *wayang lemah*, there are not enough musicians who are able to accompany him in the Teges style. A younger musician in the meeting commented that the original, older style was no longer known, since over time the pieces had changed. I told them that Nonesuch Explorer had released a full LP in 1971 and that I had recorded all the pieces Gerindem had taught me in 1972, with him playing the polos part for each piece, followed by the sangsih, so a listener could clearly differentiate the two interlocking patterns.

All assembled were elated that Teges might have its heritage regained, in this legacy gamelan and recordings that could serve as the basis for study. These instruments would be treated as sacred heirlooms of the temple, receiving offerings and prayers from temple worshippers. After the discussion, a voice called out that Wayan Sudat and I should play 'Rébong' to conclude the meeting, and we complied. At the time of writing, village representatives await an auspicious day in the Balinese calendar for a visit to the genders' owners. ♦

+ MORE Edward Herbst has directed the Bali 1928 Repatriation Project (www.edwardherbst.net and www.Bali1928.net) since 2003, supported by the Henry Luce, Andrew Mellon, Ford, Wenner-Gren, and Robert Lemelson Foundations, Fulbright Research Fellowships and Asian Cultural Council.

+ COMPETITION See p14 for details on how to vote for one of the final six shortlisted 'Gender Wayang' remixes