

Fall 2024

Friday, October 4
Crowell Concert Hall

Javanese Gamelan in the World

A Concert of
Traditional
and Hybrid
Compositions
of I.M. Harjito

Wesleyan University

Center for
the Arts

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Program

Ladrang *Lingsir*, laras sléndro pathet manyurå

Gendhing *Angembari* kethuk 4 kerep minggah 8, laras pélog pathet limå

Gendhing *Èmeng* kethuk 4 kerep minggah 4, laras sléndro pathet sanga

Gendhing *Ngungun* kethuk 2 kerep minggah ladrang *Ngungun*, laras pélog pathet barang

Lancaran *Bangun Rinå*, laras sléndro pathet manyurå

Intermission

Suite

Mengimpi for erhu, pipa and gamelan

Ceiliadh Panggih for Irish fiddle, viola and gamelan

Ketawang *Dhandhanggulå Tlutur* for string quintet and gamelan, laras sléndro pathet manyurå

Sekat for bagpipe and gamelan

Lancaran Penutup *Amerika*, laras pélog pathet barang

Presented by the Music Department, this concert was organized by Wayne Forrest '74, MA '77 and is sponsored by the American Indonesian Cultural and Educational Foundation in collaboration with the Asia Society and Wesleyan University, marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Indonesia.

Please turn off all phones, alarms and laptops. The use of audio or video recording devices or photography is strictly prohibited during the performance.

Free assistive listening devices are available at the box office in the lobby.

Notes

By Marc Perlman MA '78, PhD '94
Associate Professor of Music, Brown University

The idea of musical modernism that we are familiar with is (unsurprisingly) a Euro-American notion. With the spread of Western art music—“classical music”—around the world, often in the wake of colonizers or missionizers, local traditions were sometimes cast into shadow, or considered “backwards” or “barbarous;” some, to be “progressive,” imitated Western musical practices such as equal-tempered tuning or four-part harmony. Alternatively, a tradition could be defended against Western influence as an indigenous heritage, a gift from the ancestors, a precious sign of cultural uniqueness.

From this scenario it would be easy to suppose that artistic modernity was a Western monopoly, that whatever musical “progress” was being made was being made in the West, and that other traditions—while worthy of “preservation”—were not gateways to the musical future. This idea has been challenged as we have become more aware in the last few decades of alternative modernisms, of radical artistic innovations all over the world that are not simply imitating Western models.

This new perspective has opened our eyes to many exciting developments, but there is yet another dimension of global musical creativity that tends to elude us. For even the most “traditional” practices are dynamic, even when they do not break sharply with the past: their

innovations are less easily recognized, since they are building from their own premises, maintaining their own vocabularies, drawing on their own resources. They are innovating on their own terms. When they do absorb outside influences, they do so by incorporating them within their own aesthetic frameworks.

In this concert we present several works illustrating the achievements of this kind of traditional innovation, represented by the compositions of one of the master musicians of Central Java: I.M. Harjito.

A close disciple of the last generation of musicians to serve Java's traditional rulers, I.M. Harjito is recognized as a master of *karawitan* (Central Javanese traditional *gamelan* music), which he has performed and taught all his life. He is an authoritative representative of its repertoire and performance practice. But for nearly a quarter-century he has also been enlarging that repertoire with his own compositions. Most of these are in traditional style, but they are not merely epigonic—they extend and refresh the style, drawing out previously-unnoticed implications of its aesthetic premises. Further, Harjito has expanded its horizons to encompass intercultural fusion, embracing elements from Western art music, Chinese music, Irish traditional music, and Scottish piping, yet always maintaining a Javanese artistic perspective.

Javanese Gamelan Music

Gongs and percussion instruments made of tuned metal are found throughout Southeast Asia. In Java (an island in the Republic of Indonesia), ensembles built around such instruments are called *gamelan*. Traditionally, the Javanese *gamelan* was the basis of all Javanese performing arts: its music was essential to dance and theater everywhere, from the humblest village to the imposing, marble-floored pavilions of the royal courts. Although Western-style popular music is encroaching on its domain, the *gamelan* can still be heard accompanying the all-night shadow play, *wayang kulit*. *Gamelan* music exists in many regional styles; Harjito was trained in the style of the Central Javanese court city, Solo (Surakarta).

Gamelan music is very much an ensemble music, and the players and singers, despite their varied musical roles, must be sensitive to each other. There is no visible conductor, but the drum (*kendhang*) and bowed lute (*rebab*) lead the ensemble with subtle aural cues. A complete set of instruments is actually a double set, with one instrument for each of the two tuning systems (*sléndro* and *pélog*), arranged perpendicular to each other in the room. The central area is dominated by the *saron* metallophones, most of which have seven keys each; these play the “skeletal” melody (*balungan*) of the composition, in unison. Behind them sit the gongs which punctuate this melody: the largest gong (*gong ageng*) produces the deepest sound in the orchestra, and it signals the beginning and end of each time cycle. The large kettle gongs (*kenong*) and small hanging gongs (*kempul*) subdivide the cycle at regular intervals. On the other side of the *saron* are the “elaborating” instruments, whose players are free to express their personal interpretations of the composition in their florid melodies. In this group we find metallophones, a xylophone, bowed and plucked string instruments, a flute, and male and female singers.

Gamelan compositions (*gendhing*) are all based on time-cycles of various lengths, always terminated by a stroke on the largest gong. They can be categorized by their lengths, ranging from 8 beats to 256 beats per gong-cycle, with those in the longer cycles being generally more difficult and less popular. The larger compositions consist of two or three movements, the first tranquil, and the second more animated; if a third is present, it is a *sesegan*, a powerful fast movement that brings the piece to a thunderous close.

Gendhing are often linked together to form medleys: in such cases, each subsequent piece must be in a smaller time-cycle than the one preceding it. Often the smaller pieces are enlivened by the use of the *ciblon* drum, which plays rhythms used to accompany dance. The emotional arc of a medley—like that of the individual piece, and indeed of an entire musical evening—thus proceeds from calm moods (peaceful, majestic or tender) through stages of mounting excitement to an exuberant conclusion.

Harjito as Composer

Harjito composed two *gendhing* during his student years, as a requirement for graduation. His next composition *Cuplikan* (“excerpt” or “quotation”) was a commission from Maria Mendonça MA '90 PhD '02, then a graduate student at Wesleyan, who in 1992 staged a concert of new compositions for Javanese *gamelan*. But it was in 1999 that he began composing in earnest, motivated by an inner compulsion he can't explain. The first new pieces emerged in a burst of creativity: he composed seventeen traditional-style *gendhing* in March 1999, followed by four in April, then one each in May, June and July. Ten more followed in 2000 and 2001. After that the pace slowed, averaging one new composition each year for the next twenty-three years. However, Harjito has also been continually revising, reworking, or adding on to his earliest compositions to the present day.

In this concert he has chosen to showcase both his oldest and most recent pieces.

Over the past several decades, most of the composers of *gendhing* have avoided the heaviest “classical” genres, confining themselves largely to 32 beat time-cycles. While Harjito also works in these lighter forms, he is unusual in his penchant for the more expansive ones—he seems especially partial to the 128 beat cycle, which makes up a surprisingly large portion of his portfolio.

Ladrang Lingsir sléndro pathet manyurå

Lingsir was composed in June of this year. In Javanese, *lingsir wengi* refers to the depths of the night (long after midnight), which is when Harjito composed this piece; he woke up hearing it in his mind's ear. It is in the relatively light 32 beat time-cycle (*ladrang*), and its nimble melody is full of rhythmic surprises. Harjito envisions two uses for *Lingsir*: it can be played as a regular composition at any point in a performance, or it can be used as an “opening” (*pambuka*), a ceremonious first piece through which the musicians greet the listeners.

Gendhing Angembari kethuk 4 kerep minggah 8, pélog pathet limå

Angembari was composed in 2020. The title is a verbal form of *kembar*, “twin,” and perhaps can be approximated as “twinned.” This piece is a sort of sibling to one of Harjito's compositions from 1999, *Ngrumpaka*—many phrases of the earlier piece recur here, while others have been adapted and radically reshaped. Although the title implies a perfect resemblance, this twin is more adventurous than its sibling: it contains many striking turns of phrase unlike anything else in the canonic repertoire.

The musical mode *pélog limå* is the most calm and serious of them all, with overtones of grandeur, gravity, and awe. The first movement (*mérong*) is tranquil; a change of tempo leads to the brighter second movement (*inggah*), and finally the tempo accelerates into the

third movement, an impressive *seseگان*. Here Harjito intensifies the fast tempo and resounding dynamics with *demung imbal*, a technique of melodic interlocking where one of the larger metallophones adds notes in between the strokes of the other instruments, creating a rapid aural filigree around the melody.

Gendhing Ęmeng kethuk 4 kerep minggah 4, sléndro pathet sanga

The title means “to feel sad or lost.” It contains echoes of traditional compositions known for their fragile, somber moods (such as *Lalermengeng* and *Kalunta*). It also contains a phrase from a very well-known piece that is ingeniously transformed by a simple change of tempo. (Harjito does not consciously “quote” from the traditional repertoire; its idiom is his native language, as it were. It is so deeply ingrained in his imagination that it shapes his most creative ideas.) Like *Angembari* it is in the second-largest musical form, with 128 beats per *gong*-cycle. It consists of two movements, a calm *mérong* followed by a more animated but still decorous *inggah*.

Gendhing Ngungun kethuk 2 kerep minggah ladrangan, pélog pathet barang

The title means “astonished.” This is one of the compositions from Harjito's extraordinarily creative month of March 1999, though the smaller piece that follows it (a 32-beat *ladrang*) was added in January 2023. The mode, *pélog barang*, is one of the most exuberant. Consistent with the general high spirits of this piece, the *ladrang* employs the *ciblon* drum's syncopated rhythms. Its melody is presented in several tempos, showcasing its various facets. The performance ends with a special treatment imported into the Solonese tradition from an outlying district: the tempo slows approaching the end of the time-cycle as if the piece were about to conclude, but just before the stroke of the large *gong* the drum signals a surprising return to the previous brisk tempo.

Lancaran Bangun Rinâ sléndro pathet manyurâ

This piece, composed in September 2017, is titled “waking at dawn”; the lyrics describe it as coming to Harjito in a dream. It is in one of the smallest forms, and in the vigorous and playful mode *sléndro manyurâ*; its melody is accordingly jaunty and full of spirit. As is commonly done, the melody is presented in two different tempos, first fast, then slow. However, the “slow” section is just as festive and sparkling, if not more so, since the melody becomes ornamented and syncopated, and the singers divide into two choruses, a technique inspired by Western music that was introduced in the mid-20th century but rarely used thereafter.

Along with his creative activity in the traditional idiom, Harjito also began composing in less-traditional forms. These were fewer, both because they were occasional — prompted by specific occasions and opportunities — and because they were collaborative: each was written for specific performers of non-Indonesian instruments.

The four pieces presented here were composed separately, but for this concert Harjito wanted to connect them as a suite.

Mengimpi, for *erhu*, *pipa* and Javanese *gamelan*

The title is a macaronic compound, linking Chinese and Javanese words for “dream.” When Joy Lu PhD '21, an *erhu* player (now the director of Wesleyan’s Chinese Music Ensemble) entered Wesleyan’s graduate program, Harjito suggested they collaborate. They worked together on a semi-improvisatory piece, *Rasa Jiwa*, which was performed only a few times. Harjito later conceived the idea for a fully-composed-out piece for *erhu* and other Chinese instruments (*pipa* and *dizi*), which was premiered in 2017. As with *Ketawang Dhandhanggulâ Tlutur*, at its heart is a composition in traditional style (in the 16-beat *ketawang* gong-cycle), into which the Chinese instruments have been integrated. Although

the *erhu* is not a fixed-pitch instrument — like the violin, it can play in any tuning system — Harjito asked Joy not to adjust her intonation to that of the *gamelan* instruments.

Ceilidh Panggih, for fiddle and Javanese *gamelan*

This title too is bilingual, combining Irish and Javanese words for a social visit or gathering. Harjito composed it in collaboration with Anna Falkenau MA '04, a German student at Wesleyan who was a highly accomplished player of the Irish fiddle. Harjito had heard Irish fiddle music before, and was struck by its constant melodic motion, so unlike the steady, elongated melodies of the *gamelan*’s bowed instrument, the *rebab*. He had a visual image of two snakes proceeding together, one moving straight ahead, one sinuously weaving back and forth. He composed a simple diatonic melody (which, when combined with the *gamelan* instruments, sounded to him like *pélog pathet limâ*); he asked Anna to adapt and elaborate it in Irish style. Unlike traditional *gamelan* music, which is metrically regular (proceeding in four-beat units), this features a seven-beat phrase. He composed a *rebab* melody to match, and then added the parts for the other *gamelan* instruments. He prefixed it all with a metrically free prelude, like the traditional *pathetan*, played by a small group of instruments. He then added the tin whistle, played by Marc Perlman MA '78, PhD '94, who found a way to imitate the manner of the Javanese *suling* flute on the Irish instrument. For a subsequent performance at Brown University, discovering that one of the students (Nora Krohn) was a violist, Harjito added a part for viola.

Ketawang Dhandhanggulâ Tlutur, for Javanese *gamelan* and orchestra

Ketawang Dhandhanggulâ Tlutur is an unusual example of intercultural fusion because—unlike many such attempts—it combines Western and non-Western traditions by enfolding the former into the latter. The musical form and melodic materials are entirely Javanese; indeed, the piece can be played by the *gamelan* standing alone without losing its integrity.

The idea for a collaboration between Javanese *gamelan* and Western orchestra came from the music director of the Wesleyan student orchestra, Angel Gil-Ordóñez. He had heard a recording of a composition for orchestra and Balinese *gamelan* and asked if the Wesleyan group would be interested in playing it. Instead of trying to adapt something written for the very different Balinese instruments, Harjito thought of creating something specifically for Javanese *gamelan*.

He started by trying out ideas on a small electronic keyboard, and discovered a melody that sounded to him like the *gamelan's* *barang miring* (an idiom used by the *rebab* and singers with small intervals approximating Western semitones). He then turned to a compositional device employed by Javanese musicians since at least the late 19th century, building a *gamelan* piece out of an unaccompanied vocal melody associated with poetic meters. There were a few meters that could be sung to *barang miring*; Harjito chose one of them, *Dhandhanggula* (a form with ten lines per stanza). *Tlutur* signifies that the affect of the piece is sad or mournful.

The orchestral parts are treated like Javanese ones, each interpreting the melodic spirit of the piece in its own idiom. They follow neither the rules of Western harmony nor counterpoint, the upper-register parts more florid, while the lower-register ones rhythmically sedate. For this performance, the orchestral texture is represented by its essential core, played by a string quintet.

Sekat, for Javanese *gamelan* and bagpipes

This piece was composed in spring 2001, when Matthew Welch MA '01 was pursuing a degree in composition at Wesleyan University. Harjito became aware that he played the Scottish bagpipes and invited him to bring his pipes to the *gamelan* room, where he found pitches (spread across both the *sléndro* and *pélog* scales) that he felt could match those of the pipes. In thinking about musical resources in the Javanese tradition that would be appropriate for this collaboration, Harjito was impressed by the sheer volume of the bagpipe sound; that made him think of the *gamelan* *Sekatèn*, an unusual ensemble played only once a year at a commemoration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. These instruments are much larger than the normal ones and produce a much louder sound. They are played in a characteristic style, involving the *racikan*, a long, free-meter section of austere, floating *bonang* phrases punctuated by massive *tutti* strokes from the entire ensemble.

The *Sekatèn gamelan* can play pieces from the ordinary repertoire but also has a small handful of compositions that are entirely its own; Harjito was inspired by one of these, *Rangkung*, which he admired for its interlocking parts (*demung imbal*). Matt Welch had given Harjito recordings of Scottish piping, and as many of the tunes on it were in 3/4, Harjito composed a gong-cycle in (a very untraditional) triple meter. He was also inspired by the rhythm of a popular song he heard on the radio at that time. The final section is based on another rare *gamelan* type used for ceremonial purposes, *Carabalèn*, but the melody is newly composed.

Sekat is challenging to play. In his effort to approach as close as possible to the tuning of the pipes, Harjito intersperses pitches from both tuning systems, *sléndro* and *pélog*. Since these are produced by separate instruments placed at right angles to each other, the performer has to rapidly pivot between them.

There have, remarkably enough, been other attempts to combine bagpipes and *gamelan*, but these seem to draw only on the more familiar *gamelan* idioms. The combination of the *racikan*—unusual even by Javanese standards—with the powerful drone of the pipes remains an unparalleled musical experience.

Lancaran Penutup *Amerika*, laras pélog
pathet barang

Just as this performance started with an “opening” piece (*pambuka*), it ends with a “closing” one (*panutup*): a very short piece with a small gong-cycle and extroverted character. Harjito composed it on commission specifically for this event, which its lyrics celebrate using a traditional device of Javanese poetry, *sandi asma* (a kind of acrostic): the initial syllables of the words spell out “America,” and the first letters of “Wayne Forrest,” “New York,” “Harjito,” “Wesleyan,” and “American Indonesian Cultural and Educational Foundation.”

Composer profile and musicians

I.M. Harjito is a graduate of the Indonesian Institute for the Performing Arts in Surakarta, Central Java, where he worked closely with one of the major figures of 20th-century Javanese music, R.T. Martodipura. Harjito has taught Javanese gamelan, directed ensembles, and performed throughout Indonesia, the United States, Canada, and Europe. He is also a composer of traditional as well as innovative works for gamelan and other instruments. Harjito has been on the Music Faculty at Wesleyan University for forty years. In addition, he also currently teaches at Brown University and University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and serves as artistic director of the Gamelan Kusuma Laras ensemble of the New York Indonesian Consulate. He has been a visiting professor at University of California San Diego, San Diego State University, San Francisco State University, University of Chicago, and Smith College and a guest artist at many institutions, including Tufts University, Cornell University, Harvard University, Juilliard, and Princeton University. He has performed at many venues, including Asia Society, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Musicians

Composer: I.M. Harjito

Musicians: Phil Acimovic, Kelly Boyle MA '01, Wes Brown '74, Peni Candra Rini, graduate music student Marie Carroll, Nicholas Colvin, Wayne Forrest '74, MA '77, Joseph Getter MA '99, Darsono Hadiraharjo, Jennifer Thom Hadley '84, MA '86, Aji Harjito, Denni Harjito, I.M. Harjito, Maho Ishiguro MA '12, PhD '18, Chia-Yu Joy Lu PhD '21, Urip Sri Maeny, Andy McGraw PhD '05, Alec McLane, Chris Miller MA '02, PhD '15, Marc Perlman MA '78, PhD '94, Nadya Potemkina, Jon Rea, Leslie Rudden '77, Heni Savitri, Carla Scheele '78, Ethan Schwartz MA '22, graduate music student Anya Shatilova, Jesse Snyder '92, Anne Stebinger, Sumarsam MA '76, Joko Sutrisno, Marianne Vogel, Sarah Washburn, Matthew Welch MA '01, graduate music student Eva (Yi) Yang, Alex Yoffe

Most of tonight's non-Indonesian performers are current or past students of I.M. Harjito.

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Upcoming Gamelan Concerts

Advanced Javanese Gamelan Ensemble Fall Concert

Saturday, November 23, 2024, 8pm

World Music Hall

Beginning Javanese Gamelan Ensemble Fall Concert

Thursday, December 5, 2024, 6pm

World Music Hall

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