MUSIC OF

INDONESIA
RECORDED IN
JAVA - SUMATRA - BALI - MALAYA

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS BY RADEN SUIANTO

For many centuries Indonesia -- from the Malay peninsula throughout the vast archipelago -- has been subjected to successive foreign cultural invasions which have left their deep imprint on the indigenous way of life.

Among the first was the Mongolian intrusion from Central Asia. How strong this influence was, and how it came about, is still unclear, but it was completed long before the beginning of the Christian era.

A later cultural wave came from India when Hindu merchants and immigrants introduced Hinduism and Buddhism into the islands. The vigorous and rich Hindu-Indonesian culture which resulted gave rise to such mighty empires as Sriwijaya and Majapahit in the 7th and 12th centuries. Today, the magnificent Borobudur temple in Java still bears testimony for that glorious period in Indonesian history.

Subsequently, about the 13th century A.D., Islamic influences penetrated the archipelago. Gradually they submerged the Hindu influence on the main islands. Only on the small island of Bali was Hinduism able to survive intact; to this day Bali has remained Hindustic.

Workers preparing rice field
Photo Republic of Indonesia

Finally, in the 16th century, Western culture and Christianity came into the picture. Although, after four centuries, Western civilization has by no means superseded the Islamic hold on Indonesia (90% of the population are Moslems), it has already reshaped the outward appearance of Indonesian life to a considerable extent.

The Indonesian people are composed of many cultural and linguistic groups. They range from the very sophisticated Javanese and Balinese to the still relatively primitive Dayaks in Central Borneo, and the Temiar people of Malaya.* Some Indonesian groups were not deeply affected by the cultural invasions; the Javanese were thoroughly Hinduized; some groups were more responsive to Islamic teachings; and still others were converted to Christianity. But all of them, without exception, still preserve the old animistic practice of ancestor worship in one form or another. The cultural diversity is naturally reflected in the music. Whereas one can find in Indonesia music characterized by elemental drumming, there is also the very elaborate and highly developed Javanese and Balinese gamelan music.

*While Malaya is not considered part of present day Indonesia, it has strong historical and cultural ties with the islands. - Ed.
However, even in the case of these highly advanced forms, residues of the old culture still remain.

Many instruments of the Javanese gamelan, for example the gongs, may be traced back to old Hindu origins, as evidenced by carvings in the stone walls of ancient temples. Another instrument, the rebab, a two stringed violin, came originally from Persia, brought to Indonesia by Moslem traders. The wooden xylophone-like instrument called gambang and the bamboo flute by the name of suling are among the few remaining instruments of the original Indonesian music. In the same category is another peculiar bamboo instrument, called angklung, that is still very popular among the Sundanese people in West Java. It consists of two or more obliquely cut bamboo pipes loosely suspended in a frame. When the frame is shaken, the bottoms of the pipes strike against the frame, producing remarkably clear, almost metallic tones. The pitch depends on the length and the diameter of the pipes, and also the manner in which they have been cut. An orchestra is made up of several people playing angklungs of different tones.

Western civilization also had its influence on Indonesia's music. In the 16th century when the Portuguese were the only Europeans trading in the islands, European songs and musical instruments were introduced. The krompong, music which is very popular at present and which is played almost entirely with European instruments, probably had its beginnings in those days. In several places in Indonesia the European violin has become an integral part of the indigenous orchestra.

Indonesian music, generally speaking, serves as accompaniment for social activities, such as the performance of religious rites or dances. Only in the more developed cultures of Indonesia has music become, to a certain extent, an instrument for the expressions of emotions or feelings of beauty, but even there, in Java and Bali, music is still largely a communal art and is inseparably linked to dance and drama.

JAVANESE GAMELAN ORCHESTRA
PHOTO BY ALBERT FOX; COURTESY U.N.

The most popular drama in Indonesia by far is the wayang, a shadow-play performed with leather puppets. It is operated by one man, called the dalang, to the accompaniment of a gamelan orchestra consisting of from nine to sixteen players. It is usually performed after dark and lasts the whole night. The stories depicted are from the well-known Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. The first tells the story of the five Pandawa brothers who waged a long war to regain the kingdom of their forefathers, and the second tells how King Rama, with the help of his monkey allies, liberated his wife who was stolen by the demon king, Râwana. That this wayang show was already popular a thousand years ago is evident in an old but
THOSE IN WHICH SOME EIGHT CENTURIES LATER, SIR THOMAS STA­MFTORD RAFFLES, WHO WAS FOR SEVERAL YEARS THE BRITISH GOVERNOR OF JAVA, AND WHO WAS AN AR­DENT STUDENT OF THE JAVANESE CULTURE, WROTE ABOUT THE WAYANG: "THE INTEREST EXCITED BY SUCH SPECTACLES, CONNECTED WITH NATIONAL RECOLLEC­TIONS, IS ALMOST INCONCEIVABLE. THE EAGER MULTITUDE WILL SIT LISTENING WITH RAPTUROUS DELIGHT AND PROFOUND ATTENTION FOR WHOLE NIGHTS TO THESE DRAMAS."

AT PRESENT THE WAYANG IS STILL ENJOYED BY OLD AND YOUNG, AND NO OCCASION OF ANY IMPORTANCE IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A WAYANG PERFORMANCE.


AS FOR THE DANCES IN INDONESIA, AGAIN THERE IS GREAT VARIETY, FROM THE VERY SIMPLE ONES TO THE DELICATE AND INTRICATE JAVANESE AND BALINESE COURT-DANCES. MOST INDONESIAN DANCES ARE PART OF RELIGIOUS RITES, BUT THEY ARE ALSO RECREA­TIONAL.
IT WAS A HARVEST-DANCE, DEDICATED TO THE RICE GODDESS, BUT TODAY IT IS PERFORMED ON ANY GAY OCCASION, PREFERABLY AT NIGHT. THE DANCER HOLDS A PLATE WITH A LIGHTED CANDLE ATTACHED TO IT IN THE PALM OF EACH HAND. WHILE PERFORMING THE DELICATE MOVEMENTS HE TAPS OUT THE RHYTHM ON THE BOTTOM OF THE PLATE WITH A RINGED FINGER. THE ACCOMPANYING MUSIC IS PLAYED BY A VIOLIN, A REBANA, A TAMBOURINE AND A KIND OF FLUTE OR CLARINET.

TUMBA LELA-LELAN - THIS IS A CHILDREN'S PIECE, SUNG TO MAKE JOY AND MERRIMENT. A GROUP OF CHILDREN GATHERS AROUND A LEADER WHO MAY BE ONE OF THEM OR AN ADULT MAN. THE SINGING LEADER OR HIS ASSISTANT PLAYS THE VIOLIN, WHILE THE CHILDREN CLAP HANDS TO MARK THE RHYTHM. AT THE APPROPRIATE PLACE, THEY JOIN IN THE SINGING. THIS SONG IS A RECITATION OF POPULAR VERSES CONTAINING TEACHINGS OF WISDOM.


UDAN IRIS - THIS IS A SUNDA-NESE SONG, THE NAME OF WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "DRIZZLING RAIN." IT IS A LOVE-SONG OF A WOMAN WHO TELLS ABOUT HER SORROW IN BEING LEFT BY HER HUSBAND. IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A ZITHER WITH A LONG SOUND BOX, CALLED THE KATJAPI.

SORBAN PALID - THIS IS A POPULAR SUNDA-NESE TUNE WITH VIOLIN AND KATJAPI ACCOMPANIMENT. THE SINGER IS A WOMAN.

LAGU BABAR LAJAR - HERE IS JAVANESE GAMELAN MUSIC OF THE "FORCEFUL" TYPE; IN WHICH THE SARON AND THE SETHANG ARE PREDOMINANT. THE TONE SCALE USED IS THE SO-CALLED "PELOK," WITH SEVEN TONES TO THE OCTAVE. THE WAY OF PLAYING IS TYPICAL IN JOGJAKARTA. IT IS OFTEN USED TO ACCOMPANY THE DANCE OF A WARRIOR.

LAMBOH - THIS IS BALINESE MUSIC FOR THE DANCE CALLED "DJANGER." IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CHORUS ONE CAN HEAR DISTINCTLY THE REBANA, WHICH IS DROWNED OUT WHEN THE OTHER GAMELAN INSTRUMENTS COME IN. IN THE "DJANGER," THE DANCERS SIT IN A QUADRANGLE OR IN TWO ROWS, THE GIRLS FACING THE MEN. THEY SING WHILE DANCING WITH THEIR TORSOS, HANDS AND HEADS. SOMETIMES GIRLS AND BOYS SING TOGETHER, SOMETIMES THEY ALTERNATE. BALINESE MUSIC IS GENERALLY LIVLIER AND GAYER THAN THAT OF THE JAVANESE.

GANDA PURA - THIS IS BALINESE MUSIC FOR THE DANCE CALLED "DJANGER." IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CHORUS ONE CAN HEAR DISTINCTLY THE REBANA, WHICH IS DROWNED OUT WHEN THE OTHER GAMELAN INSTRUMENTS COME IN. IN THE "DJANGER," THE DANCERS SIT IN A QUADRANGLE OR IN TWO ROWS, THE GIRLS FACING THE MEN. THEY SING WHILE DANCING WITH THEIR TORSOS, HANDS AND HEADS. SOMETIMES GIRLS AND BOYS SING TOGETHER, SOMETIMES THEY ALTERNATE. BALINESE MUSIC IS GENERALLY LIVLIER AND GAYER THAN THAT OF THE JAVANESE.

LITHO IN U.S.A.