THE MUSIC OF THE SERIMPI "ANGLIR MENDUNG"

[Some musicological observations on Central Javanese ceremonial court dances.]

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General

The basis for the author's observations is an uninterrupted tape-recording made in 1964 by Mr. N. Tirtaamidjaja in the Kraton of Surakarta during a full-length rehearsal of the serimpi "Anglir Mendung". Jaap Kunst in his Music in Java (The Hague, 1949), and other musicologists as well, rightly classify the music of both serimpi and beďaja dances under the same heading since these two classical ceremonial court dances have many musical elements in common that set them apart from other forms of Javanese dance and music. Yet there exist significant differences between them: both the origin and the associative function of the beďaja differ markedly from the serimpi. In fact they belong to different religious spheres, for an elucidation of which the reader is referred to the paper by Mr. N. Tirtaamidjaja in this issue of Indonesia. The present article is limited strictly to the musical aspects of these dances.

The preliminary character of these observations is indicated by the fact that the transcription below represents only a part (in the author's opinion the most characteristic part) of the complete dance, which contains successively: a) Introductory paťetan played by the gambang, rebab and gender in the tonality of pelog paťet barang. During this instrumental improvisation the 4 serimpi (dancers) appear between the columns of the pendapa. This instrumental paťetan is brought to an end after 1 minute, to be followed after a short general pause by the next section; b) The choral section (sinđen) with only colotomic instrumental accompaniment, comprising 36 gong phrases, lasting 17 minutes. This section is represented in the transcription appended below; c) A second instrumental paťetan, 40 seconds long, again in paťet barang; d) A short vocal introduction (bawa) by the leading female singer (pasinđen); e) The gendèng proper, viz. ketawang "Anglir Mendung", played by the entire gamelan orchestra (however without the kemanak and only for the last part with the keprak), joined by the pasinđen and the female choir (gérongan). The duration of this section, during which the serimpi dance is continued, is 28 minutes; f) A short instrumental, improvised epilogue, played once again by gambang, gender and rebab. This ends the performance.
The transcription below is an attempt to reproduce the characteristic b section. The extremely slow speed, indicated in metronome numbers, is in accordance with the highly stylized, undulating movements of the four serimpi (or nine bedaja, for that matter). A slight, but important increase of tempo occurs, however, in the 24th gongan.

The Text

Undoubtedly ancient, the text (in poetical Javanese) is sung in unison from a handwritten collection of copied texts, lying in front of the pasiringen. The version followed in this transcription is taken from the edition of Probohardjono.1 It is in the matjapat form, the first two stanzas in the durma metre and runs as follows:

1. Anglir mendung kang wadya-bala wus tata,
  anglar samja sumiwi,
  santana arampak,
  samja busana indah,
  nèka warna tinon asri,
  lir singa lodra,
  sadaja golong pipit.

2. Swara nata ingkang pangandika nata,
  Kangdjeng Sri Narapati,
  nitih rata retna,
  pangirid kuda haṣṭa,
  binusanan murub adi,
  sunar gumebjar,
  prabanè anelahi.

Minggah:

1. Tinon asri, enggih, kang mentas menang djurit,
  wong agung babo,
  wus pinasṭi dènira djumeneng Adji,
  suka kaduk luwih,
  wisikar nata ing bala,
  kang satrija mantjur kang tjahja awening,
  wong agung kang gawē mulja,
  tulusena mukti sari awibawa,
  tulusa suka wirjoa.

1. R.Ng.S. Probohardjono, Primbon Langen Swara (Solo, Ratna, 1961): pp. 95-96. The poem is a fragment of a battle scene, probably from the Bratajuda Djajabinangun.
Translation:

1. Like dark storm-clouds the army stands arrayed,  
   In wing-like formation, they pay homage together;  
   The santana are all assembled,  
   All in beautiful robes,  
   Many-coloured, glorious to behold;  
   Like rampant lions,  
   All stand in close-set ranks.

2. The King's voice, the utterance of the King,  
   His Majesty, the Ruler of the Realm (is heard),  
   Mounted on his jewelled chariot,  
   Drawn by eight horses.  
   Clothed in glittering splendour,  
   Sparkling light,  
   His glorious emanation spreads its rays.

Glorious to behold indeed is He who has just won victory  
   in battle,  
   The great and mighty Ruler!  
   His reign was foreordained in the order of things,  
   His joy knows no bounds,  
   He is named Lord of War;  
   Like falling water the white radiance of his satrija  
       sparkles,  
   Great Prince, who makes sublime,  
   Make perfect the fulfilment of power and might!  
   Be perfect in happiness and valour!

The sung text, however, deviates on some points from Probohardjono's version, viz. in gongan 3 and 27 and in the second half of gongan 30. Furthermore, Probohardjono lists "Anglir Mendung" as a bedaja dance. The reason for these divergences may be that he makes use of a source apparently deriving from the Mangkunegaran.

Transcription

Only the first few bars have been transcribed in full instrumentation. Thereafter, it was not thought necessary to indicate the colotomic instruments (viz. the 2 kemanak, the gong, kenong, and kekuluk) on separate lines; and the kemanak have even been omitted altogether, for the sake of surveyability. Their rhythmic pattern, played alternatingly by two musicians each with one single-tone kemanak, remains unchanged during the entire piece. A kemanak beat falls on each quaver like this:
The 'mute' kemanak clicks (i.e., the bracketed notes) structurally coincide with each of the other colotomic beats (G, T and N), in which case they are either drowned or not played at all. In such cases they are structurally unimportant and therefore transcribed with a quaver rest. However, when this 'mute' click coincides with the remaining colotomic beat, viz. the wela (i.e., 'rest', indicated by 'O' in the transcription), it is clearly audible and functional. Their tuning approximates respectively ♭ sharp and ♭.

As indicated in the first line, the ketuk does not limit itself to a single beat, but (with the exception of the very first beat which falls in the bawa) plays a tremolo at slow speed, now three, then four or even five notes. The ketuk is tuned approximately to b flat.

The kenong never plays exactly on the beat, but slightly 'late'. This a common feature of kenong-style in the performance of slow-speed Javanese ensemble music. In the present piece only one kenong is used, tuned approximately to f.

The gong ageng needs no further explanation. In the transcription G stands for Gong, N for kenong, T for ketuk.

The keprak, a small rectangular wooden slit-drum akin to the Chinese wood-block, is never used in the actual performance of the ritual dances under discussion. It has become an increasingly indispensable tool during the rehearsals, as the dancers no longer possess an intimate familiarity with the tradition. Three different rhythmical motifs played on this little instrument with its penetrating, knocking sound, suffice for the dancers: (i) a quick, dotted two-note motif coinciding, e.g., with the ketuk beats; (ii) a slow semiquaver motif of two notes, usually coinciding with the first beat of a measure, sometimes even played as slow as the first two notes of a triplet; (iii) the roll, or tremolo. The author has made two attempts at transcribing the keprak roll in gongans 1 and 5 to indicate graphically that, except for the first time, this roll is anticipated by four, dotted quick motifs succeeding each other with ever increasing speed, until this dotted motif makes place for a tremolo starting at high speed at first, but soon becoming gradually slower and slower, and ending with the two-note dotted motif. The effect is somewhat comparable to the rhythm of a bouncing ball, or rather a uniformly accelerated and retarded motion, performed with a sudden crescendo. The only comparable instance of such a rhythmic pattern known to the author is the Japanese drum roll named shindo-byoshi.
In the transcribed recording the keprak is played by R. Ng. Lebdapradangga, the learned kraton official who supervises the dances.

Only one drum is used in the Solonese serimpi and bedaja dances: the large kendang gending, played here by the kraton's leading musician, the aged R.Ng. Warsodiningrat. The drumming pattern, in conformity with the dance's colotomic structure (ketawang, i.e. 2 kenong and 4 ketuk for each gong) is named "kendangan gending," in Solo sometimes also called "Gadung-melati." Although the kendang has no definite pitch, the notes played vary strongly in pitch and tone color, hence the notation on three different pitch levels, one for each (type of) stroke. It should, moreover, be noted that the player in specific instances 'deviates' from the set standard pattern. In the ultimate measure of each gongan he always plays b . d b d t, and not the expected b t d t t b d t; the first ketukan is always played b tt, instead of bt t t; in the 2nd and 3rd measures the player usually omits the 2nd and 6th quavers when they are tong, but these slight deviations are only differences in degree, not in quality. The kendang part from gong 27 onward (minggah) has been omitted from the transcription, partly to save space, but also because it follows the same pattern throughout, with no important changes, except for the penultimate measure where the usual closing pattern is played.

The rendition of the vocal part, sinden, in Western staff notation proved to be very problematic, the main difficulty of course being that the various Javanese intervals cannot be molded properly into the rigid Western notation system. The author's compromise is as follows: the scale sequence of the notes:

bem-gulu-dada-pélog-lima-nem-barang-bem-gulu, etc.,

has been conceived as a sequence of:

\[ \frac{1}{4} - 1 - \frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{2} - \frac{1}{2} - 1 - 1 - \frac{1}{2} - l, \text{ etc., tones.} \]

Such a sequence might be the nearest approximation to this non-European scale, none of whose intervals actually conforms to European intervals. The accelerando in gongan 24 introduces a musical feature which may be termed modulation. Until the ketuk preceding the 25th gong, the choir has been singing unmistakably in paťet barang, but quite unexpectedly (apart from the increase in speed) the choir shifts, modulates, to paťet

2. Solonese terminology is used here, with the strokes named bem, dung and tong. See for further data the extensive section on Javanese drumming in J. Kunst, Music in Java (The Hague, 1949), pp. 202-212.
The vocal line becomes livelier than before, the tessitura higher, and the singing more syllabic.

Modulation from one pa\textsuperscript{t}et to another is not uncommon in Javanese music, but it might be labeled as characteristic of the unaccompanied choral singing which goes with serimpi- and bed\textsuperscript{a}ja- dances. Kunst makes mention of various forms of modulation.\textsuperscript{3} However, a very fascinating peculiarity in this type of music is a method of transposition, referred to by Kunst only in passing, with regard to the music of the Bedaja Ketawang. He writes that not the choir, but the pitch of the kemanak seemed to change during a performance he once witnessed!

In his own words:

"... at another moment the pitch of the continuously beaten kemanaks appeared to have got lowered by a semitone, which impression could be given only if one felt the tonality of the melody as having been raised by a semitone. It will probably have to remain an impossibility to investigate these phenomena more closely, since the Bedaya Ketawang is so sacred that it is only very rarely performed in public... and will probably never be allowed to be recorded on a phonogram."

However, the very serimpi under discussion, "Anglir Mendung", shows a similar feature. The tape-recording reveals that at certain points, usually on long, sustained notes, the singers very carefully lower these notes by a semitone in an almost imperceptible glissando. This striking peculiarity is indicated in the transcription by the replacement of the last part of the note in question by its neighboring lower semitone which has been linked to it by a wave line, a bow and the word gliss(ando). In other instances, however, the transposition by a semitone is not effectuated by this smooth, imperceptible glissando but rather by a leap, after a long pause between two words which is filled in only by the tense sounds of the colotomic and agogic instruments, a pause long enough for the listener to forget the pitch of the preceding phrase.

In the beginning of the transcribed section these lowerings, transpositions, seem to occur with convenient regularity, \textit{viz.} at the ultimate ketuk beat preceding every other gong beat, such as:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}
Gongan 3, measure 4 (leap);
G. 5, m. 4 (leap);
G. 7, m. 4. But the line is continued less regularly there-
after;
G. 8, m. 3 (leap);
G. 9, m. 1-2;
G. 11, m. 4;
G. 15, m. 1;
G. 16, m. 3;
G. 18, m. 3;
G. 23, m. 1;
G. 24, m. 4 (leap) (the modulation);
G. 26, m. 1;
G. 27, m. 1;
G. 30, m. 1;
G. 32, m. 4 (leap);
G. 34, m. 2 (leap);
G. 35, m. 4 (leap);
G. 36, m. 1-2.

It seems justifiable to assume that this uncommon method of
transposition, impossible to perform on instruments with a
fixed pitch, is executed on purpose, and that it is ruled by
a musical tradition inherent in serimpi- and bedaja music. In
most cases the transposition leads the choir a semitone lower.
A look at Gong 15 and its preceding measure, at which point
a literal repetition of the entire section starts (G.1-9 = G.
15-23), is a striking example of this procedure. In both in-
stances the melody, in Solonese cipher notation, runs: 3 5 5
3 3 7 7. In the introductory bawa the pitch of 3 (dada) is e,
whereas the same note, (3, dada) in G.14, m. 4, sounds g sharp,
which means a downward transposition of a sixth, reached step-
wise, semitone for semitone. This shift of 'tonal center'
must be what Kunst meant in the paragraph quoted above.

Kunst, in the same section of his book (p.100), refers to
a modulation from pēlog to slēndro vice versa, within the same
piece (the Bedaja Ketawang). This very rare form of modulation,
it should be noted in passing, does not occur exclusively in
the Bedaja Ketawang. Although Kunst does not mention it, a
comparison with other serimpi and bedaja pieces, reveals the
same feature, only in a much lesser degree. For example, the
Bedaja "Doradasih" contains chromatic transpositions of the
kind described above, as well as a modulation from pēlog to
slēndro. The Serimpi "Angun-Angun" and "Sangupati" only fea-
ture chromatic transposition and modulation within the pēlog
tonality, with no modulation from pēlog to slēndro. Perhaps
the latter feature is characteristicly reserved for the
bedaja and does therefore not occur in serimpi music. Much
systematic musicological research has to be done before a clear
picture of the above-mentioned phenomena can be arrived at.
In the recording, the leading female singer is Njai Lurah Kudakara, seconded by two other female singers and one male singer, R.Ng. Warsodiningrat. (?)

The author abstains from further analysis until more data can be gathered on these highly revered, but rarely performed ritual dances at the Javanese courts. They may very well vanish forever within one generation. On the other hand both serimpi and bedaja dances, in pocket-size versions (lasting no more than a quarter of an hour, with the choral singing omitted altogether!), do now form part of the curriculum of the Jogjanese and Solonese Conservatories and Academies of Music and Dance.

A final note on the transcription ends these observations. To most students of Javanese music it may seem sheer sacrilege to put the gong and kenong on the first beat of every measure, contrary to Javanese notation custom, which usually places the gong (and therefore the kenong) beats at the end of the measure. The argument is traditionally that the final gong beat means the end, the ultimate resolution towards which all other instruments are striving. Mutatis mutandis this holds true also for the kenong beats, which themselves often anticipate what should follow. Placing the gong and kenong beats right after the bar-line, however, as is done usually in conventional Western staff notation with accented beats, does not change this fact at all. It has, on the contrary, the advantage of facilitating understanding among those students who have adopted the Western staff notation of non-western music as their standard. It has also another advantage, namely that it reveals more clearly the off-beat function of the ketuk in the total colotomic organization of Javanese gamelan music. While this is of no importance at all in the slow-speed ladrang, ketawang and gending forms where other instruments take over this off-beat role (viz. kemong and kempjang or, for that matter, the kemanak), the off-beat function of the ketuk and the kempul against the beat function of the gong and kenong becomes all the more apparent in quick pieces, like the lantjaran and srepegan forms.

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SERIMPI "Anglit Mendung"

Intro. (bawa), fem. solo voice. Mixed choir (sindén).
(Tinon asri, enggin, kang mentas menang djurit, wong agung) ba-bo, wus pi-na-sti dé-ni-ra dju-me-neng A-dji, su-ka ka-duk lu-wih; (...) wi-si-ka-r na-ta-ing ba-
Transcr.by E.H. after a tape rec.
in the Kraton at Solo, 1964.