

A typical *angklung* orchestra.



ACCOUNT OF AN ANGKLUNG CARUK JULY 28, 1985¹

Paul Arthur Wolbers

Introduction

Banyuwangi, the most important city on the east coast of East Java, has a distinct musical culture which has become popular in the rest of Java. Two original genres in particular, *gandrung* and *angklung*, have become known as *asli Banyuwangi* ("characteristically Banyuwangi"). Both are associated with the Osing, the original inhabitants of this region of East Java.

The distinctiveness of the musical traditions of Banyuwangi can in part be explained by the region's history.² Until the second half of the eighteenth century Banyuwangi formed the capital of Blambangan, the last Hindu empire on Java, which had always maintained close ties with various Balinese states. After Blambangan's brutal and destructive annexation by the Dutch (1767-70), the area was gradually repopulated with colonists from Madura and central Java and Islam was imposed. But the area's traditional inhabitants, the Osing, managed to maintain their own culture and dialect, *bahasa Osing* (which is not understood by other Javanese), and as late as 1850 Hinduism was still the main religion in at least one village close to Banyuwangi. In 1923 Lekkerkerker distinguished the Osing from other Javanese, writing that they are "known for their high self-esteem, their honesty, their obstinacy and their aversion to taking service with Europeans."³ My own observations taught me that persons from other parts of Java often associate the region and its original inhabitants with (black) magic; a remnant of the--not so distant--Hindu past of the area.

In Banyuwangi, the musical tradition *gandrung* refers to the singing and dancing of a young virgin girl (the *gandrung*), accompanied by an orchestra which consists of two violins, a drummer with two *kendang* (slightly conical, double-headed drum), a player who beats two *ketuk* (small, horizontal gong with a muffled sound), a *kempul/gong* (two vertical gongs of different pitch) player, and a man who plays the *kluncing* (a rather large triangle) and who also functions as clown, dancer, and singer. The ensemble plays at weddings or other festive

1. The author wishes to express his thanks to Professor Charles Capwell and Margaret Sarkissian, who read earlier versions of this article and made some valuable suggestions; they are, of course, not responsible for the way in which their ideas may have been used.

2. For a more elaborate account of the history of Blambangan, a description of the Balinese influence on *gandrung* and *angklung*, and a bibliography, see Paul Wolbers, "Gandrung and Angklung from Banyuwangi: Remnants of a Past Shared with Bali," *Asian Music* 18, 1 (Fall/Winter 1986): 71-90.

3. C. Lekkerkerker, "Balambangan," *Indische Gids* 45 (1923): 1031. The original reads: ". . . en staan bekend om hun sterk gevoel van eigenwaarde, hun eerlijkheid, hun koppigheid, hun afkeer om bij Europeanen bediende te worden."

occasions, where the *gandrung* sings popular songs either in the local dialect, or in Indonesian or Javanese. Moreover, the *gandrung* also functions as social dance partner; male members of the audience, after accepting a dance sash from the *tukang kedog* who offers them on a tray, can dance with the *gandrung*, one at the time. Unlike the *tledhek*, she is not considered a prostitute,⁴ and has a good social reputation.

Much of the musical repertoire of the *gandrung* is also played by the *angklung* orchestra. Both ensembles have the same basic instrumentation, but the *angklung* is augmented by an additional section of idiophones. The orchestra derives its name from a pair of large bamboo xylophones, called *angklung* (not to be confused with the shaken, one-man, *angklung*). Banyuwangi *angklung* have thirteen tubes, cut in the same way as those of the shaken *angklung*, and firmly tied to a wooden frame. The closed ends of the tubes point towards the player's stomach. The frame provides one important difference between the Banyuwangi *angklung* and the free-hanging construction of another Javanese bamboo xylophone, the *calung* from Banyumas. The frame of the Banyuwangi *angklung* forms a single unit, including a bench for the player, and during performance it is decorated with tall, brightly colored *wayang* heads and ribbons. The rest of the orchestra consists of metallophones of three different sizes: *slentem* (low-pitched), *saron panerus* (middle-pitched), and *saron barung* (high-pitched). The nine keys of these instruments are made of iron, and lie flat on a wooden trough.⁵

When an *angklung* orchestra accompanies a *gandrung* singer, usually only the section that forms the independent *gandrung* orchestra participates. *Angklung* ensembles frequently accompany dances, and often one male dancer belongs to such an orchestra. *Angklung* entertainment is very popular in the region, and each *angklung* ensemble has its own group of supporters.

One of the most exciting musical events in the Banyuwangi region is the so-called *angklung caruk* where two groups play on the same occasion, in a contest-like atmosphere. ("*Caruk*"⁶ means "to meet" in the *bahasa* Osing, referring to the fact that two groups are invited to encounter each other, on so-to-speak neutral ground to add luster to a festive occasion such as a wedding or a circumcision.) The orchestras are usually both required to play a number of the same tunes, to make it easier for the audience to judge their relative

4. See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 299. See also Robert W. Heffner, "The Politics of Popular Art: *Tayuban* Dance and Culture Change in East Java," below, p. 75.

5. This orchestra was described for the first time by J. S. Brandts Buys and A. Brandts Buys-van Zijp in "Over Muziek in het Banjoewangische," *Djawa* 6 (1926): 205-8. They do not refer to the orchestra as *angklung* but as *bali-balian* or *tabuhan Bali*; the name *angklung* may be of a more recent date. For a description of present-day practice, see Michael Crawford, "East Java" in "Indonesia," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1980) 9:201-7.

6. *Caruk*, in Javanese, refers to putting various things together. In Bali, *caruk* is (or was?) the name of an ensemble which "requires no more than two players, and takes its name from an antique form of bamboo-keyed xylophone, the *charuk*. . . . Two *sarons* . . . complete the ensemble" (Colin McPhee, *Music in Bali* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966], p. 265). Apparently this Balinese ensemble is a combination of a bamboo xylophone (although this instrument has flat keys) and metallophones, like the *angklung* ensemble from Banyuwangi.

playing skills.⁷ Each group comes with a considerable body of supporters who may behave in a very rude way in order to intimidate the other party. The atmosphere of the event can be likened to that surrounding, for instance, a soccer match: two teams have trained for many weeks before their encounter. When they meet, they try to mobilize as many supporters as they can, although a number of uncommitted spectators will be influenced solely by the quality of the music they hear. Accusations regarding one orchestra's use of black magic in order to vanquish the other are not uncommon; but the performance usually ends cordially, with everybody exhausted by the several hours of shouting and dancing. There is no jury to proclaim a winner.⁸ I have been told that in earlier times these events took place at night, but the local authorities then prohibited night performances since the use of alcoholic beverages, as well as the coolness of the night air (which gave the supporters more energy), gave rise to serious disturbances.

The background of *angklung caruk* may be found in several more or less extinct traditions, which will be briefly discussed below. According to Nieuwenhuis it was customary in East Java during extended periods of drought for the people to perform a fight dance, accompanied by an orchestra: "One fights with rattan sticks, and one is aware of the fact that everything is only a play. These weapon dances are also performed at weddings and circumcisions."⁹

Near to Banyuwangi the Brandts Buys witnessed a similar form of entertainment which was called *gitikan*, in which two men tried to hit each other with a long whip, made from palm leaf fibers. The performance was accompanied by two *angklung*. The musical repertoire was the same as that of the *gandrung*.¹⁰

Another custom that may have contributed to *angklung caruk* is found in what Pigeaud calls *prang desa*, "village war."¹¹ One of the forms from the Banyuwangi area, described by Pigeaud, is the *pacul-gowang*, "in which three men from two different villages perform in front of one another, and sing [texts] . . . which contain unfriendly allusions to certain idiosyncracies of the village of the other party."¹² Pigeaud relates another tradition from Banyuwangi, called

7. See also Crawford, "East Java," p. 206.

8. There can be various reasons for not having a jury at a *caruk*: there may never have been a jury (especially if it stems from the *prang desa* [see below]); the number of supporters per group and the noise they produce may be a sufficient indication of which group has shown most skills; and in certain cases it may be against the etiquette, and the Javanese harmony model, to proclaim one group (your special guests!) loser.

9. "Man ficht mit Rotan-Stöcken, und ist sich bewusst, dass alles nur Spiel ist. Diese Waffentänze finden auch bei Hochzeiten und Beschneidungsfesten statt." A. W. Nieuwenhuis, "Über den Tanz im Malaischen Archipel," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie* XXIII (1916): 230. For a description of Balinese fight dances see Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies, *Dance and Drama in Bali* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), pp. 252-57.

10. Brandts Buys, "Musiek in het Banjoewangische," pp. 211-12.

11. Th. Pigeaud, "Aantekeningen Betreffende den Javaanschen Oosthoek," *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde* 72 (1932): 275.

12. Ibid. The complete, original text is as follows: ". . . waarin uit twee verschillende *désa*'s elk drie mannen optraden, welke tegenover elkaar *sisindiran*'s met *wangsalan*'s (blijkbaar van hetzelfde slag als de reeds meermalen

gedogan, in which during the night "men of two competing villages will beat familiar tunes as loudly and long as possible on rice-pounding blocks; for this purpose these blocks were put together in a special open space. This still may happen during weddings."¹³ Pigeaud interprets these customs as stemming from the need to reinforce ties within the village, so that its inhabitants are encouraged into enmity with other villages.

How or when *angklung caruk* in its present-day form was developed seems to be unknown, but it may become evident from the following description of one such event that it shares many elements with the older traditions described above. It should also be added that the idea of having competing *gamelan* has been popular on North Bali for many years,¹⁴ and since there is a lively traffic between Banyuwangi and North Bali, it is not unthinkable that here, too, we may find a root of the *angklung caruk*.

Thanks to my informant, Pak Moestopo, who trains his own *angklung* orchestra, I was able to attend an *angklung caruk*. Pak Moestopo's group, known as "Selandang Sutro," practices regularly in anticipation of an upcoming contest. The players are all very young, averaging around 20 years of age. Rehearsals take place on the small veranda of a neighboring house, and despite the enormous noise and the advanced hour (they practice till almost midnight), nobody in the street seems to mind. Pak Moestopo, who is in his early fifties, no longer performs himself. He used to dance and play in the various art forms of Banyuwangi, but today he owns the orchestra in which his sons and their friends play. From time to time he will listen to the rehearsals and comment upon them, but it seems on the whole that the musicians are perfectly capable of making joint decisions during the rehearsal. No notation is used, difficult passages being repeated as often as necessary until everybody finally knows how to play his part. One of the *slentem* players functions as the leader and often initiates the songs.

The event that I will now describe took place on Sunday July 28, 1985, close to Rogojambi, a village not far from Banyuwangi. The following account is based upon my field notes and tapes.

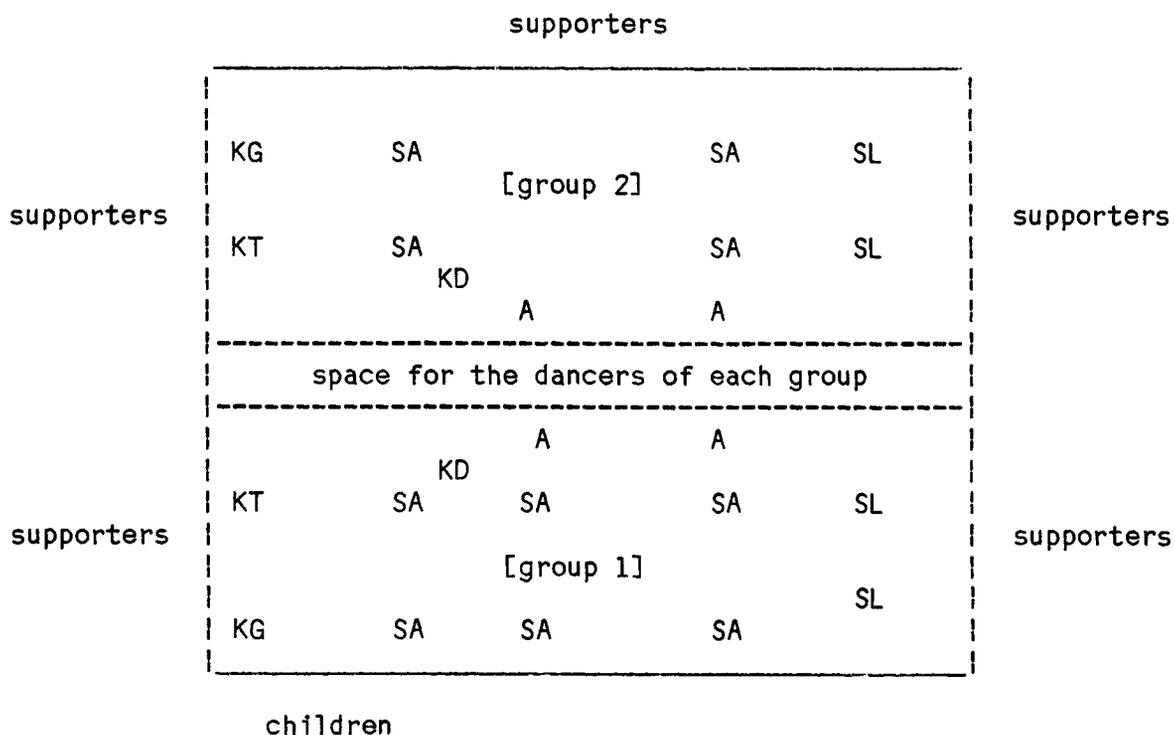
The Angklung Caruk

10.30 AM: We arrive at the house of the host and are invited inside before going to the performance. Somebody tells me that the occasion for which the *angklung caruk* is being organized is a wedding, but during the performance, as will be seen below, I conclude that the occasion is, in fact, a circumcision. Outside, an enormous temporary pavilion has been erected, under which two *angklung* orchestras, hundreds of supporters, and a number of policemen dressed in green fatigues, are assembled. The following figure shows the layout inside the pavilion:

genoemde Oost-Javaansche parikan's) zongen, welke minder vriendelijke toespelingen op de dorpseigenaardigheden van de tegenpartij bevatten."

13. Ibid. ". . . daarin bestaande, dat 's nachts, door groepen mannen van twee wedijverende dorpen, zoo hard en lang mogelijk de bekende wijzen in rijstblokken werden gestampt; die rijstblokken werden daartoe dicht bij elkander op een daartoe geëigende open plek gezet. Dit gebeurt ook thans nog wel bij een bruiloft."

14. Walter Spies, "De gamelanwedstrijd te Gianjar," *Djawa* 19 (1938): 201.



(microphones)
 XXX
 tables for the important guests

chairs and benches for all the other guests

A = *angklung*; KD = *kendang*; KG = *kempul/gong*; KT = *ketuk*; SA = *saron*;
 SL = *slentem*

(Because of the large number of supporters that surrounded both groups, there was no chance to walk around, and therefore all my observations, photographs, and recordings were made from the same location, i.e., the tables for the important guests where Pak Moestopo, his wife and daughters, and I were seated.)

10.55 AM: We are seated, while group I (hereafter referred to as: #I) is playing a number of short pieces, often in contrasting tempos. This has the character of a warm-up session. The audience does not yet seem to be too concerned with the match. One tune, apparently especially designed for this purpose, provokes some chanting from a number of supporters.¹⁵

11.08: Group II (Pak Moestopo's group) begins, and immediately their dancer comes into the "arena," the narrow space between the four *angklung*. This group also plays short, virtuosic pieces. In the fast tempos, one can see the tall

15. Unfortunately, I had to leave the area soon after the caruk, and had no time to listen to the tape with my informants. Therefore I have not been able to find out what exactly the supporters were shouting at each other. It was evident, however, that the slogans were intended to agitate the other party, who would always furiously respond.

wayang heads of the *angklung* shaking vigorously; now I understand why these are mounted in such a loose fashion on the frames; it is a very impressive sight! One of the longer pieces also calls for chanting by the supporters, who are becoming more and more involved. The number of chanters grows every time the music stops for a moment to give them the opportunity to chant their slogan.

11.18: Apparently annoyed by the choruses, the musicians of #I begin to play; one after the other they try to drown out the music of their competitors. Some of the children run away. The dancer of #II continues in this cacaphony. The police officers are looking worried and try to stop #I.

11.23: While #II continues the same piece, #I is silenced by the police; one officer places his chair close to the leader of the group and looks menacing. The dancer of #I is seen in the audience, preparing himself to perform as soon as he is called. Pak Moestopo asks me not to record the moments in which the two groups are playing simultaneously, because that is not very representative of the music (it is quite normal, however, for *caruk*). I explain that I nevertheless enjoy the effect. This is incomprehensible to him.

11.35: The supporters have become more rowdy; by now there is a lot of screaming and whistling. The *angklung* of #I start to play, but #II continues, together with its dancer. The police have to restrain the audience which keeps pushing towards the musicians. More and more instruments of #I start to play through the music of #II. Many boys in the audience are now making dance movements with their arms and hands.

11.45: By now #I is playing at full strength in a coordinated effort to silence #II. It becomes clear that each of the groups of supporters has someone who is beginning to serve as its leader, because he has the loudest voice and makes the most offensive remarks and gestures towards the other group. The leader from #I, for instance, keeps pointing his behind at the other supporters. #II is finally silenced, and #I continues.

11.50: The audience is roaring, and the musicians are now also joining in; #II starts to play again. One of its musicians is shouting obscenities at the leader of #I's supporters, and has to be warned by a police officer. #I stops for a few minutes, but the provocations of the other supporters force them into the field again, and together the two groups continue to produce polyphony that would have graced Charles Ives. The dancer of #II is still trying to perform, which is quite remarkable since by now he must have difficulty hearing his accompaniment. Supporters of #II try to chant their slogan but their voices are drowned out by the music.

12.00: Suddenly the metallophones and *angklung* stop, and the drummers of both groups can be heard, desperately trying to outdrum one another. The audience roars with enthusiasm. One of the policemen has succeeded in silencing #I, which stops to bursts of cheers from its supporters. I notice that in this turmoil there are metallophone players in each group who are not participating in the piece their own group is playing, but are carefully trying to play with the music of the other party; musical spies perhaps?

12.22 PM: #II is still playing, while the supporters manage to dance between the instruments. Pak Moestopo looks totally unmoved and does not seem to have any contact with his orchestra; apparently this is the normal course of events at an *angklung caruk*. The only time his group contacts him is when someone informs him that they have run out of cigarettes, a situation which I am supposed to remedy. The supporters of #II again start to chant their slogans, and the *slentem* players of #I are hammering madly to avenge the insults.

12.30: The dancer of #I takes to the floor, and although group II plays for a few minutes, it finally stops to give its opponents a chance. One of #II's supporters, a very rowdy type who wears sunglasses (considered to be very hip among the teenage boys), sticks his head through the ornaments of one of the *angklung* and begins to shout at #I's dancer.

12.43: #I begins another piece. Feelings are running so high that objects start to fly through the air. One of my neighbors looks at me with a satisfied grin, and compares the situation to the catastrophic soccer match between Italy and England. A real fight breaks out, and I am prepared to run should it spill over in our direction. Soon, however, the police restore order; they shovel the audience away from the players by force. Whenever an *angklung* threatens to be pushed out of shape, policemen are ready to restore it again.

12.55: #II has joined in. The dancer of #I is getting tired--not surprising as he is wearing a costume made of some sort of synthetic fiber, and is soaked with sweat. He presses his group to grant him a little break. Subsequently the two groups engage in a short "chase chorus." Even the young children, sitting in their safe corner, begin to shout and shake their fists at the supporters of #II.

13.10: While the musicians of #II play, their supporters hoist their leader and some other boisterous characters onto their shoulders and dance around with them, a seemingly impossible feat in such a packed space. The policemen have now brought out wooden clubs because the mass has become extremely unruly. One policeman stands on guard with the dancer of #II. Suddenly the leader (the *slentem* player) of #I gets angry with one of his *angklung* players and lashes out at him with his foot; while the *slentem* falls, the leader manages to kick his musician in the back! Even Pak Moestopo looks worried now and wonders aloud whether we should be going. A short fight erupts among the supporters of #II, while #I plays a brilliant piece with long *angklung* solos.

13.48: Completely exhausted, the dancer of #I asks his group to stop, but they continue. The dancer then sings for a while; at least he appears to be singing, but he cannot be heard above the noise. After a few minutes he is forced by his musicians to dance again. I'm afraid the man may die of exhaustion; is this going to be an Indonesian *Sacre du Printemps*? The audience is also getting tired, and therefore quieter. Group #II is having lunch, and this also contributes to the more peaceful atmosphere.

13.55: While #I is having lunch, #II begins to play and dance. Suddenly everybody turns to look at a number of people entering the pavilion. One of them proudly holds a little boy whose bandaged genitals show that he may be the reason for this party that he does not seem to be enjoying at all!

14.18: Lunchtime is apparently over because #I begins to play through the music of its opponents. Musicians of #II get annoyed and begin to provoke #I's *angklung* player (the one who had previously been kicked by his own leader); all sorts of things are being shouted at the poor fellow who, however, keeps a cool head and continues to play.

14.45: While #I has stopped, #II is still playing. Its supporters push the *angklung* back and forth, so that the *wayang* heads shake menacingly to the rhythm of the music. Almost everybody seems to know the pieces, for in every break a short chorus erupts.

15.00: Group #I gets its turn, the audience becomes agitated, and provokes #II to resume playing. The leader of #I, who is more or less under permanent police surveillance, begins to scream at the other group. Someone hands a note

to a musician in group #II, probably a request from the host to behave with more restraint. At any rate, it keeps the group from playing, so that #I has its chance, while its dancer, apparently recovered, moves into action, encouraged by screaming and whistling supporters.

15.35: With the audience in a permanent state of frenzy, #II takes over. The police are no longer able to control the crowd and everybody dances or stands around wherever he likes.

15.50: Accompanied by shouts of triumph, #I concludes the *angklung caruk*. When I ask Pak Moestopo which group has won, he smiles broadly and answers that both groups were equally good, so the result is a tie. Further questioning teaches me that this is always the case; after a heated contest, everyone leaves in harmony.

15.55: Everybody goes home completely satisfied. We, too, can leave after fulfilling what is expected of all the important guests: making a financial contribution to this extraordinary event.