

# Music and Dance

as a Living Tradition in Indonesia

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Consisting of three thousand islands, Indonesia is inhabited by hundreds of ethnic groups living in their own environments, beliefs and customs. Indonesia, as a result, inherited a variety of music and dance forms and other performing arts as well.

The successive waves of foreign influence have all left their imprint on Indonesian culture to some extent. But the indigenous cultural tradition maintains its link with the contemporary culture. In most rural villages, especially in the mountainous areas, art forms closely related to animistic religious beliefs are still practiced.

Apart from these forms of arts, in the coastal areas, we can find dance, music, and theatre forms with Islamic religious connotations. Since the early development of art, art forms have been centered in the aristocratic royal court of Java and have been largely influenced by the Hindu religion, except for those in Bali, which are based on the Hindu-Bali beliefs.

Modern art forms, coming from the West, started in the big cities. Then they penetrated into the surrounding areas. But a two-way interchange of influence, between the modern and traditional forms, is in process today. As a matter of fact, modern-day Indonesian artists are now looking at their roots and want to express and revive their traditional art forms.

Traditional Indonesian dance and music, as they exist today, can be classified, in terms of function : ritual and ceremonial, social, and performing dance and music. In addition, self-defence dance could be considered a special type of dance.



Folk dance performed on stage stressing unison in movement.

Opposite page : Western modern dance influence is clearly indicated in this piece choreographed by Tom Ibnur.

#### Ritual and Ceremonial Dance and Music

The first type to be discussed and which are probably one of the oldest surviving music are : the Saver and Tutunggulan. They still have ritual meanings in rural villages.

The Saver and Tutunggulan are chantings in old local language. They are still sung by women, of the Sundanese peoples in West Java, while pounding rice for praising and welcoming the rice goddess.

The dance type performed with these chantings are also connected with the rice culture in Ngalage. During the rice planting rite, while playing the Angklung (bamboo shaken instruments), a male dances around a Pupuhunan (a life-tree). A Dukun chants while touching the rice grain to be planted. After the dance, the planting of rice in the Ladang (dry rice field) starts.

The Bedaya dance of the Royal Courts in Central Java, the Pendet dance of Bali, which is familiar to visitors, and the Sang Hiyang Hiyang dance, performed by young girls, still have ceremonial meanings.

#### Social Dance and Music

While ritual dances are addressed to the spirits, asking for blessings from the holy or preventing evil, social dances and music are addressed to the participants themselves. Samples of social music are : the Tembang, Macapat and Mamaea. They are party songs, among friends and relatives. Social dancing include Tayub and Ketuktilu in Java, Joget in Sumatra, and Lenso in the eastern part of Indonesia.

#### Performing Dance and Music

Social dance and music does not separate the audience from the

performers. But in professional dance and music, or other theatrical performances, the activity is raised to a level to please the audience.

There are numerous examples of professional dance and music. Among others, the Wayang dances in Java, Kebayar dances and Baris dances Bali and, the Topeng (mask dances) in Java and Bali are also well known. The Mainang dan Serampang 12 in Sumatra, Pakarena in Sulawesi are also some of the more popular ones.

Theatrical performances, interweaving dance, music and play into one work of art, are also played to entertain the spectators. Some of

the many examples worth mentioning here are : Randay and Makyong in Sumatra; Mundu in Kalimantan Wayang; Ketoprak, Banjet and Ludruk in Java; and Gambuh in Bali.

Sendratari is an innovative idea. In this theatrical performance, the dialogues are dropped. Instead, new movements are choreographed to replace the dialogues. Corollary to this, it is interesting to mention that modern dramas in Indonesia are starting to include dance and music.

While some are working for innovations in the performing arts, others are concentrating their attention to the traditional forms of these arts. These forms must be

preserved as they are the roots of living Indonesian art tradition. Maintaining the traditional culture then becomes an important task of the contemporary artist.

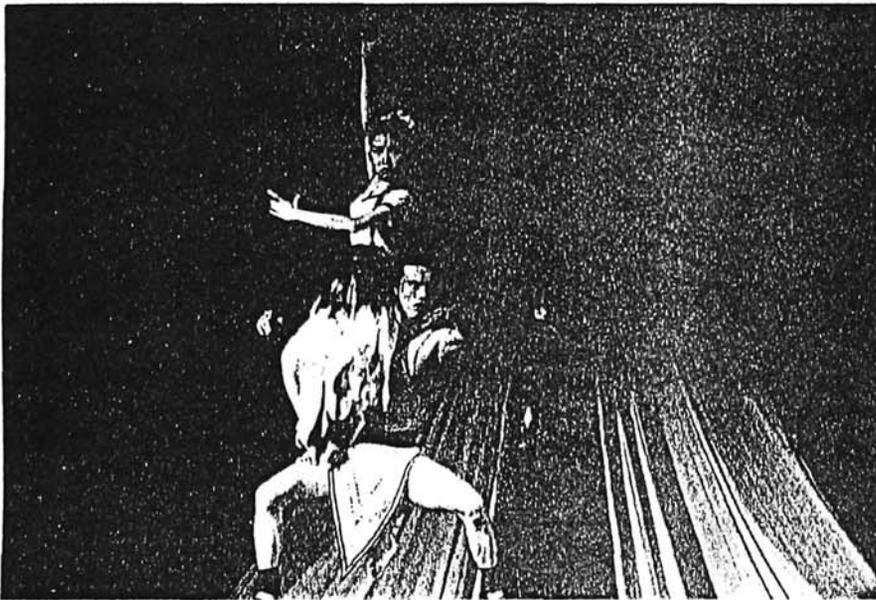
In the following paragraphs, **Pesta Desa Di Sunda**, a village festival in Suna, West Java, is selected as a case study to illustrate the range of dances that are popular in contemporary Indonesia. This festival comprise the **Gondang** dance and music, **Calung** ensemble, **Jaipongan** dance, **Penca**, **Kendang Rampak**, the music of **Kecapi-Suling** and **Tembang/Kawih** and the dance of **Gotong Singa**.

#### Gondang Dance and Music

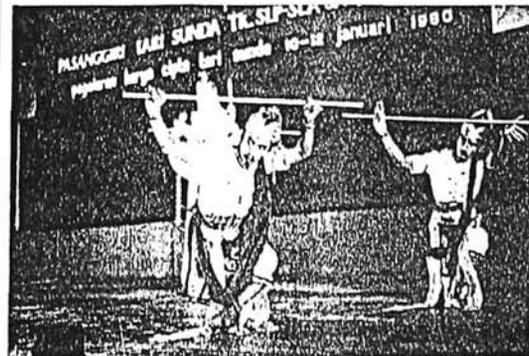
Gondang is the name of a performing piece which was brought about by the rice-pounding ritual of the villagers. This ritual is held during the harvest festival, when the first harvested rice bundles are pounded. It follows other rituals related to the praise-offering of peasants to the rice goddess, *Dewi Sri* or *Sanghyang Pohaci*.

During this ritual, a group of women bring the first harvested rice bundles to the house of the village head, who keeps the village rice-shed and the rice-block (*lesung*) especially used in the ritual.

When the rice bundles are all placed in the rice-block, one of the elderly women sings or chants in praise of Dewi Sri or Sanghyang Pohaci. She asks for her kindness and to give them much harvest. After the singing and chanting, all the old women of the village take turns, group by group, in pounding the rice until it is ready to be put in the rice-shed.



The modern ballet above was performed at the Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia while the Sundanese dance item on the right was performed at the 1980 Dance Festival in Bandung.





Javanese classical dance retains strong appeal to contemporary audience.

Gondang dance and music have been created according to this ritual. The pounding sound by the poles hitting the rice-block, was however added, to make the performance more pleasant with rhythmical beats. The movements of the performers and the songs have also been modified for theatrical presentation.

But one thing has to be noted : beating the rice-block is actually not always connected with the rice-pounding. Village people beat the rice-block or lesung, only when there is an eclipse. An eclipse, they believe, could cast evil to the people, causing epidemics and other frightening dangers. It can also give signals, warning people of floods, fires, etc.

#### Calung Ensemble

The *Calung Jingjing*, or simply the *Calung* Ensemble borrowed its name from the bamboo xylophone. This xylophone used to be played by

peasants while watching his rice field to ward off birds. It was also played when harvest is done and the first bundles of the harvested rice are carried to the rice-shed.

The idea of the *calung jingjing*, developed in the 1950's, is a synthesis of two activities. Carrying their bamboo drums (*kohkol*), the night-watchers of the village beat drums to prevent them from sleeping. While beating the *kohkol*, they also sing.

#### Jaipongan Dance.

The name *Jaipongan* was borrowed from three nonsensical syllables, *ja-li-pong*. The syllables imitate the sound of a drum, used as an accompaniment for one of the oldest folkdance styles, called *Ketuktilu*. *Jaipongan* uses a drum beat with a lively pattern and which has been forgotten for a long period of time. The *Jaipongan* dance is often performed by skillful dancers as well

as enjoyed by the masses as a social dance.

#### Penca Dance

*Penca Silat* is an art of self-defence. It is a part of a larger tradition found throughout Asia. In Indonesia, it has developed into a unique dance called *Penca*.

*Penca* utilizes the movements of self-defence, which have been set into a distinctive type of music, called *Kendang Penca*. *Kendang* is the name of a drum. The instruments used for this dance are two different drums, a reed instrument, and a small gong called *Kempul*.

*Penca* dances are divided into four main types, according to the drum beat patterns and the tempo. They are : the *Pandungdung*, the *Tepak-Dua*, the *Tepak-Tilu*, and the *Peleredan*.

The *Padungdung* has the fastest tempo. It also functions as the opening piece. The *Tepak-Dua*, on the contrary, is the slowest. And the *Tepak-Tilu* and *peleredan* have medium tempos. The latter has, notably, a steady drum pattern.

*Penca* dances are usually performed on festive events, such as circumcisions and weddings. On the occasion of the *Penca* Festival, the best *penca* dance is selected.

#### The Music of Kecapi-Suling and Tembang/Kawih

The oldest style of singing accompanied by a *kecapi*, or a zither, is the *pantun* story-telling. The performance is held during the entire night. *Pantun* story-telling has a close connection with the rice rituals as well as initiation rites.

In the late 19th century, fixed classical songs were developed out of



Social dance encourages improvisation. Picture shows joyous men flirting with girl.

the pantun chant. Later on, a flute was added and this was followed by the insertion of the *rincik*, a small kecap, to the ensemble. In the process of development, fixed rhythmic songs came into being.

At present, singing parties are usually held in family circles, wherein friends and relatives sing informally. The parties sometimes last until early morning, the next day.

The lyrics of the songs may be nostalgic or romantic. It could also be about one's admiration of the beauty of his homeland.

#### Gotong Singa Dance

In persuading their son to submit himself for circumcision, parents usually provide entertainment.

The entertainment could be any kind and may be a *penca* performance, a small carnival for children, folkdance and music, a buffoonery play, a *wayang golek* or a wooden puppet play, or a West Javanese folk theatre called *longger*.

Among these entertainments, the *Gotong Singa* is becoming increasingly in demand today. *Gotong* means to carry and *singa* means a lion. This entertainment features an artificial lion. The lion is carried on poles by four strong men.

The lion is carried with a boy seated on it. Sometimes the lion is carried, with the boy, until one full day. Excited because he is riding on a lion instead of a horse, the boy is also entertained by the dancing

carriers and by others who join the funny dances.

The dancing procession crosses the village like a carnival. The occasion also becomes a small festival for the villagers, especially the children.

From the foregoing explanations of the different types of traditional Indonesian dance and music, it is obvious that Indonesia has similarities with other Southeast Asian countries. Their traditional arts exist as products of the same agricultural background and similar cultural heritages. With this idea in mind, a closer mutual understanding among the peoples of the region may be better promoted.

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