

**A Gamelan Composition Portfolio with Commentary: Collaborative
and Solo Processes of Composition with Reference to Javanese
Karawitan and Cultural Practice.**

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Project 3

Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 2, for Javanese gamelan, by Charlotte Pugh

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1) Initial Ideas

There were several starting points for this piece. Firstly there was a desire to write a full gamelan piece, and for this to be specifically my own composition, rather than a collaborative one. However, I would still include collaborative elements, such as a composition-by-rehearsal process.

Another starting point was the slendro melody from the final part of *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 1*, which is a piece for slendro gender and recorder written for my MMus degree, and performed at SOAS, London, in 2008.¹ Sounds were also an important inspiration, particularly those of bowed genders, gongs, gambang gangsa and peking, and the combination of these contrasting instruments. Another important initial idea was a dream I had about playing gamelan in parallel universes. Imagery from my dreams was generally an inspiration and I wanted to create a piece that could somehow recreate these images in music.

The slendro melody from my previous composition is played by five players on bowed gender barung and gender panerus, and these players distribute the notes between them. They decided how to do this in

¹ *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 1* is a separate piece from the one included in this portfolio, called *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 2*.

a way that worked best for them. Figure 4.1 shows the notation for this section.

Figure 4.1) Notation for slendro melody played on bowed genders.

$$\left[\overline{13} \ 6 \ . \mid \overline{13} \ \overline{62} \ . \mid \overline{13} \ 6 \ . \mid \overline{13} \ \overline{62} \ 6 \ . \right] \times 2$$

$$\left[\overline{25} \ 6 \ . \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \ . \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \ 5 \ . \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \ . \ . \right] \times 2$$

A pelog section was added, along with a section of a recording of a music box, which connected together to create an arch structure: diatonic tuning – slendro – pelog – slendro – diatonic. However, this structure emerged much later in the development of the piece. Figure 4.2 shows the notation for the pelog section.

Figure 4.2) Notation for the pelog section.

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} \overline{13} & \overline{51} & \overline{35} & \cdot 1 & \overline{35} & \overline{61} & \overline{53} & \cdot 1 \\ \overline{36} & | & \overline{53} & \cdot 6 & \overline{53} & | & 3 & ! \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{cccccccc} \overline{13} & \overline{51} & \overline{35} & \cdot 1 & \overline{35} & \overline{61} & \overline{53} & \cdot 1 \\ \overline{35} & \overline{61} & \overline{53} & \cdot 6 & \overline{53} & | & 2 & ! \end{array}$$

The intention for the pelog section was to reflect the more complex part of the music box melody (the ascending rush of notes heard from approximately 43s until 53s), with a more complex or lively pelog section that would then contrast with the slower slendro section. The pelog melody came from choosing to use the slendro melody and play it in pelog. I tried it in pelog with 7's and pelog with 1's, preferred it in pelog with 1's and transposed it down one note from the original. I then improvised around

the melody, taking smaller phrases and notes and expanding them. I recorded it all and then listened back, picking out melodies and phrases. Then I taught the phrases aurally to the group and whilst they were learning them, tried out different combinations and instrumentations. There are similarities here to the Sono Seni Ensemble rehearsal process.

2) Structure

The structure came much later, after most of the music was composed. I knew that the piece would be played in the gamelan concert and so I had to decide on the fixed structure of the piece and stick to it (I also felt some pressure to do this from members of the group who needed it to be fixed and to know what they were going to do).

The piece was simpler than I wanted it to be. This was partly because I was teaching the group aurally and it took a long time to learn. Also it was the first time I had composed a piece for a gamelan ensemble and my first time teaching a piece aurally, so I was feeling my way and being cautious. I knew that after the performance of the piece, I could continue developing the piece (in keeping with elements of flexibility found in gamelan – see section 3.4 in the overall commentary), and it did not have to stay as it was.

As stated earlier, an initial inspiration was a dream about playing gamelan in parallel universes, and other common images in my dreams about moving between different worlds. The music box section was intended to signify an opening and closing of doors into some kind of dreamlike and magical world, which the gamelan tunings represent.

3) Music Box

The music for this section was written for a music box on which one can create one's own music, by punching holes in a strip of card. I started by making patterns of notes on the card and at this point I was working with patterns rather than sounds. I then took certain phrases, for example, the opening phrase (shown in Figure 4.3) to use in this piece, plus I carried on using the patterns to create visual representations of the sound, for

example, the ascending rush of notes starting at 43s was created in this way.

Figure 4.3) Opening phrase of music box melody.



The piece starts with a recording of the piece being played three times, each out of synch with each other. I created this recording by playing the music box piece and recording it on my Zoom. I then played that first recording back on my hi-fi speakers and played the music box again along with it, slightly out of synch and recorded it. Then I played this recording of the two out of synch melodies and played the music box a third time. This resulted in a recording of three out of synch versions of the same melody. This process created a muffled and lo-fi sound, which suited the dreamlike atmosphere I wanted to create.

The effect of the music box creates a dreamlike state, which illustrates the dreamlike world I am attempting to create. The sound of the music box can perhaps conjure memories of childhood, memories of which can be quite hazy and dreamlike, which are reflected in the hazy sound quality of the recording of the music boxes, and the fact that they are slightly out of synch contributes to the atmosphere of uncertain memories. This sound world may compare to the way that of the Javanese gamelan may sound to a Western audience that is unfamiliar with it. It may sound otherworldly, with tuning systems that do not match those of Western tunings. It has certainly been described in this way by people hearing it for the first time.

Thus, we hear a combination of two sound worlds that may convey dreamlike feelings, images and memories. These sound worlds reinforce the concept of parallel worlds behind the piece. It is not just the sound world of the gamelan itself that is intended to convey a dreamlike world, it is also the music composed for the instruments, particularly the bowing of genders and bonang pots and the melodic phrases used – these are all untypical of traditional gamelan music. The bowing of the instruments

produces different harmonics and sounds that are not heard when the instruments are played conventionally.

4) Rehearsal and Composition Process

This piece was the first composition I would consider as mostly non-collaborative – it is my own composition. I would compose sections and then bring them to the group.

There were collaborative aspects, but most of these were more concerned with how I would teach the piece to the group, than the actual musical content. For example, teaching the group aurally meant that I could gauge how the music sounded, how long it would take to learn, who may be more suitable for certain parts than others. This rehearsal process also enabled me to make recordings every week, which I could take away and listen to, to help shape the piece.

At the start of the rehearsal process, people swapped around and learnt different parts. I considered this important, as it would hopefully give a fuller understanding of the piece. This connects to the ideal way of learning gamelan – learning as many instruments and parts as possible – the piece consists of the whole. Towards the performance, I notated parts and gave them to people who needed them.

One part of the piece that was created collaboratively was the gong part. I worked with Jacobs for this. I asked him to play gongs along to the melody and I suggested that I wanted separate tunings first (slendro and then pelog) and then both tunings played together.

Although I have described this piece as mostly non-collaborative, there are still elements of collaboration present. Specifically the ‘composition by rehearsal’ process, where I tried out musical ideas – this is collaborative in the way that feedback from the players was vital in helping me to compose the piece, especially in the issues of actually playing the music – what was possible to play, how the parts sounded together, and also how to notate or teach the parts.

Also, the fact that this piece was mostly non-collaborative unlike the other projects in this portfolio, is part of the creative journey of this

portfolio, which looks at the way the collaborations I have been involved in affect my creativity. Through collaboration, I have learned the skills and confidence to create my own music, whilst still retaining the aesthetics of collaboration in different ways. For example, I could not have composed this piece solely on my own, as I needed the practical input and moral support of the group.

5) Connection to Other Projects

There are connections to the *Ice Pictures* trio. For example, the contrasting sounds of gongs, bowed gendfers, gambang gangsa and peking were explored in this collaboration, and these sounds provided one of the inspirations for *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 2*.

Other connections mainly concern the rebab line, which was again developed from ideas derived from improvisation for that trio. This material was used extensively in the pieces *Gundrlay*, *Rebab Wind and Grind*, and *Rough Sand Circles* (these pieces are examined in Project 2). The rebab solo was the last part of the piece I worked on and it was intended to fit over the rest of the piece, like a veil or a spider's web – invoking the ethereal quality of my dreams. Working with Jacobs on his music had meant playing in higher registers than I was used to, and the exploration of double-stopping, which is not normally done in traditional rebab playing. These things developed my playing technique and made it stronger, and improvising with the trio then developed this further.

This style of rebab playing also connects both to the OOF collaborative duo with Charles Matthews, and the *Ice Pictures* collaborative trio with Jon Hughes and John Jacobs.² This playing features much glissandi and vibrato (and more exaggerated than in traditional playing). See also section 2.3 in the overall commentary, which discusses the development of playing techniques.

This piece also connects to *I Fear No Spirits* in various ways. Firstly, the titles are similar. Both are phrases taken from other people's

² See track 2 on the CD for the collaboration with Charles Matthews – *Rebab, Long Delays and Feedback*. And also the three tracks on the CD for *Ice Pictures* trio – *Gundrlay, Rebab Wind and Grind*, and *Rough Sand Circles*.

work. *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue...Part 2* is from *Paul Bunyan* by Britten (libretto by Auden), and *I Fear No Spirits* is from *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* by Lotte Reiniger. A second connection is that the pelog section of *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue...Part 2* became *Moon in Pelog*. The main melody was extended, elaborated and more parts were added, such as peking, extra saron, demung, slenthem, bonang, gongs, kempuls, kenong, vocals and suling. The piece also became more complex.

In some ways, I consider *I Fear No Spirits* to be a development of *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue...Part 2*, as it has ideas in common of dreams and different realities. Visual aspects are also very important for both pieces (a common theme in all my work). Another common theme was also a connection with my emotional state.

6) Connections to karawitan

One notable difference between this piece and the other music in this portfolio is the absence of many strong structural connections to karawitan. The main connections to karawitan found in this piece are through the use of gongs and kempuls in the slendro bowed section at the beginning of the gamelan section of the piece. The gongs and kempuls punctuate the melody in a kind of colotomic structure that echoes that found in karawitan. These are also the main example of a traditional instrumental role. In the middle pelog section most of the instruments are playing in unison, there is no heterophony, so these instrumental roles are very different to karawitan.

The role of the rebab could be seen as being partly traditional, as it 'sews' the piece together. I visualise it as a kind of musical thread, or web, which deliberately covers the whole gamelan part of the piece (it is not played in the music box sections). This role can fit in with Supanggah's description of the rebab as '...the spiritual leader of the gendhing/karawitan. The rebab is also the life or soul of the gendhing' (2011, p.101). I was playing the rebab part in this piece, and the part was intended to express my inner emotions.

Connections to karawitan in this piece are more along the lines of those found in *I Fear No Spirits* – those of rasa and meditation, and the expression of these in the music. Supanggah suggests (while discussing rasa):

Each person can determine the extremes and groups of rasa according to his or her own perception and interpretation. This may range from the saddest to the happiest or the angriest character, or may use other parameters such as the psychological burden borne by the musicians, the weight of lightheartedness of performing a gendhing. (2011, 234)

This is in reference to karawitan, but can be extended to the creation of new music. So, *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue...Part 2* is a branch on the karawitan 'tree'. (Discussed in section 2.2 of the commentary.)

The connections to karawitan here are perhaps broader than purely technical ones, and are more concerned with rasa and meditation, and there are perhaps slightly more 'extra-musical' connections.

I suggest that in this piece I have used the parameter, as Supanggah suggests in the above quote, of the 'psychological burden borne by the musicians', to determine the rasa of this piece. Meditation is illustrated by the use of the rebab, which sews the piece together. As well as expressing my inner emotions, it is intended to do so meditatively, using elements of meditative processes – the rebab is intended to describe the thoughts and feeling that weave through the music, considering them as one would during meditation. The stillness of the slendro parts of the music also reflects feelings of meditation and the search for inner peace.

This kind of self expression is not alien to karawitan, but not particularly common. Self-expression is more evident in pieces that use miring (particularly heard in the rebab and vocal parts) and tlutur pieces which invoke melancholy moods (such as Sendhon Tlutur, which is used in

I Fear No Spirits). The rebab line in *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... part 2* also uses miring notes, and these therefore illustrate feelings of sadness and melancholy.

There are technical similarities to karawitan (as discussed above), but important expressive differences. With the exception of tlutur and pieces featuring miring, most karawitan and the performance of it does not feature strong elements of self-expression. When tlutur or miring pieces are played, they are usually expressing the feelings of a particular wayang or dance character, rather than the personal feelings of those performing it. Although it is not true to say that karawitan has no self-expression (Supanggih's quote suggests that it does), it is perhaps conveyed more indirectly, as is 'elusiveness', a strong feature of karawitan. (Discussed in *I Fear No Spirits*.) The use of rebab in this piece is intended to convey a much more direct sense of my personal self-expression, rather than through the medium of a character.

Figure 4.4) Notation for *Look at the Moon! It's Turning Blue... Part 2*

Overall structure

Overall Structure

- Bonang start bowing (from end of music box section)

- Bowed genders - slendro

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--|----------------------|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| A x 2 | | A x 2 | | A x 2 | | A x etc (fade out after gambang gangsa has |
| B x 2 | | B x 2 | | B x 2 | | switched to pelog and played A two times.) |
| | | (+ slendro gongs) | | (+ dischord gongs) | | |

↳ Gambang gangsa plays A in slendro twice, then A in pelog twice, then plays pelog @ twice - the rest of the balungan (except slenthem) come in on: $\cdot \bar{6} \bar{5} \bar{6} | 1 \cdot \cdot |$ on the second time.

- Then - pelog (b) x 2 } - no slenthem

" (c) x 1 }

" (a) x 1 } - slenthem joins in

" (b) x 1 }

" (c) x 1 }

- then $\cdot \bar{6} \bar{5} \bar{6} | 2 \cdot \bar{6} \bar{5} \bar{6} | 1 \cdot \cdot | \times 3$ (speeding up)

then $\cdot \bar{6} \bar{5} \bar{6} | 1 | \times 3$ (speeding up and crescendo)

- Then into (d) - last note of $\cdot \bar{6} \bar{5} \bar{6} | 1$ becomes the first note of (d)

- Then (d) x 2 (all balungan and gender, slenthem only on 3! of 1st and 2nd time)

(e) x 2 (1st time just gender and gambang gangsa,

2nd time everyone else joins in, gongs on the second time)

(d) x 1 (just gender and gambang gangsa)

(e) x 1 (everyone else joins in, plus gongs)

- Then stop and let everything ring.

- Then rebab solo.

- Then slendro bowed genders play A four times.

Figure 4.5) Notation for slendro section

Notation for slendro section:

$$A \left[\overline{13} \ 6 \cdot \mid \overline{13} \ \overline{62} \cdot \mid \overline{13} \ 6 \cdot \mid \overline{13} \ \overline{62} \ 6 \cdot \right] \times 2$$

$$B \left[\overline{25} \ 6 \cdot \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \cdot \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \ 5 \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{66} \cdot \cdot \right] \times 2$$

Figure 4.6) Notation for the pelog section

Notation for pelog section:

$$\textcircled{a} \ \overline{62} \ 5 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid \overline{15} \ \overline{5} \ \overline{65} \mid \overline{62} \ 5 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid 1 \cdot \cdot \mid$$

$$\textcircled{b} \ \overline{62} \ 5 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid \overline{25} \ \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid 2 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid 1 \cdot \cdot \mid$$

$$\textcircled{c} \ \overline{62} \ 5 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid \overline{35} \ \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid 2 \cdot \overline{6} \ \overline{56} \mid 1 \cdot \cdot \mid$$

$$\textcircled{d} \ \overline{13} \ \overline{51} \ \overline{35} \ \overline{1} \ \overline{35} \ \overline{61} \ \overline{53} \ \overline{1} \\ \overline{35} \ \overline{61} \ \overline{53} \ \overline{6} \ \overline{53} \ 1 \ 3 \ 1$$

$$\textcircled{e} \ \overline{13} \ \overline{51} \ \overline{35} \ \overline{1} \ \overline{35} \ \overline{61} \ \overline{53} \ \overline{1} \\ \overline{35} \ \overline{61} \ \overline{53} \ \overline{6} \ \overline{53} \ 1 \ 2 \ 1$$

