

UNIQUE EXPERIENCE DURING THE 3RD SEAMEX (SOUTHEAST ASIA MUSIC EDUCATION EXCHANGE) 2019, INDONESIA

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Abstract

SEAMEX (Southeast Asia Music Education Exchange) is said to be the 1st dedicated marketplace for music education in Southeast Asia. The 3rd SEAMEX 2019: “Music, Sphere, and Interconnected Generation” was held at Jogja National Museum in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from 6-8 September, 2019. As a group, Gamelan Shanghai, organized by Gisa Jähnichen from Shanghai Conservatory of Music, was very honored to be invited to participate in this big event. 10 members of the group are from different countries and have different majors such as composition, instrumental performance, music education, and ethnomusicology. But this time, they were all gamelan performers. Some of them studied gamelan over 2 years. This paper will present their unique thoughts and feelings during the event SEAMEX.

Keywords

Southeast Asia, Gamelan, Festival, Education Exchange

The event “SEAMEX” (Southeast Asia Music Education Exchange) is said to be the 1st dedicated marketplace for music education in Southeast Asia. The founder of SEAMEX is Isabella Pek from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. After the event was held in Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, the 3rd SEAMEX 2019 under the title “Music, Sphere, and Interconnected Generation” was organized at Jogja National Museum of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from 6-8 September, 2019. More than 1,200 music professionals from 10 ASEAN countries came together to share ideas and musics. Other international representatives were also invited to participate in the dialogues¹.

SEAMEX consisted of 7 organizational parts: Music Edu Fair, Conference, Performances, Music Talk, Music Demonstration, ASEAN Youth Music Projects, and Music Workshop. Hilmar Farid, who is the director general of “Culture of Yogyakarta”, said that SEAMEX 2019 would contribute greatly to the efforts in promoting Southeast Asia’s music in particular, and culture in general, to the global stage. SEAMEX was expected to become a platform for a series of discussions that talked about music between speakers, coaches, and practitioners from different genres of music and of various backgrounds². It was clear that the discussions were based on different issues and related to a variety of music practices, such as Jazz and Popular Music in Indonesia, Harmonization in Hindustani Music Fusion, Music-Women-Continuity in Minangkabau, Folk Music in the Basic Education of Thailand and others. Also, the workshops and performances are consisting diverse forms, some of them are attributed to traditional music, but new compositions were welcome, too. The topics include Malaysian and Philippine choir music, keroncong, Jazz improvisation and dance theatre.

As a group, “Gamelan Shanghai” organized by Gisa Jähnichen³ at Shanghai Conservatory of Music (SHCM) was very honored to be invited to participate in the event. “Gamelan Shanghai” exists since

¹ SEAMEX 2019 Indonesia Secretariat. 2019. <https://seamex2019.com/page/12/about-us>. Consulted 10/20/2019.

² SEAMEX 2019 Indonesia Secretariat. 2019. The Program Book of SEAMEX.

³ Prof. Dr. Gisa Jähnichen is, among others, teaching gamelan practice at Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

2016. Every semester, the gamelan course takes in new students and staff from all main subjects at SHCM. Some members stay for another semester. This mixture is challenging and helpful at the same time. This time, the team was formed by six persons from SHCM: Gisa Jähnichen, Yin Xiang (尹翔), Jiang Anran (蒋安然), Lim Hyoseung (林孝承, 韩国), Liu Xiangkun (刘祥焜), Angga Yudhistira (杨宇嘉) and four persons from Malaysia: Ainnur Aiman, Gerald Ng, Shirley Lim and Amin Nur Azim.

All of them have for a shorter or longer time participated in gamelan classes taught by Gisa Jähnichen. Some even learned gamelan more than 2 years. This chance brought them together. Despite the interesting rehearsals and the well-attended performances, they exchanged instruments and tried some new improvisation, so, they also have had discussions with each other about their different musical cultures.

The repertoire they performed this time include two parts: one part was themed “Plants in Chinese Life” consisted of 6 pieces: Bamboo, Tea, Rice, Gingko, Chrysanthemums and Burning Forest. These plants, actually excluding the last one, are specifically meaningful in China. Their connotations go beyond the view of them as simple plants. They relate tightly with life and they all have a special meaning in some parts of the Chinese culture such as Bamboo with literati, Chrysanthemums with the Double Ninth Festival and yearning. As Gisa Jähnichen said, a choice from flowers, grains, trees, and grasses may invoke associations through the presented pieces dedicated to environmental issues that all follow the cyclic scheme of gamelan playing and the layer rules of gamelan instruments. It is worth mentioning that the last piece “Burning Forest” was a special arrangement. Firstly, it means that all the plants we showed before may one day burn in the fire. The aim is to remind people to protect the environment. Secondly, there was a sad event taking place at that time: a big fire burned parts of the Amazonian Forest. This is an enormous disaster for the whole humankind. We try to use this way to express our sorrow. In addition, the melodies of them are partly taken from traditional local repertoire and interwoven with complex interpretations to shape a new texture.

The second part was a special piece based on the traditional Bubaran and composed by Supanggih assisted by a number of talented arrangers from Indonesia. It is a piece for a symphonic orchestra, choir and gamelan. Such a unique experience for all of us! We got the stave notation of the gamelan part instead of a traditional one in order to read it faster. And we needed to follow several gamelan players from Jogjakarta who sat before us thus being able to focus on the conductor’s gestures all the time. This is a totally different feeling of playing the gamelan. We learned that for a gamelan ensemble, the most important thing is listening. We have to learn to be responsible for our own part, but in the same time, we need to listen to others, to cooperate with everyone else. During the gamelan lesson, we always try to arrange the pieces, and adjust our own part frequently with the whole group. But when we play with the orchestra, the way of cooperation changed. I feel like the gamelan plays a special role and is in charge of a unique timbre representing the local thoughts of Indonesia to some extent. Without doubt, the piece Bubaran is a wonderful piece. It is a fusion work to express grand-epics-emotion.

SEAMEX involved many different types of music and discussion issues. Inclusivity is a typical trait of it. This is important to the social and cultural context of Southeast Asia, which is in need of open inclusivity. We could feel this core problem in the piece Bubaran and other works produced in this land. Different persons brought their own understanding of Southeast Asia, too, just like our “Plants in Chinese Life”, which progressed coming from a preceding “Animals in Chinese Legends”. After participating in this event, Lim Hyoseung from Korea, who is one of the many international students at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, looks forward to have more interflow with SEAMEX and tries to create a new composition combining gamelan with Chinese and Korean music elements. Similar thoughts move the drum player Angga Yudhistira, he joined the workshop in SEAMEX and tried to use his way of drumming to have more open conversations between different musical experiences. And SEAMEX also made myself thinking more about the role of different music cultures, the cooperation and negotiation between them, and let me rethink to the abundance of creative possibilities. What’s the influence of SEAMEX on these different types of music? I think raising this question is, maybe, the core significance of SEAMEX.





FIGURES 1-3: Gamelan Shanghai on stage (Photos courtesy of the organizers).

REFERENCES

SEAMEX 2019 Indonesia Secretariat. 2019. The Program Book of SEAMEX.

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