



East Meets West, With a Punch

Eight young Indonesian composers were commissioned to compose for the Frankfurt-based Ensemble Modern. The compositions, performed at the Salihara Theater, are a bold nod to both Western and Indonesian traditions.

FRANKFURT'S Ensemble Modern musicians, clad in pink, purple and neon green, may not be your typical concert hall scenery of classically trained musicians at work. And there's nothing typical about *Soundscapes*, with an intro that made the audience look around in an initial bewilderment followed by evident glee. The ensemble musicians stomped rhythmically toward their seats before the *saluang* (a traditional woodwind instrument), played by the night's first composer Ris Banbos, made a subdued entrance from the opposite end of the stage. The pieces performed at *Soundscapes*, the grand finale of the three-month long German Fest, ranged from the avant-garde to the contemporary classical, merging Western, Indonesian and non-traditional musical instruments with visual and performative elements.

New Music, Chief Manager of Ensemble Modern Roland Diry explained, "...is the tradition of developing new ideas." The ensemble is clearly interested in challenging the boundaries of music: experimenting with various bowing methods and tuning systems, stretching the potentials of both traditional and non-traditional musical instruments—taking a big gulp of water

Soundscapes Ensemble Modern

Conductor: Franck Ollu

Composers: Ris Banbos, M. Arham Aryadi, Joko Winarno, Taufik A. Adam, Gema Swaratyagita, I Dewa Ketut Alit, Stevie Jonathan Sutanto, and Gatot Danar Sulistyanto

and gurgling included, as is the case in Joko Winarno's imaginative *Krotoguns*. Other composers, such as Gatot Danar Sulistyanto and Gema Swaratyagita, combined performative aspects with vocal utterances, while M. Arham Aryadi sound-engineered city clamor recorded in Frankfurt, and Stevie Jonathan Sutanto, the youngest of the eight, incorporated visual elements into his composition.

The eight young Indonesian composers selected by the Frankfurt-based ensemble to compose pieces for *Soundscapes* went through a rigorous selection process, which included a workshop in Jakarta, attended by 16 composers, followed by a two-week workshop in January 2015 in Frankfurt, Germany, where the final selection of eight composers worked closely with the Ensemble Modern musicians. The December 2 concert at the Salihara Arts Complex in Jakarta was the concert's Indonesian

premiere.

For some of these composers, working with a Western ensemble was a first. Not surprisingly, as revealed in the documentary *Ruang Suara: Soundscapes* by the British-Ethiopian filmmaker Theo Eshetu, screened prior to the performance, there were evident challenges.

Taufik A. Adam, whose piece *Balayia* evokes the culture of going out to sea among the coastal communities of Western Sumatra, for example, said he was asked why he played the *bansai* (a Minangkabau woodwind instrument) differently at each rehearsal. "I play according to my mood at any given time," he explained. Additionally, not all eight composers presented their work using the staff notation. Some composed using the numbered system, which was then transcribed into the Western staff notation.

Though most of the Indonesian composers chose to combine Western and Indonesian instruments, I Dewa Ketut Alit, a seasoned Balinese *gamelan* musician, opted to work solely with Western instruments. "I had never worked exclusively with Western instruments before, so I knew from the start that this was an opportunity to give it a try," he said.

Soundscapes is the collaborative project of the Goethe-Institut, the Ensemble Modern and the KfW Stiftung, Germany's state-owned development bank. *Soundscapes* premiered in October 2015 at the Frankfurt LAB, prior to the Frankfurt Book Fair, and will be traveling to Yogyakarta and Bandung to perform on December 4 and 6.

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