

There is a common thread throughout the compositions included on this two-disc set, namely the intermingling of South Asian musics with western improvised music. Disc 1 is comprised of one long work firmly rooted in the Indonesian gamelan music of Central and West Java but influenced by western music, while disc 2 is an inversion of that: jazz compositions with South Asian influences ranging from the Middle East to Bali. The discs are named “Java” and “New York” respectively and reflect different periods and different aspects of my compositional life. Taken together the writing spans 35 years.

Disc 1

Gendhing For a Spirit Rising is a symphonic-length work for ten musicians in four movements written over a period of 15 years. It reflects a number of musical loves of mine, most notably Javanese and Sundanese gamelan and modern jazz improvisation. The unusually long gestation period also reflects an internal growth process that had to do with assimilating disparate forms of music emanating from extremely disparate cultures, then distilling them through my own particular aesthetic sensibilities.

My first exposure to gamelan was as an undergraduate at Yale, and the path traveled to that music was a rather circuitous one. Through a survey course on avant-garde classical music, I became acquainted with minimalism and was fascinated by it. Minimalism was at high tide in both music and the visual arts at that time (the early '70's), and the emerging composer Steve Reich made a particularly strong impression. His use of gradually shifting, repetitive rhythmic motifs, orchestrated for an earthy array of mallet instruments, percussion and strings, seemed to bring two worlds together, if tenuously. I imagined one to be very old and the other very new, although I really didn't know where those old sounds were coming from. I went on to play in Reich's ensemble briefly the next year and realized that although the music was beautiful in its own way, it was lacking

some vital qualities that the other music I was becoming more and more involved with, jazz, had in abundance. These were improvisation (with its inherent spontaneity), swing and soul. I was, however, taken with the textural richness of Reich's music and was curious if there were musics from other cultures that embraced all of those things. Reich mentioned something about Balinese gamelan at some point, and when I happened upon an album of Javanese gamelan in a local record store, I figured “gamelan was gamelan” and I snapped it up. (The two musics, I would later learn, are worlds apart, if emanating from adjacent islands). I was totally enthralled by it and so I kept foraging to see what else was out there and came across Pygmy music from Cameroon, Timbila marimbaphone orchestras from Mozambique and so on, and my mind was blown by what I was hearing.

Not one piece of music out of all the music history courses required for my music degree was written outside of the European continent. So upon graduating, I enrolled at Cal Arts to study Ghanaian drumming and Javanese gamelan, to make up for some lost time, as it were, and go far away while I was at it. That turned out to be not quite far enough. Although it took another 8 years, I eventually got all the way to the source, Surakarta, a city of half a million people, which at one time was the seat of one of the two great kingdoms of Central Java, where most of the Javanese music we hear in the West originates. I had the luxury of a Fulbright grant, which meant I could stay for a full year and delve not only into the music but also the culture, which was a big plus. Much of the music on disc 1 is an outgrowth of that experience.

The first movement, *Ladrang*, was written while I was still a student in California. It is simpler than the later movements, relying less on ornamental counterpoint and more on churning ostinatos for its textural richness. The name is derived from the form of the same name which has a gong cycle of 32 beats (traditional Javanese gamelan is structured around gong cycles of varying lengths, the longest, to my knowledge, being 256 beats, often resulting in gongs occurring several minutes apart!).