

Stories from *The Jakarta Post*

Homecoming tour

Wed, August 23 2017 | 01:14 am



London-based gamelan group Siswa Sukra performs at the Indonesia Art Institute (ISI) in Surakarta, Central Java, on Monday evening.(JP/Ganug Nugroho Adi)...

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<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/08/23/homecoming-tour.html>

Preserving Javanese culture through gamelan

Posted: Tue, September 5, 2017 | 12:36 pm

Twenty-four foreigners who are members of the Siswa Sukra gamelan group, which is based in Britain, visited Indonesia from Aug. 5-22. They visited Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Surakarta as part of their training.

They first performed at the Museum Wayang (Puppet Museum) in Central Jakarta on Aug. 6, followed by performances in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. They also visited Mojolaban, which is the center of gamelan instrument production.

It is extraordinary that foreigners play the gamelan, which unfortunately has been abandoned by the younger generation in Indonesia. Fewer and fewer youths show an interest in learning how to play the gamelan – which is ironic, especially since foreigners are interested in playing the instruments.

It is important that the younger generation help preserve the culture as Indonesia will hold the 2018 International Gamelan Festival. [yan]



British nationals of the Siswa Sukra group play gamelan instruments at North Sabrang village in Trucuk, Klaten regency, Central Java, on Sunday, Aug. 20, 2017. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Female gamelan players put on makeup prior to their performance. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Indonesian Dona (left) and Andrea of Germany rehearse their dance moves accompanied by gamelan played by Sukra members at the Indonesian Arts Institute auditorium in Surakarta, Central Java, on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



A gamelan instrument is played while a note is laid on top of it during rehearsal. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Sukra members rehearse before a performance at the Indonesian Arts Institute auditorium in Surakarta, Central Java, on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Sukra members play gending (songs) during their visit to Surakarta, Central Java. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Female gamelan players wear kebaya (traditional blouses) during a performance in Surakarta, Central Java. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Clad in traditional attire, Sukra members perform at the Indonesian Arts Institute auditorium in Surakarta, Central Java. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



A sinden (singer) from London amazes the audience during her performance in Surakarta. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Sukra members perform in Surakarta. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan



Indonesia dancer Dona (left) and Andrea of Germany perform wearing traditional attire. JP/Maksum Nur Fauzan

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/multimedia/2017/09/05/preserving-javanese-culture-through-gamelan.html>

Siswa Sukra a British gamelan affair

Ganug Nugroho Adi

Surakarta, Central Java | Thu, September 14 2017 | 01:25 am



Show time: Siswa Sukra, one of around 150 British gamelan groups, gives a live performance. (JP/Ganug Nugroho Adi)

A pesinden (Javanese female singer) sang a Javanese poetry song called Gending Kutut Manggung with grace and eloquence during a recent performance at the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) in Surakarta, Central Java. This pesinden, however, is not your typical one. Despite her eloquence and versatility in singing Javanese songs in the traditional language, she is not Javanese. Instead, she is British and her name is Cathy Eastburn.

Eastburn performed with Siswa Sukra, a London-based gamelan group headed by Peter Smith.

Practice makes perfect: The Siswa Sukra gamelan group trains at the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) in Surakarta, Central Java.



Cathy Eastburn

Ganug Nugroho Adi

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Eastburn performed with Siswa Sukra, a London-based gamelan group headed by Peter Smith.

The group's main base is at the Royal Festival Hall in London, and the performance of ISI was part of its Governor Agung Kawiyang (Gubernur Robertus Hama) tour, which also included Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Magelang and Solo. **Read: August 7 to August 23**

"We're visiting Indonesia, especially Solo (Surakarta), to walk down memory lane. We're expressing our gratitude to all the instructors, because we learned how to play gamelan from this census [ISI]," Smith said in Surakarta.

In 1982, Peter, who prefers to be called Peto, or Peto, began his three-year study of gamelan

at the campus. Before he began studying the art of gamelan, he first became acquainted with it when he was studying piano at York University in 1982.

"At the time, Professor Neil Sorelli, a lecturer at York University, brought a set of strange musical instruments to the campus. I helped unpack them. They were beautiful, with arrays of drujetas, flutes and boxes. I was stunned. It was my first sight of gamelan instruments," he recalled.

Sorelli had been involved with the gamelan since the 1970s. Smith then learned gamelan from Sorelli and took classes at Southbank Center, the largest arts and cultural centre in the world. Having fallen completely in love with gamelan, Smith then decided to leave his piano study.

Smith eventually met Pradiyanto, an ISI gamelan lecturer, during an Indonesian arts festival at the Indonesian Embassy in 1990. From Pradiyanto, Smith obtained a scholarship recommendation to study gamelan in Indonesia in 1992.

"I should have spent only a year in Solo, but I stayed there for three years. Even now I will frequently travel back and forth, even twice a year. Solo reminds me of the village atmosphere during my childhood," he said.

SISWA SUKRA a British gamelan affair

A pesinden (Javanese female singer) sings a Javanese poetry song called Giending Kunn Manggung with grace and eloquence during a recent performance at the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) in Surakarta, Central Java.



Life-long passion: Siswa Sukra head and founder Peter Smith (second from right) playing gamelan during a practice session at ISI in Surakarta, Central Java.

Returning from Indonesia in 1996, Smith taught gamelan on campuses like Oxford University, Kingston University and Southbank Center to students ranging from beginner to advanced level.

Smith remembered how difficult it was during the initial phase to introduce gamelan to people in Britain because of the instrument's non-British origin.

He then tried to offer free gamelan practice to communities at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and the United Gamelan Society by opening a range of classes starting with a class for seven-year-olds. "They responded in different ways, so we took different approaches. But I like to do the large, I love gamelan. For me gamelan is (most interesting and) hard to keep there," Smith said.

"There were also other British gamelan experts who helped Smith during the initial phase of introducing the art to Britain.

Some of these experts were Southbank Center Gamelan Manager Sophie Bamford, who has played gamelan since she was 12. Eastburn, who has played gamelan for over 30 years and is now a famous British pesinden, and gamelan musician Richard Finchcombe.

The regular meetings of Southbank Center led to them forming the Siswa Sukra gamelan group, which launched its sector in 2000 at an arts festival in London. Along with Siswa Sukra, there are about 100 gamelan groups all over Britain today.

"New means students and Sukra is Friday. We chose Friday because it's the day of our regular class meetings. So we adopted the name Siswa Sukra," Smith said about the origin of the group's name.

Siswa Sukra now has 23 members ranging in age from 21 to 71 with diverse social, educational and occupational backgrounds. Most of them have learned and played gamelan at Southbank Center for five to 15 years.

In Britain, Siswa Sukra has often performed at various cities, offering different kinds of Ja-

vianese music from modern gending (poetry songs with gamelan), Javanese dance music, to classical gending compositions from the palaces of Surakarta and Yogyakarta.

Several Siswa Sukra members have followed in Smith's footsteps, studying gamelan at ISI-Surakarta. Among these members are Jeremy Best, a high school teacher, and Jonathan Roberts, a doctor of gamelan whose dissertation concerned non-professional gamelan groups in Surakarta.

"I've been playing gamelan for 21 years now. It is a remarkable kind of music because it can bring people closer together and form a family," Jonathan, who is also a finalist Javanese speaker, said.

According to Eastburn, the beautiful sound of gamelan is not only pleasing to the ear but also serves as a remedy to reduce stress.

"Its vibrations and resonance enter the body, permeating the nerves and leading to something positive. The music environment eases stress due to a lot of pressure and isolation. So, I think why not take gamelan to prisons," Eastburn said.

With this conviction, Eastburn has introduced gamelan to prison inmates through various workshops.

Eastburn's idea has now turned into a charity called Good Vibrations. In the last 13 years, around 5,000 inmates in 96 prisons/factories in Britain have received gamelan training and therapy from Eastburn and the charity.

Eastburn believes that gamelan helps people to develop self-control. Learning this Javanese music constitutes an initial step for the prison inmates to change their lives when they are released.

"For us, Siswa Sukra is an Indonesian group. They love Indonesian culture, introducing and popularizing gamelan in Britain," said Ahmad Mahendra from the Directorate General of Culture, Education and Culture Ministry.

— PHOTOS BY JPI GANUG NUGROHO ADI

Show time: Siswa Sukra, one of around 100 British gamelan groups, gives a live performance.





Cathy Eastburn (JP/Ganug Nugroho Adi)

The group's main base is at the Royal Festival Hall in London, and the performance at ISI was part of its *Gamelan Pulang Kampung* (Gamelan Returns Home) tour, which also included Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Magelang and Klaten from August 5 to August 22.

"We're visiting Indonesia, especially Solo [Surakarta] to walk down memory lane. We're expressing our gratitude to all the instructors, because we learned how to play gamelan from this campus [ISI]," Smith said in fluent Javanese.

In 1992, Peter, who prefers to be called Parto or Pete, began his three-year study of gamelan at the campus. Before he began studying the art of gamelan, he first became acquainted with it when he was studying piano at York University in 1982.

"At the time, Professor Neil Sorrell, a lecturer at York University, brought a set of strange musical instruments to the campus. I helped unpack them. They were beautiful, with carvings of dragons, flowers and leaves. I was stunned. It was my first sight of gamelan instruments," he recalled.



Lifelong passion: Siswa Sukra head and founder Peter Smith (second from right) playing gamelan during a practice session at ISI in Surakarta, Central Java. (JP/Ganug Nugroho Adi)

Sorrell had been involved with the gamelan since the 1970s. Smith then learned gamelan from Sorrell and took classes at Southbank Center, the largest arts and cultural center in the world. Having fallen completely in love with gamelan, Smith then decided to leave his piano study.

Smith eventually met Prasadiyanto, an ISI gamelan lecturer, during an Indonesian arts festival at the Indonesian Embassy in 1990. From Prasadiyanto, Smith obtained a scholarship recommendation to study gamelan in Indonesia in 1992.

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Practice makes perfect: The Siswa Sukra gamelan group trains at the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI) in Surakarta, Central Java. (JP/Ganug Nugroho Adi)

“They responded in different ways, so we took different approaches. But I like such a challenge. I love gamelan. For me gamelan is intoxicating and I want it to thrive there,” Smith said.

There were also other British gamelan experts who helped Smith during the initial phase of introducing the art to Britain.

Some of these experts were Southbank Center Gamelan Manager Sophie Ransby, who has played gamelan since she was 12, Eastburn, who has played gamelan for over 30 years and is now a famous British *pesinden*, and gamelan musician Richard Pickvance.

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[Link to Tari Gambyong Pangkur on YouTube](#)

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