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REVIEW

*Gamelan Sekar Jaya**GSJ 30th Anniversary: 'Serasi', 'Bebarisan',
'and others'**May 2009**San Francisco, Cowell Theatre**by Renee Renouf*

The fall of 1979 Michael Tenzer and Rachel Cooper coordinated a group of Balinese enthusiasts to start Gamelan Sekar Jaya. Using an East Bay residence as its clubhouse and living quarters for guest artists, Sekar Jaya gave its first public performance at Fort Mason, February 9, 1980. This year at San Francisco's International Arts Festival, it used its initial rehearsal period as the basis for celebrating its remarkable three decades of active study and performance. One of the original devotees, Wayne Vitale, took over the director's role when Tenzer and Cooper moved on. May 22,23 and 24 the ensemble appeared as one of the San Francisco International Arts Festival offerings at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater.

Whatever the historical details, Sekar Jaya embodies the principles of artistic exchange which Andrew Wood, director of the San Francisco International Arts Festival, is seeking to make common San Francisco practice each spring. It also expresses remarkable community and generational continuity; not only did the original organizers arrive to celebrate the occasion, but so did the original musician and dance instructor, I Nyomen and Ninik Wenten, who now teach at Cal Arts in Valencia. Gathering to assist in the occasion was Larry Reed, puppet master and leader of Shadow Play translating for the dance drama Palewakia, a kebyar work, jointly performed by I Made Moja and Emiko Sarasawati Susilo.

I was familiar with Susilo, having seen her parents perform in the heyday of the Ethnomusicology Program at UCLA under the late Mantle Hood. Susilo is currently in residence with Sekar Jaya as guest dance director with her husband I Dewa Putu Berata, guest music director. The couple started Cudamani, an arts school and performing company in Bali. While raised primarily in the United States, Susilo, tall like her mother Judy Mitoma, over two decades has absorbed

Balinese style and emotional projection to an amazing degree. The filigree of her hand gestures and the darting movements of her head matched Moja's, affiliated with Larry Reed. Both artists matched each other in height and were costumed in the elaborate layered body coverings and formidable head ornaments.

Palewakia was the second part of Serasi, or harmony arranged by Berata and Susilo and designed to emphasize balance, harmony, and interdependence amongst human beings, nature and the spiritual world, all central to Balinese belief. Serasi had opened with a collective style dance, Niti Sari, performed by women of all ages as a ritual offering; I might add also of all sizes and degree of skill, though a basic facility was evident. Here Nanik Wenten appeared as well as Koping Metri Davies, another gifted Balinese artist.

An opening excerpt from the famous Legong tradition, confined to pre-adolescent girls, was danced by Dewa Ayu Devi Larassanti, daughter of Berata and Susilo. With her small body tightly bound in brilliant marigold and red, and a headdress with two horn-like flower spikes which she once or twice adjusted, young Larassanti looked to be seventy-five per cent large, dark inquiring eyes, aged eighty going on nine years old. Obviously lithe and supple, the dance nonetheless was both a feat of memory and energy which she executed with utter aplomb; only once or twice was there a flicker to reveal the youthful concentration and young girl behind the utterly professional demeanor. The audience was extremely privileged to enjoy the rarity of the number which Balinese musical devotee Dudley Brooks informed me was the first and maid's entrance to the full length legong.

The program was completed with Bebarisan, again danced by the remarkable Sekar Jaya community, fully intent on its next three decades of making Balinese music and dance a continuing part of San Francisco Bay Area life.