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Contemporary Music in Indonesia – Between Local Traditions, National Obligations and International Influences

When we speak about the music of a country like Indonesia, we generally think of various so-called “traditional musics” of the various ethnics. The term “traditional” is often regarded as something static, strengthening the cultural identity and is mostly anonymous. After working in Indonesia (mainly in Bali and West Java) since 1978, my impression is different. These traditional musics exist, but I prefer to call them “local music traditions” and they change all the time as well, although people are often less aware of it. At the same time, the political administration of that young country (Indonesia became an independent nation in 1945) saw music as an important tool to define national identity as well. And finally, scholars from all over the world and later the internet brought a diverse amount of other musics, even to quite remote villages. This triggered the ongoing debate what Indonesian contemporary music really is. In my presentation, I will talk about those origins and the modern “clash of music cultures” in this amazing country.