

Research aspects of “The Watchers by the Well”: an English folk-tale collected by Ruth Tongue, with new music for Balinese *gendér wayang* and other instruments by Nicholas Gray

This project was presented in a concert at SOAS on 1st November 2014. For more details about the music and story, see the introduction and programme notes.

Research questions:

- 1) How is Balinese *gendér wayang* particularly suited to creating dramatic atmospheres and what kinds of atmospheres can be created? Exploring the relationship between atmosphere and timbre: does the diffuseness of the concept of timbre contribute to this link? How to match visual and musical atmospheres and link with the story.
- 2) How to use improvisation and flexibility in building a composition project and, in particular, to use group rehearsals as a means to refine and develop the composition in a parallel with some Balinese compositional practices.
- 3) How to incorporate improvisation and flexibility in the final performance, given that *gendér wayang* is a largely interlocking genre.
- 4) What is the suitability of *gendér wayang* for an English story? This raises a number of issues: sound versus representation, portraying liminality (the borders within the story), post-colonial issues and ethics (representation and power). Are instruments sound-makers, culturally embedded symbols, or both?
- 5) Exploring aspects of performativity, ritual and psychic journey within the cross-cultural context of the story and the music.
- 6) Exploring the reliability of the narrator Ruth L. Tongue: an ethnographer or teller of tales? What does this tell us about ethnographic writing?

Research environment:

The project builds on the work undertaken for “The Birth of Kala” project (see <http://music.sas.ac.uk/node/160>). Some of the compositional methods relate to those explored in Gray 2011. The composition shows stylistic influences from Balinese shadow play, English folk song and experimental music.

Research methodology:

To build a composition that would take its final form through group rehearsal, creating a performance more tightly woven and integrated with narrative than the previous Kala project, though still incorporating Balinese pieces in the final programme as a frame.

References:

Gray, Nicholas (2011) *Improvisation and composition in Balinese gendér wayang: music of the moving shadows*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

For bibliography of material relating to the story, see accompanying programme notes.