

JEPUN BALI

If you want to hear what the royals of Bali used to listen to in times gone by, Jepun Bali ensemble is what you are looking for. Founded in 2009 by Lucian Zbarcea and Pradnyani Dewi, Jepun Bali is the only one of its kind in Romania and nearby countries, and its members play instruments that together make up a spectacular Gamelan of the God of Love – a type of gamelan only intended to be heard by royal ears in the past.

Lucian Zbarcea has been honing his gamelan music skills since 2006. He discovered this music thanks to a grant with the Denpasar Arts Institute in Bali; Pradnyani Dewi studied traditional Indonesian dance with the same institution. The outcome of their cooperation, Jepun Bali combines Indonesian tradition with modern spirit, in an ensemble which, apart from promoting Asian culture, supports contemporary music writing for the gamelan. The two ensemble leaders firmly believe that – just as Debussy, Xenakis or Poulenc once did – young composers will integrate the gamelan in their music thinking, once they have become familiar with its potential. A case in point is “Panguripan,” a work by DanDe Popescu included in the repertoire of Jepun Bali, a piece in which the author explores a core concept of Indonesian philosophy: the idea of existential cyclicality.

Jepun Bali ensemble does not use sheet music. As in the traditional Balinese practice, music is learnt through repetition, even when it comes to complex structures. This creates a state of alertness as well as constant communication between musicians. The intense vibrations, the ostinato rhythms, the contrasting dynamics, the clear yet mysterious sounds become the combined creation of the Jepun Bali performers, who are in perpetual acoustic interdependence.

The gamelan is still an exotic instrument in Romania, but with each performance the audience receives with enthusiasm what Jepun Bali has to offer. Its leaders currently work to popularize the syncretic identity of the ensemble, represented on the one hand by the authenticity of Balinese traditional music and dance, and on the other hand by the exploration of modern composition principles. The central gong in any gamelan ensemble may sound both Asian and European beats, in a dialogue that can only enrich both worlds.

