



Archipelago Gem

An Exploration of Trisutji Kamal's *Sunda Seascapes*

By Dr. Meldy Tanako

Trisutji Kamal (1936–2021) incorporated the folklore and traditional charms of Indonesian music in her 48 solo piano works, establishing herself as the only woman among Indonesia's renowned contemporary composers. This poster introduces three works from her *Sunda Seascapes* collection: "Nuances of the Sunda Strait," "Mystery of Sanghyang Island" and "Song of the Sea."

Kamal began her musical education in Indonesia before continuing her studies in Europe, developing a compositional style that blends musical elements from her Javanese heritage with Arabic and Islamic traditions, and Western compositional techniques. Completed in 1990, *Sunda Seascapes* exemplifies this blend. The collection includes seven works graded at level 10+ according to the Magrath leveling system, reflecting its technical demands, including parallel chords, rapid sixteenth notes

and frequent hand position shifts. Although *Sunda Seascapes* was once published by the Mitra Budaya Foundation, it is now out of print, with only three copies available in the United States through interlibrary loan.

The first piece, "Nuances of the Sunda Strait," features musical traits derived from Javanese gamelan music, prominently utilizing the pentatonic *Slendro* scale. Written in a five-part, through-composed form, this piece showcases the modified *Slendro* scale and incorporates gamelan compositional practices such as melodic transposition and doubling. "Mystery of Sanghyang Island" employs open sonorities and melodic elaboration principles derived from gamelan music's heterophonic texture. "Song of the Sea" explores Arabic traditions within a four-part through-composed structure, with each section marked by shifts in texture and tempo. The piece also uses the heptatonic *Pelog* scale, which can be reinterpreted as a modified double harmonic scale, effectively blending musical elements from both gamelan music and Arabic traditions.

Overall, Trisutji Kamal's *Sunda Seascapes* is a collection that seamlessly integrates Javanese, Western, Islamic and Arabic musical traditions, showcasing her versatility as a composer. ◀◀

Meldy Tanako earned a DMA in piano performance and pedagogy from the University of Oklahoma in August 2024. She has presented her research on the pedagogical works of Asian composers at regional and national conferences.



ARCHIPELAGO GEM: AN EXPLORATION OF TRISUTJI KAMAL'S SUNDA SEASCAPES **Meldy Tanako, DMA** **University of Oklahoma**

PURPOSE

Trisutji Kamal, the sole female composer among Indonesia's renowned contemporary composers, incorporated Indonesian folklore and traditional elements into her 48 solo piano works. Despite her extensive body of work, Kamal's compositions have yet to gain recognition in major piano literature texts. This poster introduces three captivating pieces from her *Sunda Seascapes* collection: "Nuances of the Sunda Strait," "Mystery of Sanghyang Island" and "Song of the Sea."

TRISUTJI KAMAL



Kamal (1936–2021) was born into a Javanese aristocratic family in Jakarta and grew up in Binjai, North Sumatra. She studied piano and composition with Dutch concert pianist Laurine Rammert before furthering her musical studies at Amsterdam Conservatory, École Normale de Musique in Paris and Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome. Upon completing her studies in 1967, Kamal returned to Indonesia to pursue her composition and teaching career. Her compositions have been performed in major cities in Europe and all around Indonesia.

COMPOSITIONAL OUTPUT

- Composed for multiple instrumental and vocal mediums
 - Lorjonggrang* (1956) - Indonesia's first opera
 - Prayer for Redemption* - for orchestra
 - Mount Agung* - ballet suite
 - One symphony
 - Two piano concerti - one of which is accompanied by gamelan bumbung (Balinese bamboo gamelan ensemble)
 - Dance and film music
- Solo piano music dominated Kamal's solo instrumental output**
 - Wrote 48 solo piano works
 - Published collections:
 - Sunda Seascapes* (1990) - 7 pieces
 - Younger Years Selected Compositions* (2002) - 10 pieces
 - Indonesian Folk Melodies* (2002) - 26 pieces

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

- Indonesian elements: Javanese gamelan concepts and practices, Indonesian folk-like melodies, quartal and quintal harmonies
- Islamic elements: Quran recitation rhythm (*tajwid*), double harmonic scale
- Western elements: jazz harmonies, Western forms, Western diatonic harmonies, changing meter

SCORE INFO

Sunda Seascapes score is available through interlibrary loan from:

- Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, TX
- Rice University, TX
- Cornell University Library, NY

ABOUT SUNDA SEASCAPES

- Dedicated to Kamal's husband, A. B. Kamal
- Completed in 1990 at Kamal's villa in Anyer, a small town in West Java, Indonesia
- Premiered in 1991
- 7 character pieces inspired by the beauty of nature

"Here I enjoyed, felt, and received the penetrating vibrations of another world. For hours I used to stare at the colors and atmosphere of the sea, from dawn till dusk, sometimes continued gazing at the skies during moonlit nights. I visited the mysterious Sanghyang Island, where the remnants of Japanese fortress can be found. The color of the skies, the quietness and beauty of the sunset at Anyer beach was like a natural painting that changes constantly every day and forever and ever. The nuance of the sea was of the gradation of blue, depending on the sunrays and the states of the weather." (Kamal, in an interview with Tamio, 2007)

- Style: Romantic, Impressionist, Minimalist
- Musical features: gamelan traditions and sonorities, double harmonic and pentatonic scales, *tajwid*
- Difficulty: Artist level (Level 10+ Magrath leveling system)

I. NUANCES OF THE SUNDA STRAIT

Gamelan traditions

- Melodic stacking and doubling in fourths and fifths (m. 9)
- Gong strikes (m. 22, left hand)
- Colotomic structure (between sections A and B)
- Musical climax at the end of a section (sections A and B)

Western element

- Planing (mm. 53 - 54)



Melodic motif:

- Modified gamelan slendro scale (C-Db/D-Eb-G-Ab)

Three-part form

- A: mm. 1 - 37
- B: mm. 38 - 74
- C: mm. 75 - 144
- New sections marked by textural change

Pedagogical values

- Non-traditional scales
- Compound melody voicing
- Weak beat accents
- Polyrhythm

II. MYSTERY OF SANGHYANG ISLAND

Gamelan traditions

- Microtonal tuning (m. 2)
- Gamelan pentatonic slendro scale (mm. 1 - 8)
- Octave doubling (m. 20)
- Use of heterophonic texture principles as melodic elaboration technique (m. 21)
- Use of open-sounding quartal and quintal harmonies

Western elements

- Debussy-like three-voiced texture (m. 50)
- Planing (mm. 71 - 74)



Islamic element

- Double harmonic scale (m. 34)

Five-part form

- Introduction: mm. 1 - 8
- A: mm. 9 - 29
- B: mm. 30 - 52
- C: mm. 53 - 75
- D: mm. 76 - 107

Pedagogical values

- Variety of articulations
- Rapid change in hand positions
- Smooth octave movement

V. SONG OF THE SEA

Gamelan traditions

- Improvisatory style
- Layered texture (m. 27)
- Gamelan heptatonic pelog scale (mm. 1 - 2)
- Melodic fillers (mm. 98 - 102)
- New section marked by tempo changes (mm. 57 and 61)

Western elements

- Jazz harmonies (m. 56)
- Glissandi (mm. 21 - 22)



Islamic element

- Double harmonic scale (mm. 1 - 2)

Four-part form

- Introduction: mm. 1 - 8
- A: mm. 13 - 56
- B: mm. 58 - 83
- C: mm. 88 - 107

Pedagogical values

- Exposure to non-traditional scales
- Changing meter
- Rhythmic diminution

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Scan the barcode for:

- Audio recordings of selected pieces from *Sunda Seascapes*, performed by Ananda Sukarlan, a renowned Indonesian composer-pianist
- Reference list
- Leveled list of Kamal's published piano works



CONTACT

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