

Center for World Music at ISI Surakarta: Problems and Policies

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Good afternoon distinguished ladies and gentleman,

I am from Indonesia Institute of the Arts (ISI) Surakarta. Surakarta is located at Central Java, almost right in the middle of Java Island, the most populated island in Indonesia.

Today, I am going to talk about the Center for World Music in Solo, the nickname of Surakarta. The Center belonged to ISI Surakarta, an institution that was founded in 1964, about fifty years ago. I will discuss the Center from the beginning in 1970s until today. More specifically, I would like to talk about what problems we have and what policies we want to reinforce for users. My presentation will be short in order to give opportunity to the floor to comment, make suggestion and dialogue.

In 1970s ISI Solo was a small institution called ASKI (academy of gamelan music). We started to purchase recordings, especially phonographs. The collection was only a few and only some students visited and listened to the music. The reason was that they were busy with artistic activities. They rehearsed gamelan music (as well as dance, and puppet show) on daily basis. Students and lecturers started to practice early in the morning and went home at night. In classes, students also worked in studios or practiced gamelan ensembles. They often performed gamelan from town to town not only for practicing for individual or groups' merit but also for the requirements of their classes.

Interest on documentation was quite low because they wanted to focus on playing music rather than listening to recordings. Investigation and documentation on music and performing arts was also done occasionally, only when they wanted to write field report once in a while. The necessity to become good musicians, dancers, and puppeteers was the priority for many students and lecturers.

In this situation, music library was not thought of as the main interest to think even if it was there right in the campus. Few students who visited the Center were those who wanted to listen to music for class assignments. Lecturers came to the office when they intended to entertain themselves with music. The center experienced such situation several years during the "artistic period."

In early 1980s the center got opportunity to purchase more collection. Thanks to Philip Yampolsky, the keynote speaker of this conference, we could collect more recordings of world music. With some funding from the Ford Foundation the center was able to gather recordings of music from different parts of the world. More than just assisting to get the collection, Philip Yampolsky was also available to be the consultant for the founding of the center. It was at this time, with the guide from him, that we started to make catalogue of the collection.

In 1986, when ethnomusicology program was founded at ISI Surakarta, the collection of the center became the major resources of musical library. Due to the necessity to expand knowledge and theories of world music, this center was used more by these students, lecturers and researchers. These people use these collections for their academic activities: preparation to conduct fieldwork, basic information for seminar and workshop, analysis of styles of music, inspiration for writing papers, and other similar activities.

In early 1990s, due to the need to expand the collection, we decided to purchase cassette recordings. At that time, cassette production was flourishing in Indonesia. We decided to buy commercial cassettes produced by local cassette producers. So, we went to major cities in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi to buy commercial cassette of music. We intended to gather music of Indonesia. This was done to make the previous world music collections more complete and accessible for users.

We considered that this strategy of gathering recording materials not only easy to do but also inexpensive and saved money. In addition, it did not spend too much time to do this work. Doing this, we wanted to provide students, lecturers, and researchers the varieties of music of Indonesia that were not possible to document due to the vast geographic areas and limited budget. We understood that extensive works like what Philip Yampolsky did, could not be done because of the limited time and budget available for the center.

We were aware of the lack of this strategy. The center could not get what specific areas we wanted to document, what information we wanted to elicit, and in what way we want them to document. Of course, by doing this simple method of collecting music recording, we got limited information about music. The only data was only from the cover of the cassettes if any. The shopkeeper could not provide important data concerning many aspects of performance that we need for academic purposes.

We tried to cover as wide areas as possible considering that every group of ethnic people had specific genres and specific styles of music. But, again we could not provide excellent information because we were not familiar with repertoires, localities, musicians, character of the contexts, and atmospheres where those performances were being held. For us, what Yampolsky did in his series Music of Indonesia was an ideal work, but I believe that this kind of work was not easy to do by other scholars. The limitation of time and budget, not to mention about spirit, were problems that we had so far.

The limited knowledge of field experience resulted in an inaccurate information in making categories of music. For example, the use of localities and styles for groups of music did not show the real situation in the field. The category of "Bali" or "Sunda," which we meant to be the style of the music, often ignored the fact that in reality there were many genres and sub-genres available in those areas. As we know that groups of people in Indonesia often interpret and re-interpret a style of music to be new repertoires and genres making the performance to become "new music" in new contexts. Not to mention about how cassette producers provided lack of information regarding names of musicians that made researchers difficult to find a way to get more information about important aspects of music that they want to explore.

Information about music is unsatisfactory. Names of pieces, names of the leaders of the group, names of ensembles, and pictures of instruments and/or the leaders of the groups are the most data we can get from commercial recordings. For research and academic activities these information are inadequate. Knowing insufficient data provided for the users we enforce strict policy on making copy of the collection. Especially for the commercial cassettes that people can buy from recording shops we recommend that they purchase by themselves in the market. We provide information how to get and where to buy the collection. Doing this we intend not to break the copyright law and the ethic of distributing information about music, musicians, group of people, and repertoires of music.

Recently, since the graduate and postgraduate programs were initiated in 2001 and 2011 students and researchers use the center more than the previous time. Along with their counterpart in undergraduate program in ethnomusicology they are potential users of the center collection. In addition, students from “creative study program” also make use of the collection available in the center. This shows that, or at least it seems that, scholars in Indonesia are now getting more aware of the existence of the center and the important role of recording music as the “second resource” of data when live music is not available around.

Thank you..

Manila, 15 October, 2014

