



Review

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subordinates idiosyncrasies found in his other film work to the rhythms and forms of the live performances. *A Music Circus*, a seventieth-birthday celebration, features twelve Cage works performed within two hours, often overlapping, and thus motivates a kaleidoscopic assortment of brief snippets; the Philip Glass Ensemble's visually static performance inspires more prolonged swaths of uninterrupted music. Monk's cinematic approach to staging and choreography ("all the cinema language is how I think in terms of theater") and Ashley's video conception of his opera *Perfect Lives* more directly shape approaches to the filming of their work.

Of course, Greenaway is never the entirely invisible observer; he occasionally finds opportunities to assert his own style. These range from rapid, rhythmic intercutting images of the sound sources used in Cage's works, such as "27 sounds manufactured in a kitchen," to the slow-motion close-ups of Glass nodding cues to his ensemble. Most openly individualistic are the interviews with Ashley and his collaborators, in which they appear simultaneously in one or more on-screen video monitors, filmed from different angles and at different magnifications, and intercut with typescript title cards to underscore selected words and phrases. Though clearly modeled on a technique used in Ashley's opera, the result is unmistakably Greenaway.

At its best, the interplay of sound and image strikingly illuminates each composer's philosophy. Puzzling over the quirky, even bizarre choreography in Monk's *Turtle Dreams* (1983), which expresses the "pre-World War III anxiety" of contemporary urban life, we hear her explain: "It's like little templates or something, like little evocative nuggets, little psychic triggers . . . and it's all these little moments of explosion within this very formal, very abstract form that, in a way, you could look at and you could say it doesn't have any idea or content." Likewise, as we see musicians intently performing Cage's indeterminacies, we hear his account of orchestral shenanigans during 1958 performances, and his realization that he had to "find a way to let people be free without becoming foolish, so that their freedom will make them noble."

Occasionally, key information almost slips by unnoticed, as when Glass observes

that "the whole development of popular music over the last ten years has been very helpful to us." One longs here for a narrator to emphasize that, thanks to commercial pop music's trends in the 1970s toward static harmonies and ubiquitous synthesizers, minimalism's popular appeal was neither a birthright nor an achievement, but genuinely thrust upon it (as Glass notes dryly, "It's not music with clearly populist intentions."). Of course, some contexts were unknowable at the time: although some of the images in Ashley's video opera strongly resemble rock video clichés, 1990s viewers must recall that the 1983 *Perfect Lives* immediately predates the rise of MTV.

Inevitably, the contexts provided in a one-hour format are tightly circumscribed. With Cage and Monk, we do acquire some sense of stylistic development. *A Music Circus* incorporates works from 1940 to 1979, and rather than follow a chance arrangement in performance, Greenaway and Guest present them chronologically. Although Monk's musical and stage works are presented in a more flexible ordering, her film works *16mm Earrings* (1966), *Quarry* (1976), and *Ellis Island* (1981) do appear in sequence. But other than a quick excerpt from *Music in similar motion* (1969), the Glass segment includes only his work from about 1983, and the Ashley segment presents only *Perfect Lives*. Therefore, viewers for whom any of these documentaries provide a first encounter will have to turn to other media to build a fuller sense of the composers' outputs, especially in relation to contemporaneous developments in music and the visual arts. Nevertheless, the filmmakers' skillful integration of image, music, and text, especially in some of Greenaway's more subtle visual puns and symbols, as when the Cage segment begins with what appears to be the slow-motion demolition of a church—which, in fact, turns out to be its renovation, will reward viewers of all backgrounds.

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Taksu: Music in the Life of Bali. Written, produced and directed by Jann Pasler. Berkeley (2176 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley CA, 94704): University

of California Extension, Center for Media and Independent Learning, 1991. Catalog no. 38095. (VHS; 24 min.).

Bali Beyond the Postcard. Produced by Nancy Dine and Peggy Stern. Directed by Peggy Stern and David Dawkins. New York (124 E. 40th St., New York, NY 10016): Filmmakers Library, 1991. (VHS; 60 min.). Also available in motion picture format.

Despite their strikingly similar opening shots of musicians playing Balinese *gamelan* instruments, *Taksu: Music in the Life of Bali* and *Bali Beyond the Postcard* display widely different angles on Balinese art and culture.

Taksu: Music in the Life of Bali introduces Balinese music in its ritual context and portrays traditional elements of Balinese culture and beliefs. The viewpoint is that of a highly interested, outside observer; the tone personal, yet educational. Numerous ensembles, music rehearsals, ritual ceremonies, and instrument makers are shown. The camera work is clean and focused, often capturing the hand movements of musicians on different instruments, useful for an introduction to Balinese instruments and playing techniques. The pace moves swiftly from one instrument or aspect of Balinese music to another, with a few connecting themes.

Central to the video is the spiritual power, or *taksu*, found in Balinese ritual arts, and the ability of the Balinese to maintain this essential aspect of their culture in the face of increasing tourism and materialism. The spiritual aspect of Balinese culture is represented in sacred *gamelan* musical ensembles; in the *mudras* (sacred hand gestures) and *mantras* (sacred syllables) performed by the high priest as he creates holy water to bless the villagers; in the chanting of a text from a *lontar* (palm leaf manuscript); in group prayers; and in numerous ritual processions.

The ritual context of music may be seen here in cremation and tooth filing ceremonies. Pasler traces the life cycle from death and burial to cremation, a casting of the ashes into the sea, a rising of the soul to Besakih, the mother temple of Bali, and the return of the soul into a new family

member, to the constant accompaniment of marching gamelans. In addition, the importance of community service and cooperation in Bali, demonstrated by Balinese music ensembles and in the music itself, is assessed. *Interlocking*, in which two musical parts join and complement each other with contrasting rhythmic patterns, is shown as a metaphor for Balinese life, not only as it is found in the music, but also in the interplay of various roles that people perform, in the interaction of old and new.

Just as these elements are interwoven in Bali, the video alternates between depictions of weaving and a *gamelan* rehearsal, and between scenes of water and music, rice harvesting and dance. The concepts of good and evil are touched upon in the roles of the *barong* (the good force in the shape of a large, lion-like animal) and Rangda (the witch). In order to fulfill their ritual function, the masks for these characters must be imbued with *taksu*.

The focus here on the spiritual, ritual aspects of Balinese life tends to exclude more modern or secular elements, although some newer developments—such as women's *gamelans*—are noted. Community life and community values rather than individual opinions or beliefs are depicted. In most scenes, 'the Balinese' are discussed as a unified whole, underplaying the role of the individual in Bali. I would like to qualify Pasler's comment regarding Balinese names. While it is true that the names Wayan, Made, Nyoman, and Ketut, depict birth order, and people are frequently referred to by these names alone, family names exist as well, along with other titles that delineate caste.

A great deal of material is covered here in a short amount of time. However, the quality of *taksu*, an important, powerful, and often intangible, element in Balinese ceremonial music and dance, is thoughtfully introduced. This video would be useful for general survey courses which contain a section on Bali, or for courses concerned with Balinese music, music and ritual, dance, or Balinese religion.

While *Taksu: Music in the Life of Bali* gives an overview of Balinese ritual music and traditional beliefs, *Bali Beyond the Postcard* gives an intimate portrayal of the *legong* dance tradition as it is passed on from one generation to the next in a family of

musicians and dancers from the village of Peliatan. It is also the story of David Dawkins, the cinematographer and co-director, whose experiences of and nostalgia for Bali create a framework for the video. Here, we get a close look at the life of a few important individuals, namely I Made Lebah, the famous musician, his son, I Wayan Gandra, and Gandra's daughter, Ni Luh Mas, a renowned legong dancer. The transmission of the legong dance from Ni Luh Mas to her nine-year-old daughter, Ni Luh Kade is interspersed with rehearsals, scenes of daily life and film clips from 1966 of Ni Luh Mas performing and rehearsing this dance at the same age.

Despite the thematic importance of Kade as the recipient of the legong tradition, she does not display the magnetic attraction, or *taksu*, discussed in the previous video. Consequently, the "seductive" quality of the legong, emphasized by Dawkins, does not come across in this video. Here, the spiritual aspects of the legong are only briefly mentioned; more attention is focused on the daily lives of the family. However, those who do contain *taksu*—the older, more experienced artists, I Made Lebah, and Ni Luh Mas, and possibly the baby girl of the family, Ming, who at seventeen months old is already infused with the legong—are the most riveting subjects.

While interviews are not used with much success in the previous video, *Bali Beyond the Postcard* is notable for its use of interviews between Dawkins and various members of the family. It is valuable to hear the perspectives of these Balinese musicians and dancers in their own words. The interviews are conducted in Balinese (with English subtitles) or in English. Ni Luh Mas is remarkably comfortable in front of the camera, smiling, laughing and unselfconsciously sharing her numerous roles, which include dancing for tourists, teaching her daughter and other young girls to dance, painting mini-sculptures as part of a business contract, cooking offerings for temple ceremonies, and praying in the family temple. It is clear from the early film clips that she contained the dramatic intensity and captivating expressions required to be a powerful Balinese dancer. In a similar vein, one feels privileged to see I Made Lebah playing the drum casually at his home, guiding musicians and dancers, and shar-

ing his thoughts on such. Lebah is concerned that people are forgetting the longer versions of some dances, performing only shortened versions for tourists.

The family members seem totally at ease with Dawkins, which allows the story to unfold in a natural way. At times, the camera pans from one subject to another, which seems to emphasize the context over the particular subject, or the learning process over the finished product. Consequently, the picture is not always clean-cut. While the legong is portrayed in fragments, certain hand and eye movements are highlighted. There is a nice consistency between the movements portrayed in the photos at the beginning and the segments of the dance seen in the rehearsals and final performance. Some of this footage would undoubtedly be useful for dance ethnologists. A particularly instructive moment occurs with a close up of Ni Luh's face as she demonstrates the different eye movements used for male and female characters.

In addition to the generational cycle of the legong tradition, other parallel cycles of life are depicted, such as rice planting and harvesting. Appropriately, this harvest occurs just as the young girl blossoms into a new legong dancer. Ritual elements are also interspersed in a light-hearted manner. The tone is humorous, casual, but direct.

Twice as long as the previous video and moving at a slower pace, the many facets of life in this one family, as well as the time required to master this complex dance, are portrayed. The video closes with each member of the family waving goodbye, a nice touch, but the names that prominently follow each picture are not those of the main characters, rather those of the producers and directors. Unfortunately, one of the most important people in the video, namely Ni Luh Mas, is not acknowledged except in tiny print at the very end, an oversight probably exacerbated by the transfer from film to video format. Having received numerous awards, this video is especially useful for programs in dance ethnology, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology or sociology, Southeast Asian studies, and the broader fields of which they are a part.

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