

THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF KARAWITAN

(from Summary of the Theory of Karawitan and Technique of Playing the Gamelan
by Sulaiman Gitosaprodjo, translated from the Indonesian by Judith Becker)

ETHICS

All the members of a gamelan group must keep the good name of the group. For example, in all relations with other artists, or with people outside the group, one must avoid undesirable consequences . . .

AESTHETICS

Karawitan, like all the arts, must be beautiful, both from the spiritual and the physical perspectives.

From the perspective of spiritual beauty the following elements are important:

1. The playing of a gamelan group must be smooth and harmonious. The situation must be avoided in which one person tries to show off his expertise to the disadvantage of others, for then the playing will not be harmonious. It must be remembered that gamelan playing is a collective activity.
2. In order to achieve the highest level of beauty, each player must control his ego. The theoretical and practical aspects of karawitan must be in balance.

From the perspective of physical beauty, the following elements are also important:

1. The place where the gamelan is kept must be clean, with mats, a platform for the gamelan . . . and a blackboard for purposes of study.
2. The gamelan players and vocalists, both male and female, should wear proper and clean clothing for rehearsals as well as for formal occasions.
3. The manner of sitting, standing, entering and exiting from the gamelan room, holding and setting down of the gamelan beaters (tabuh) must all be orderly. All bodily movements should appear beautiful.

NORMS

Each gamelan player must know the norms or customs of gamelan playing in order to ensure the fluency and smoothness of the rehearsal or performance; otherwise, confusion and disorder in playing will result . . .

IDEALS

The ideals [of karawitan] can be formulated in the following ways:

1. One should educate oneself to become an artist who is both skillful and wise.
2. One should teach students - from those in kindergarten to college students.
3. One should educate the society-at-large in karawitan - in government offices, villages, neighbourhood communities, and private groups.
4. The material to be taught can be taken from the inheritance of our revered ancestors . . . To add freshness to the field of karawitan, new gamelan compositions may be added . . .

In conclusion, all gamelan musicians must cultivate these ideals for the glory and exaltation of the art of karawitan.