

“Gang of Gamelan” by Bill Brown

One of the tracks on the upcoming tribute album to Andy Gill (*The Problem of Leisure: A Celebration of Andy Gill and Gang of Four*, to be released on 14 May 2021) will be a cover of “Not Great Men” by the all-female Japanese Gamelan ensemble Sekar-Melati. This Gamelan version will in fact be one of *three* covers of the great post-punk song (one of the band’s best) to appear on the album (a double album, God help us), with the others done by Flea & John Frusciante (from the Red Hot Chili Peppers) and LoneLady.

Led by Hitomi Ozeki, Sekar-Melati recorded its version live back in 2011. A video of it has been on the ensemble’s YouTube channel ever since then, but has only been watched 56,000 times. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K19jPwpP5XY>

According to Ms. Ozeki, speaking through a translator (Yomoko Moore, who is the wife of Aaron Moore, the fellow who organized the tribute album), the performance took place at Ms. Ozeki’s father’s house in the Gifu prefecture of Japan. The woman speaking in Japanese at the beginning of the video is Makoto Imao, who was both a percussionist in the ensemble and the one who had the brilliant idea of creating a Gamelan version. (She is no longer in the ensemble, which continues to perform to this day.) Ms. Imao also did the wonderfully clanky arrangement, which strips away the song’s words. But there are voices, the women’s voices, and they seem to be jeering: *Yahhhhhhhhhh!* History’s not made by great *men*.

“This Gamelan cover version of a post-punk classic by the Gang of Four burrows so deeply into the original that, coming out the other side, it turns everything (the whole world) on its head: the cover sounds like it is the real original and the original sounds like it might well be merely a clever cover. Best part: the handclaps, which are like frogs snatching flies out of mid-air with their tongues.”

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