Dimas Kusumojati

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Diane Riggenbach

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Balawan and his influence for Indonesia

There are a lot of artists in this world now. Art is something beautiful that makes our mind relax. Indonesia also has a lot of artists. An artist is someone who makes art, a person whose work shows exceptional creative ability or skill (Free Dictionary). The definition of art depends on their own thoughts about it. Football player can be considered as an artist because his football is beautiful, like an art. But, there are some people out there that can’t take that because they have different thought. I choose I Wayan Balawan as my artist. He is a guitarist from Bali, which has a beautiful landscape. Balawan has influenced Indonesian people to love jazz music and Indonesian traditional music.

I Wayan Balawan, known as Balawan, was born in Gianyar, Bali, Indonesia on September 9, 1973. Balawan is the fifth of seven children in his family. Growing up with such traditional influences, Balawan fell in love with music, especially Balinese traditional music. Some of his brothers and sisters are artists, such as traditional dancers and sculptors. He started to play guitar when he was 8 years old. His interest of playing guitar came from his sister and his friends. They liked to play guitar with him. He learned guitar by himself (autodidact). At that time, he was influenced by a lot of Balinese guitarists, such as Agus Darmadi and I Ketut Irwin. He could play virtuoso rock guitar like Yngwie Malmsteen when he was 10 years old. He had only been playing guitar for 2 years. He made his first band when he was 14 years old, which is in 1987. After he graduated from high school, he went to The Australian Institute of Music to learn jazz guitar and vocal in 1993. He also got a scholarship for Diploma of Music for 3 years. He spent 5 years in Sidney for college. While he was in the college, he made a new band again called Maxell. With his new band, he played a lot of rock songs from some popular rock bands such as Scorpions, Deep Purple and The Beatles. He was later attracted to jazz, particularly the jazz-rock styles of John McLaughlin, Chick Corea and Stanley Jordan (Papanikolaou, Eftychia). At that time, he thought that Balinese guitarists aren’t creative at playing guitar. He wanted to make something different. In his opinion, many of them are talented but unable to work optimally because of their unwillingness to learn more(Balawan, I Wayan). After he finished his study, he went back to his hometown, Bali in 1997.

Balawan is highly admired by his fans for his speed and “touch tapping” technique. Normally, a guitarist must use two hands to play a note. One press down a string behind a chosen fret to prepare the note, and the other either plucks or strums the string to produce the note. With a touching and tapping technique, a guitarist produces a note using only one finger by quickly tapping his finger down behind the appropriate fret. The force of impact causes the string to vibrate enough to immediately sound the note.The technique was first developed by American guitarist Stanley Jordan. Balawan is the only Indonesian guitarist to play in this style and he is the first man in Asia to play guitar with touching and tapping technique or known as 8 fingers tapping technique. This technique was introduced by Eddie van Halen in 1978.After he went back to Bali, he made a group band called Batuan Ethnic Fusion. The other members of the band were traditional Balinese musicians. Balawan wanted to combine jazz music and his traditional Balinese music. But, the other members didn’t know how to read the musical notes. It is almost impossible to play jazz music without knowing how to read musical notes. Incredibly, with Balawan’s passion, he taught them slowly until they can be a success like now. Batuan Ethcnic fusion has a lot of concerts, including concerts abroad. They made their first album in 1999, called gloBALIsm. They had a concert in Germany on East Meet West Gitarren Festival Edekoben Germany 2000 tour, Hell Blues Festival in Norway (September 2001). He also has a band named Trisum, which is the members are Indonesian best guitarists, Tohpati, Balawan and Dewa Budjana. This band is also well known in Indonesian jazz world.

Balawan always play at least 1 traditional song in his concert even when it is concert abroad. He shows that he loves traditional music too. His mission is to make young generation loves their own traditional music. He wants to show that Indonesian traditional music is also good to hear. Beside that, he also want that jazz music will improve on this country. In his opinion, jazz music is not as popular as pop music in Indonesia. He also influence the people from other country to know and love about Indonesian music and artist.

Balawan has influenced a lot of people about his jazz and traditional Balinese music. So now there are a lot of people who knows about jazz and traditional Balinese music especially the young generation. Most of the audience of Balawan’s concert are young people. It shows that Balawan has successful in his mission so far.

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