



simakDialog *The Sixth Story*

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• Record Label: MoonJune Records,
2013 • www.moonjune.com • www.simakdialog.com

Stepping In; Lain Parantina; Harmologic; What Would I Say; For Once And Never; Common League; As Far As It Can Be (Jaco); 5, 6; Ari.

PERSONNEL.: Riza Arshad: Fender Rhodes electric piano, acoustic piano, synth, soundscapes; Tohpati: electric guitar; Adhithya Pratama: bass guitar; Endang Ramdan: Sundanese kendang percussion (left); Erlan Suwardana: Sundanese kendang percussion (right); Cucu Kurnia: assorted metal percussion.

By: Nora McCarthy

The nine tracks on this the sixth recording for simakDialog, a dynamic and synergistic Indonesian band, are a compositional treasure trove with a mother load of ideas, grooves, moods, sounds and ethereal spiritual energy.

The tradition of gamelan is at the core of simakDialog's music and refines every aspect of the overall sound not only of every instrument, distinct and unique unto itself from multiple perspectives but it is also the blueprint used to create the compositions—each one a facet in some shape or form of a larger whole. The transformation that takes place as a direct result of this process can only be described as

absolute spirit. This is the nature of gamelon and the higher purpose that this music serves.

With their use of sonic effects and Western instrumentation combined with the kendang—a two headed drum that is considered to be a primary instrument used in the gamelan ensembles, simakDialog has managed to create rhythmic textures that are reminiscent of the Yoruba Bata drums used in the fusion of Afro-Cuban music which can be heard in the first perhaps the most complex of all the tracks, it is also the most literal in that it establishes a descriptive musical language of movement and images that is captivating. What lies ahead is a kaleidoscopic thrill ride through the collective consciousnesses of the artists who have carefully crafted every composition in order for the magic to occur and it does—thus the story begins.

“Stepping In” starts with an introduction played on the Fender Rhodes by Riza Arshad, which sets up the framework for a 6/8 pulse beat by the two kendangists Ramdan and Suwardana, the percussionist Kurnia and the bassist Pratama followed by an elaborate melodic rhythmic figure played by the electric guitar of Tohpati along with the Rhodes. The piece develops in a constant shift of the *one* with drum breaks and reharmonization of the main theme leading to a different type of off-the-pocket funk groove to create the blowing section for piano and guitar consecutively. Both Arshad and Tohpati took very interesting solos. Coming out of the guitar solo the piece ends with a recapitulation of the main theme.

There are multiple elements employed in the development and performance of the music on *The Sixth Story* that go beyond objective reality into a higher form of musical expression. All nine compositions are tethered by an electric wave of energy that weaves its way in and around each piece connecting their various patterns into a composite of melodic and unpredictable lines, serene overtones, dramatic interludes, futuristic projections and nostalgic reflections, with shades of familiar beauty unfolding

one into the other in varying tempos and metric beats.

There is a section in “Lain Parantina” that features an extended group improvisation in an open ostinato between the guitar and the piano which really grabs and pulls the listener into the mix. Riza plays exciting lightning fast runs throughout that are impressive.

Something about the reflective “What Would I Say” invoked thoughts of Weather Report’s “A Remark You Made.” The search for the answer to the question posed results in the temperamental march-like feel of “For Once and Never” that breaks out into a passionate solo by Riza then emerges renewed. The strong resolve of the powerfully visual “Common League” integrates electronic motifs within the arrangement to create a feeling of moving through time and space.

The lovely bolero song “As Far As It Can Be” is a dedication to Jaco Pastorius and features the great solo work of Tohpati and Riza with a pulsing soft percussive underpinning.

Arshad takes an otherworldly solo on the moving mixed meter of “5,6” and again his rapport with long-time collaborator Tohpati is evident as the two create an outer limits kind of experience that is conducted by the steady forward movement of the kendangs and percussion.

Two standouts are the third and the ninth track. “Harmologic” with its shifting structural templates, comes out of the tradition of early Ornette Coleman whose concept of harmolodics is similar to that of the gamelon ensemble. The improvisational dialog between the guitar and piano is based on a scale sequence with a very hip 6/8 groove established by Ramdan, Suwardana and Kurnia with his minimal punctuations on the assorted metal percussion. They begin to sound like a drum set and if you close your eyes it feels like a calypso. “Ari” with its altered moods and the profoundly jazz touch of Arshad uses the acoustic piano with its sparkling pure resonance and