

Instruments of knowledge and melody



Picture: GARY SCHAFER

ANU School of Music artist in residence Mr Soegito, front, joins fellow musicians performing in the new Indonesian gamelan orchestra.

By HELEN MUSA,
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The Australian National University is playing international relations — in music.

In launching the School of Music and Faculty of Asian Studies' new Indonesian gamelan orchestra, Vice-Chancellor Deane Terrell said he hoped the set of instruments would assist in understanding our nearest neighbour better.

And that gamelan, still shim-

mering in polished bronze, already has a name. Unlike its normal Javanese cousins, which are called Kyai, Venerable Sir, this one is called Nyai, Venerable Mistress, more appropriate to the 21st century, the university says.

The vice-chancellor explained that the full name Nyai Widya Laras, meant the Venerable Lady Melody of Knowledge, very proper for a centre of learning.

The gamelan is made of in-

struments tuned in two ways. Those in the "slendro" scale belong to head of percussion at the ANU Institute of the Arts Gary France and the others in the "pelog" scale were ordered from Mr Soehirdjan, a maestro of gamelan-making in Yogyakarta.

Head of the School of Music Professor Nicolette Fraillon said the arrival of the gamelan was long overdue. She said that while composers like Debussy

had long ago been inspired by such sounds, to date the school had focused on white European music or, at most, the music of America, in the Jazz Studies course.

All that was changing, however. The new World Music course, recently set up by Mr France, already had 48 students in a unique cooperative venture between the School of Music and the Faculty of Asian Studies.