

Gamelan Music of Indonesia- Music of Cooperation

Indonesia encompasses over 13,000 islands and is world's 4th most populous country. It has the largest Muslim population in the world, although that number makes up only 88% of the country's total population. The country has been a cultural crossroads throughout its history due to its proximity to India, Southeast Asia, and China, and also because of its rich natural resources. The area was under Dutch colonial rule for approximately 350 years (ie, Dutch East India Company), finally gaining independence in 1949.

Basic Characteristics

- Orchestras called **Gamelan**, primarily composed of bronze instruments- keyed metallophones, tuned gongs (rack and hanging), also with drums and additional string and wind instruments; instruments are tuned as an entire orchestra and are not interchangeable with other ensembles. [see pdf of instruments from Alves book]
- Compositions guided by a core melody- composed of artful contours and melodic motives- basic melody guides all other parts; VERY **polyphonic texture** predominates, all layers are equally vital
- Colotomic structure- cyclical music iterated and punctuated by the sounds of various sized gongs. Distance between primary (lowest) gong strokes is called a **Gongan**.
- Paired families of instruments- In Java this results in having two complete sets of instruments in two different tuning systems.
- Stress at the END of metrical cycles instead of beginning- single hardest thing for Western ears to grasp- notes proceed TO gong instead of away from gong as would typically happen in Western music.

Central Javanese Gamelan

- Centered around the urban areas of Yogyakarta and Surakarta- traditional seats of powerful courts that provided generous patronage for all art forms, including Gamelan and dance.
- Javanese blend of Islam combined with spiritual aspects of Hinduism- emphasis on balance- light vs dark, good vs evil, etc.

- Javanese Gamelan music is very refined, moderate, and contemplative.
- Drums (Kendang) lead, primary melody instruments play **Balungan** (core melody), other instruments elaborate on Balungan or else are part of the colotomic structure, all layers performed at various speeds and styles appropriate to function and abilities of the instrument; a full-sized gamelan with all the complementary instruments can contain 40 or more musicians. [YouTube- Javanese Gamelan Performance; Bugaran: Nudan Mas]
- Longer pieces often feature contrasts between loud instruments (bronze) and softer instruments (string, wind, wood, vocal, etc)

Tuning and Pairing in Java

In Javanese music, two tuning systems are used- **Slendro** (5-tone), and **Pelog** (7-tone). When Pelog is used, a 5-note subset is usually employed, so Gamelan music is predominantly pentatonic. The different orderings/hierarchies of the 5 tones create the various modes, called **Patet** (such as Patet Lima and Patet Mayura). Since the two tuning systems are not compatible with each other, each player must have an instrument in each tuning system available, hence the pairing of instruments.

Music can also include lyrics or else accompany dancing [Ketawang Puspwarna]

First introduced to Europe at the 1898 World's Fair in Paris, Javanese (and Balinese) gamelans are very popular in the West as ensembles for study and performance in university settings due to the work and advocacy of early Ethnomusicologists. As a result, Gamelan traditions are some of the most thoroughly-studied musics in the world, Gamelan music has influenced many western composers, and many new compositions are composed for both Indonesian and Western ensembles. [Gamelan Pacifica- Gending Erhu, written for the Gamelan Pacifica ensemble in Seattle]

Music in Bali

Bali is a small but culturally rich island near Java, the only area of Indonesia with a predominantly Hindu population. The Balinese pride themselves on their ability to integrate new models into their traditional art forms, resulting in a spectacular diversity of indigenous ensembles in both bamboo and bronze. Balinese music is primarily characterized by its dynamic energy, frenetic speeds, angular melodies, frequent and sudden tempo and dynamic changes, all accomplished with a very high degree of ensemble cohesion and virtuosity.

For a general side-by-side comparison of Javanese and Balinese gamelan styles, see the *[pdf of Table 16.3 from the Alves text]*.

Tuning and Pairing in Bali

Each ensemble in Bali functions in only one of the two tuning systems, but pairs of instruments will be tuned slightly apart in order to create a characteristic “shimmer” when the same pitch is struck on matching instruments and the frequencies interfere with each other. This effect is known as **Ombak** and is essential to the Balinese sound.

Interlocking parts in Balinese music

The cooperation necessary for the performance of Balinese music is best viewed at the upper levels of the polyphonic texture. Here, the high pitched melodies are too fast to be played by a single person, instead requiring intense cooperation to realize the interlocking parts that together create the entire melody. The interlocking parts in Balinese music are called **Kotekan**. There are several styles of kotekan, but they all involve interlocking to some degree and are directly related to the anticipation of the **Pokok**, or core melody, just as in the music of their Javanese cousins. *[YouTube- Balinese Gamelan Kotekan]*

Bamboo Ensembles

Most scholars acknowledge that the **Gamelan Gambuh** is the oldest ensemble in Bali, and the tradition from which all other instrumental traditions spring. This is an ensemble composed entirely of Suling, the Indonesian bamboo flute. *[Tabuh Gari]*

Angklung is an orchestra of instruments made of bamboo that sound by shaking. Traditionally, each player would only hold one instrument, which sounds pitches in octaves. Playing a melody would therefore take a large number of players. *[Rayuan Pulau Kelapa]*

It has become fashionable to arrange Western classical and pop music for Angklung, with a single player playing a large number of pitches. *[YouTube- Bamboo Angklung Concert; Rihanna- Umbrella]*

A popular but rare ensemble is the **Gamelan Jegog/Joged**, made up of very large instruments played in a struck fashion like other keyboard instruments. Since muting keys is not necessary on these instruments, players can play both kotekan parts, one with each hands. *[YouTube- Gamelan Jegog- Jaran Duah; Joged Bung Bung]*

Bronze Ensembles

The oldest form of bronze gamelan on Bali is the **Gamelan Gong Gede**, which sounds similar to and is derived from the (much) older Javanese gamelan traditions, and was (as in CJ) an ensemble of the court.

The Angklung has leant its name to the **Gamelan Angklung**, a relatively small ensemble whose pitches evoke the happy, bright pitches often found in bamboo Angklung music. Although the ensemble is tuned in the Slendro system (5 pitches), each instrument has only 4 pitches available (1,2,3,5, missing 6). The instruments

are small because they were originally carried in ritual processions such as cremation ceremonies. [*Gamelan Angklung: Margepati*]

Gender Wayang is an ensemble of 4 instruments used to accompany the night-long Wayang Kulit shadow plays. As it only requires 4 players, it is among the most complex and interwoven of the Balinese musical forms. Each player often plays both melody and accompaniment lines, one with each hand (while also muting with both hands!). [*Sekar Sungsang; YouTube- Gender Wayang: Komin's Composition No. 1; YouTube- Sangar Gangsa Dewa Denpasar*]

Gamelan Gong Kebyar has emerged since the early 20th Century as the predominant ensemble on the island, secular and populist, not tied to the rituals of the temple or the whim of nobility. The art form alternates between highly rhapsodic and metric episodes, often played at lightning-fast tempos. It is an ensemble in which material from any other ensemble may be appropriated and adapted for use. Unlike most other gamelan ensembles, GGK often features sections where soloists or certain small groups of instruments can display their prowess. [*Golden Rain (Hudjan Mas); Swa Buana Paksa*]

A village that is home to a gamelan will have commissioned the entire orchestra from a known maker (Gongsmith), and is considered communal village property and functions primarily in service to the local Hindu temple and its resident deities. The Gamelan will have its own structure in which it resides and where rehearsals are held, but will be moved to the temple for numerous ritual functions throughout the year.

The public performance cycle for a village gamelan often culminates at the annual Bali Arts Festival. For this festival, a prominent composer will be hired to compose a composition especially for the group and teach it to them. Groups are judged based on the difficulty and quality of their performance as well as their costuming, choreography, flashiness, etc. Winning the top prize at the Bali Arts Festival becomes a point of great civic pride for the village, and will often see the group rewarded through additional performances throughout the next year. [*YouTube- Bali Arts Festival 2013- Oleg Tmulilingan- Cudamani*]

Balinese Movement Arts and Dance

The **Wayang Kulit** is a traditional shadow play enacted with two-dimensional puppets made of leather. While the puppets are extremely colorful and ornate, in performance the audience sees them only in silhouette. A performance of Wayang Kulit lasts approximately nine hours, all through the night, during which time people will come and go, eat, and socialize as they please. The puppeteer (called a **Dalang**) controls all of the puppets with his hands and feet while also providing all narration, singing, and Foley sound effects. Musical accompaniment is provided by the 4-member Gender Wayang ensemble (discussed above) and possibly additional musicians or singers as necessary. The allegorical stories of the Wayang Kulit are often drawn from the Hindu epic stories of heroes and villains found in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* sacred texts. [*YouTube- Bali and Beyond Wayang Kulit*]

For more information about Balinese dance, which is decidedly angular in many respects, see the video [*YouTube- Understanding Balinese Dance*]

A very popular dance form, designed for tourists in the 1930s, is the all-male **Kecak** dance-drama. This performance often reenacts stories from the *Ramayana* epic, with dancers playing primary characters and the chorus providing both musical accompaniment and additional setting, acting both as physical features such as wind or waves and as the army of the Monkey King Hanuman. The name of the dance derives from the chanted syllable of the chorus, used to create complicated interlocking patterns derived from *Kotekan*. Certain specific chorus members may also chant *Pokok* and colotomic parts. [*YouTube-Kecak Dance; Ketjak Dance (excerpt)*]