

Gambang Techniques: Aspects of Regionalism in Java and Bali

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at the University of New England under the supervision of
Drs David Goldsworthy and Andrew Alter



Fig 1: Pak Kurnadi playing *gambang* at Hotel Bentani, Cirebon

Prologue

He sits at the *gambang*. The beaters in his hands travel up and down the wooden keys. It is a sound you hear outside the bungalows of Bali, in the *wayang kulit* of Java, in Sundanese *wayang golek*, and during the tourist oriented *angklung* shows. The music is in perpetual motion, but with frequent bounces and syncopations. The tuning is called *slendro*, the scale with no semitones. Is he making it all up? What patterns are evident, and are the choices his, his cultures' or both? Why does this instrument carry so much melody and rhythm?

Abstract

This thesis investigates the use of wood and bamboo keyed xylophones, often known by the name ***gambang***, throughout the islands of Java and Bali; analysing playing styles in the dominant cultural centres of Java (Solo and Yogyakarta), Sunda (Bandung), and of the *gambang* areas of Bali (Negara and Tenganan), and thus to create broad divisions within the thesis; examining playing patterns from lessons and transcriptions and placing those variations and developments in an historico-cultural context; and examining in particular the xylophone practices of the border regions of Banyuwangi and Cirebon, comparing them with general models for the regions surrounding them, thus seeking signatures distinctive to each area.

In so doing the thesis investigates issues of local, regional and national identity, and questions in what ways these have affected the distinctive styles of each area, and whether any dominant cultures (including the West) have changed the old and new traditions of Indonesian *gambang* playing.

In the process of this investigation guidelines to understanding and creating *gambang* variations are established that might assist future researchers.

Declaration

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not been and is not being submitted for any other degree.

I declare that to the best of my knowledge this work is my original work, except where sources are specifically noted, and any help in preparing this work has been duly acknowledged.

Mike Burns

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MB Sunday, 23 January 2005

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| 3 | .15:19 | <i>Gantungan</i> phrasing - variation | Soegito, <i>gamelan</i> teacher, Indonesian Embassy: | Indonesian Embassy, Canberra 2001 |
| 4 | 1'06:00 | <i>Ayak-ayakan Malang</i> | Unidentified performer, Seni Padepokan Mangun Dharma: | Malang, July 1998 |
| 5 | .47:07 | (Tulungagung <i>gambang</i>) | Unidentified performer, during <i>ketoprak</i> | East Java, July 1998 |
| 6 | 4'16:02 | <i>Penungkap Sabda</i> | Yeh Kuning <i>Joged bumbung</i> group | Negara, West Bali August 1998 |
| 7 | .36:12 | <i>Pintu Gerbang</i> | <i>Seni jegog</i> , Tegalcangkring: | Negara, West Bali, August 1998; |
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| 11 | .49:11 | <i>Klocian solo</i> | Pak B | Banyuwangi, East Java, July 1998 |
| 12 | 1'27:09 | <i>Klocian duo</i> 1 | Pak A & Ichwan | Banyuwangi, East Java, July 1998 |
| 13 | .09:06 | <i>Changeover</i> | Pak A, B & Ichwan | Banyuwangi, East Java, July 1998 |
| 14 | 1'09:12 | <i>Klocian duo</i> 2 | Pak A & B | Banyuwangi, East Java, July 1998 |
| 15 | 1'23:09 | <i>Klocian</i> , followed by <i>gandrung lagu</i> | <i>Angklung empat</i> group, dir. Sumitro & Suniardiyanto | Banyuwangi, East Java, July 1998 |

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| 2. Sampak Sunda |
| 3. Banjaran Upandi |
| 4. Banjaran Sukaya |
| 5. Ranjow Cinta |
| 6. Kacirebonan |
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| 8. Punyah |
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| 10. Gamelan gambang-Kusumba |
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| 13. Klocian duo2 |

Foreword

In 1976 a number of students at the University of Western Australia began studying *gamelan* music as a preliminary to studies in Ethnomusicology under a visiting authority, Professor Bernard Suryabrata (originally Ijzerdraat), at one point one of Jaap Kunst's most dedicated students. My impressions from Suryabrata are that he dealt with building and repairing the instruments, and subtleties of playing, while Kunst gave the lectures and kept track of the terms. Each year he would bring assistants with him and we would learn complex pieces to accompany traditional dance by his troupe. Yet UWA abandoned the ethnomusicology course in 1978, and much of that work was lost and forgotten.

In 1983 I went to Java to study in the field, and I visited their acquaintances in Central Java, and studied in Yogyakarta and Solo, spending a week in a village in the Wuryantoro mountains. By that time I had learned all the parts of over a dozen pieces on the simpler *gamelan* instruments, from Solo, Yogya, Cirebon, Bogor and Banten. With his assistant Sukaya Dikarta I studied *gambang*, along with drumming, zither (*kacapi*), flute (*suling*), and wood-carving. I also sought lessons in other localities, and made many subsequent journeys in search of skills in the arts, almost all of it at my own expense.

Suryabrata was determined that *gamelan* should be studied very broadly, that there were vital connections between the traditions of Java, Sunda and Bali. Kunst was inclined towards such ideas in *Music In Java*, but the tendency in most ethnomusicological circles since then has been the opposite - Sunda, Java and Bali have been treated separately, with very little reference to one another. Nonetheless, there are many areas of overlap in those traditions, and particularly in the study of the *gambang*.

After meeting with R Anderson Sutton and Dr David Goldsworthy in Canberra late in 1994, comparison of *gambang* techniques emerged as a promising area of research. This led to further trips to Java to investigate *gambang* practice in two border cities of ethnically distinct areas - Cirebon, on the Sunda-Java border; and Banyuwangi, the Javanese ferry port across the strait from Bali.

What I found confirmed both the diversity of common roots and traits and the variety of locally distinguishing features. This provoked investigations such as: what makes a phrase distinct for one area?; do the border towns identify with one region or another, or as a separate entity entirely? and; in what ways are the *gambang* played in the same way? Further reading of Sutton's work (75,91) supported the need to study *gamelan* in its pluralism, and filled in many gaps.

As the thesis reached its final stages, it seemed unlikely to provide simple answers to those questions and issues. West Java seemed to have more in common with East Java than with Central Java, and issues of identity were multi-layered and individual. Thus the finished thesis presents many issues and much data with varied conclusions around the focus of the *gambang*, with numerous analyses demonstrating the variety of approaches to the instrument, and some broad details of cultural context. In addition, I had always intended that this work should be of use to musicians, and *gamelan* musicians in particular. Hence this work is presented as an instructive, if brief, compendium of regional *gambang* techniques for performers, and also as an investigation into regionalism as expressed in *gambang* playing

Orthography

The Indonesian language follows the same orthographies as Finnish or Eastern European:
Vowels:

- *a* is pronounced long as in father (British/Australian), slightly shorter as *ang*. In Central Javanese terminal *a*'s are pronounced *â*, as in walk. In East Java this almost becomes *o*. Eg: tabuh, but *Surabayâ* (central) and *Surâboyo* (East Java);
- *e* is of three types: it may be short, as in bet; longer when stressed or terminal, as in soufflé; or voiceless (the *schwa*) in prefixes such as *se-*, *ke-* or *pe-*. Eg: short – *patet*; stressed – *soré*; voiceless – *kenong*, *slenthem* (K'nong. Slent'm);
- *i* is always of medium length, as in pin;
- *o* tends to be long: *pola*, *saron*, *grobogan*. (Not like *toboggan*);
- *u* is always long, as in brute. It is never the *a* substitute of cup, nor the diphthong *yu* in vacuum. Examples: *kempul*, *Sunda*.

Consonants:

- *b* is standard, as in bath;
- *c* is always *ch*, as in chair. Examples: *Cirebon*, *pancer*. It replaced the prewar Dutch *tj* (*Tjirebon*, *pantjer*);
- *d* and *f* are as in English duffer;
- *g* is always hard, as in guard, except in the nasal *ng*, pronounced as in sing. Indonesian separates *ng* and *ngg* – *gongan* is pronounced as in hanging, but *jengglong* as in Molonglo (Australian);
- *h* is variable. As an initial such as in *halus* it is very light, almost *alus*; the same in a terminal, as in *mudah* (easy), but the aspirant is important – *muda* means young. *h* softens the plosives *d* and *t* in *gending* and *pathet*, but it makes *kh* a harsh glottal catch, between the Scottish and Arabic *ch*, depending on the area;
- *j* now stands for *dj*, as in joy. In pre-war texts it was always English y, thus the old spelling of Jakarta was *Djakarta*;
- *k*, *l*, *m*, *n* and *p* are standard as in kick, lick, mock, nick and pick;
- *q* is a hard aspirant, as in quara, the Koran is spelt *Quran*;
- *r* is standard, as in right, occasionally rolled, as in Scottish braw;
- *s* is standard as in sit, and never the *z* of *is*;
- *t* is always hard, as in tight;
- *v* and *w* are standard, but rare;
- *x*, also rare, can be another harsh aspirant;
- *y* is rare, equivalent to *i*. The oddity remains that *Jogjakarta* (once *Djogdjakarta*) is now spelled *Yogyakarta*;
- *z* as in zoo. Again, rare.

Beyond these rules, it should be mentioned that Indonesian tends not to aspirate at the end of plosives (*b*, *d*, *g*, *k*, *p* and *t*). Say "stop" and keep your lips shut and you get the idea.

Finally, emphasis in Indonesian is generally light or optional: gambang or *gamb*ang.