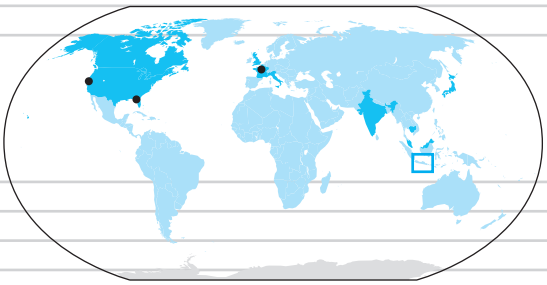
chapter seven

Indonesian **gamelan** music:
interlocking rhythms, interlocking **worlds**



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Bali is a small island located in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia. I first ventured there in 1989 while an ethnomusicology graduate student. I have since traveled to Bali many times, and my professional life has come to revolve largely around studying, performing, and teaching Balinese music. Many of my important life lessons—about trust, compassion, and the joys and challenges of experiencing music in a distant land with people whose musical and cultural backgrounds are far removed from my own—I learned in Bali.

Soon after arriving in Bali during my first visit, I headed into town one day to do some shopping. On my way back to my bungalow, I stumbled upon a brick-paved temple courtyard where four teenage boys were sitting

World events		Music events
Hinduism and Buddhism brought to Bali from Java, blending together with one another and with earlier Balinese belief systems to form the base of the Hindu-Balinese Agama Tirta religion Frequent warring between rival Balinese kingdoms	**13th century–1906 Pre-colonial era**	Advanced culture and arts with *gamelan* music as central component of ritual, social, and political life
	1889	French composer Claude Debussy hears gamelan at the World's Fair in Paris; influences his compositional approach
Bali colonized by Dutch	**1906–1908**	*Gamelan gong kebyar* and kebyar musical style emerge in the wake of Dutch colonization, sociopolitical transformation
	1933	German film *Insel der Dämonen* (Island of Demons), featuring *Kecak* performance
Republic of Indonesia declared (though full national independence not achieved until 1949)	**1945**	
	1950s–present	Extensive experimentation on the part of both Indonesian and Western musicians with the blending of gamelan and Western music elements
	1986	First *gamelan beleganjur* contest, Denpasar New contest musical style, *kreasi beleganjur,* emerges
	1990–1992	Beleganjur groups directed by composer I Ketut Suandita win three consecutive annual championships in the major Denpasar beleganjur contest
	1997	Premiere performance of "B.A.Ph.PET," a post-traditional work for gamelan and scratch turntable soloist by Michael Bakan
	2005	Sony BMG Indonesia releases *Magic Finger*, by I Wayan Balawan and Batuan Ethnic Fusion; includes the track "Country Beleganjur"

around relaxing and chatting. Resting in a haphazard arrangement near the boys were four small knobbed gongs and a bundle of mallets. Apparently some kind of a rehearsal was about to begin. This excited me, for I had heard little Balinese music of any kind since my arrival.

It took a long time—perhaps half an hour—for all of the musicians to arrive and for the rehearsal proper to begin, but it was well worth the wait. I counted 21 musicians in all. The music they played was powerful: loud, brash, and forcefully energetic. It sounded nothing like any of the Indonesian music I had heard before coming to Bali, and nothing like the rather uninspiring "tourist performances" I'd attended since arriving either. It pumped along with a contagious groove and mesmerizing rhythmic drive. The two drummers and eight cymbal players propelled the music forward with dazzling unison figures and continuous streams of interlocking rhythm that unfolded over the anchor of a steady, recurring cycle played on large gongs suspended from ornately decorated stands. Meanwhile, rapid-fire melodies played

in interlocking patterns by four musicians on a set of four small hand-held gongs elaborated a two-tone ostinato melody played on a pair of similar instruments an octave below.

The rhythmic complexity, the precise execution, the inventiveness of the musical arrangement with its endless variations and contrasting sections—all of these were breathtaking. I was transfixed, and I listened carefully, transcribing the rhythms in my head as best I could. After a while, the playing stopped. There was some talking among the musicians and the next thing I knew, one of the cymbal players was looking at me, smiling, beckoning me to come over. As I walked toward him, he held out his cymbals.

I took the cymbals and sat down next to a slim, mop-topped member of the group. He appeared to be the leader of the cymbal section. He smiled and introduced himself as Madé. As the drumming introduction started up, I glued my eyes on Madé's hands. He sprang into action and I followed. (At this point, listen to **CD ex. #2-11** as you continue to read.)

CENG - - - CENG - CENG - - - CENG CENG, went the cymbals; then again,
CENG - - - CENG - CENG - - - CENG CENG. Then softer,
ceng - - ceng - - ceng - - ceng - ceng - CENG CENG CENG, leading directly into an intense passage of interlocking cymbal rhythm,
CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-
CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-, then, back to unison:
CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG CENG
Then a repetition of the whole last chunk:
CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-
CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-CENG-ceCENG-ceCENG-
CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG-CENG CENG, and on we went.

CENG ce-CENG (CHAYNG chuh-CHAYNG)

The author (with beard) performing in a contest with a gamelan beleganjur group in Bali, Indonesia, 1990.

What joy! Here I was, halfway around the world, playing a kind of music I had only just discovered with a group of musicians I had never met before and with whom I didn't even yet share a common language. But we were playing together, the music sounded good, and we were having a great time.

When our session ended, I asked the cymbal player, who spoke some English, what kind of music we had been playing.

gamelan beleganjur (gah-muh-lahn buh-luh-gahn-YOOR)

"Gamelan music," he said.

"Gamelan what?" I asked. "What kind of gamelan music?"

"Gamelan beleganjur," he replied.

I jotted down the unfamiliar name on a notepad. A new chapter of my life had just begun.

■ ■ ■

Introduction

This chapter explores musical traditions of Indonesian **gamelan** music, with a particular focus on the **gamelan beleganjur,** the Balinese "gamelan of walking warriors." The term *gamelan* essentially means "ensemble" or "orchestra". It is used in reference to a diverse class of mainly percussion-dominated music ensembles found on Bali, Java, and several other Indonesian islands. Related types of ensembles also are found elsewhere in Southeast Asia, for example, in Malaysia and Cambodia. Though they usually consist of a large number of individual instruments played by multiple performers, each gamelan is conceived of in its entirety as a *single* music instrument. Each is regarded as being unique and distinct from all other gamelans, even from other gamelans of the exact same type. Individual gamelans even have their own proper names, like Gamelan of the Venerable Dark Cloud.

The gamelan beleganjur is a *processional ensemble* (i.e., the musicians walk or march as they perform, as in a Western marching band) consisting of multiple gongs, drums, and cymbals (see the photos, pp. 96, 104, and 106). It has played an integral role in Balinese ritual and ceremonial life for many centuries. Traditionally associated with warfare, battles with evil spirit forces, and rituals for the dead, it has in modern times become the basis of an exciting type of music contest as well. From the interlocking rhythms of its music to the interlocking of worlds it animates—human and spirit, traditional and modern, Balinese and Western—the gamelan beleganjur is an ideal lens through which to view vital processes of tradition and transformation in Balinese music.

Balinese Gamelan Music in Context

Like all music traditions, Balinese gamelan traditions are framed by broader musical, historical, cultural, and societal contexts. In this section, we briefly overview some of these in preparation for the more focused exploration of beleganjur and related gamelan musics that follows in the later portions of the chapter.

Bali and the Republic of Indonesia

Bali is one of more than 17,000 islands in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia (Republic of Indonesia), which spans from Sumatra in the west to Papua in the east. Close to 6,000 of Indonesia's islands are inhabited. Bali is very small—you can easily drive around its perimeter in a day—but it is densely populated. More than 3 million people live there, the majority in the fertile rice-growing lands of the southern and southeastern portions of the island. Bali is home to a very large tourist industry, annually hosting hundreds of thousands of visitors from other parts of Indonesia and throughout the world.

The capital of Indonesia is Jakarta, the country's largest city with a population of 14 million. Jakarta is also one of the world's most densely populated metropolises. It is located in the northwestern portion of Java, Bali's neighboring island to the west. More than 120 million people, over half of Indonesia's entire population, live in Java. Surakarta and Yogyakarta are other major Javanese cities. Both are located in the province of Central Java. They are home to the great musical traditions of **Central Javanese court gamelan** (*gamelan kraton*), an example of which we heard earlier on **CD ex. #1-7** (to which we will return). Another major historical and contemporary center of gamelan activity is the city of Bandung, where the distinctive language, culture, and music of the Sundanese people of West Java predominate.

Bandung (Bahn-doong)

Indonesia became an independent nation in 1945, though full national sovereignty was not achieved until 1949. Most of its lands, including Bali, were formerly Dutch colonies or Dutch-occupied territories. Bali did not come under Dutch colonial rule until 1906–1908, much later than Java and many other Indonesian islands. The national language is **Bahasa Indonesia** (Indonesian), a derivative of Malay, though more than 300 other languages are spoken by members of the country's 300-plus ethnic groups, each of which has its own distinctive culture. The Balinese are one of these many ethnic groups, accounting for less than 2 percent of the Indonesian population. Almost 40 percent of Indonesians are of Javanese ethnicity, and another 16 percent are ethnically Sundanese.

Bahasa Indonesia (Bah-HAH-suh Indoh-NEE-see-uh)

Indonesia's national slogan, **Unity in Diversity** (Bhinnéka Tunggal Ika), was instituted to provide a framework for the preservation, development, and nationalization of the country's diverse cultures and cultural traditions. Certain traditions, including various forms of Central Javanese gamelan and Balinese gamelan, have figured especially prominently in the national image of Indonesia promoted under the cultural nationalism agenda of Unity in Diversity, both within Indonesia and internationally. The modern, contest style of beleganjur music, which originated in Bali's capital city, Denpasar, in 1986, has received abundant government support as a musical emblem of Balinese-Indonesian cultural nationalism.

Bhinnéka Tunggal Ika (Bee-nay-kah Toon-gahl EE-kah)

Denpasar (Duhn-PAH-SAHR)

Religion in Bali and Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's largest Islamic nation, both geographically and in population. Almost 90 percent of Indonesians are Muslim, though the religion is practiced in many varied forms that often represent syncretisms with earlier Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous belief systems. Bali is the only province of Indonesia in which Hinduism is the majority religion. Indeed, Bali is the only world society outside of the Indian subcontinent in which the majority of the population is Hindu.

Agama Tirta (Ah-gah-muh TEER-tuh)

wayang kulit (wah-yahng KOO-leet)

Though historically derived from Hinduism in India and sharing many key features with it—cremation of the dead, belief in reincarnation, entrenchment in great mythic Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, a prominent place for music and related arts in religious life—Balinese Hinduism is a unique religion. It is known either as Agama Hindu (Hindu Religion) or **Agama Tirta** (Religion of Holy Water) and is in fact a syncretic faith blending elements of Hinduism and Buddhism (both originally brought to Bali from Java beginning in the 13th century) with earlier layers of indigenous Balinese spiritual belief and practice. Gamelan music always has been central to the practices of Balinese Hinduism and is performed at virtually all religious ceremonies. Most of the major forms of Balinese gamelan and related arts—dances, dance-dramas, shadow puppetry (*wayang kulit*)—trace back historically to the same Hindu-Javanese culture (the Majapahit) that brought Hinduism to Bali many centuries ago.

Gambuh, an ancient Balinese dance-drama.

insights and perspectives

Bali Aga: The "Original Balinese" and Their Gamelan Music

Not all Balinese are Hindus. In certain Balinese villages such as Tenganan and Trunyan, people follow indigenous religious faiths that have not absorbed the Hindu or Buddhist layers of influence that largely define Agama Tirta. These are the villages of peoples known as the **Bali Aga,** or "Original Balinese." Though there are similarities between the Bali Aga and Hindu-Balinese cultures, there are also profound differences. Certain sacred Balinese gamelans believed to predate the arrival of Hindu-Javanese culture centuries ago, such as the iron-keyed *gamelan selonding* of Tenganan and certain other Bali Aga villages, are regarded with reverence not only among the Bali Aga themselves but by the Balinese population at large.

It is also important to note that though Islam is not nearly as prevalent in Bali as it is elsewhere in Indonesia, there is a sizable Muslim population on the island. A number of villages and towns in northern Bali are predominantly Muslim.

Balinese shadow puppet performance (wayang kulit).

In the Hindu-Balinese conception of the universe (i.e., Hindu-Balinese *cosmology*), there are three worlds (*Triloka*). The Upper World is the domain of the gods and venerated ancestors, who reside in the heavens above Mount Agung, the volcano that gave birth to Bali with its own emergence. It is here that the Trimurti, the "Three Shapes" of the supreme Hindu deity—Brahma, the Creator; Wisnu (Visnu, Vishnu), the Preserver; and Siwa (Siva, Shiva), the Destroyer—are believed to dwell. The Middle World of Balinese cosmology is Bali itself, the earthly realm of the Balinese people. The Lower World, beginning where land meets sea and descending from there, is the realm of evil spirits and malevolent creatures, such as *bhutas* and *leyaks,* who pose a constant threat to humankind. As we will explore, gamelan beleganjur music performed during Hindu-Balinese cremation processions functions in important ways in the battles between the human and evil spirit forces that animate these events.

Triloka (Tree-LOH-kah)

Trimurti (Tree-MOOR-tee)

Gamelan in Bali and beyond

Few world cultures have held so tenaciously to the cultivation of their indigenous musical traditions as have the Balinese, and few musical traditions have inspired such awe among world music connoisseurs as has Balinese gamelan.

Indonesia is a nation of extraordinary musical diversity that goes far beyond gamelan music. Non-gamelan-based religious, folk, and popular traditions of many kinds; regional and national musical styles; and contemporary, experimental music genres blending traditional Indonesian and international elements abound. Resources for exploring some of the fascinating non-gamelan music traditions of Indonesia are included at the Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/bakan2). Here, though, we limit our focus exclusively to gamelan.

kebyar (kuh-BYAHR)

BALINESE AND JAVANESE GAMELAN MUSIC: A COMPARISON The best-known Indonesian gamelan traditions are Central Javanese court gamelan and Balinese **gamelan gong kebyar,** examples of both of which we have already heard in connection with earlier chapters (**CD ex. #1-7** and **CD ex. #2-12,** respectively). These two traditions share a common line of

historical descent originating with Javanese gamelan traditions of several centuries ago. The following general musicultural features are characteristic of both, and of gamelan musics generally:

- Related types of instruments (bronze gongs, bronze metallophones, drums, end-blown bamboo flutes, bowed chordophones).
- A basis in cyclic musical forms.
- Related tuning systems, scales, and modes.
- Multipart textures in which the higher-pitched instruments play at faster rhythmic rates than the lower-pitched instruments.
- Melodic organization in which a main, slow-moving melody played on one or more instruments (the *core melody*) is embellished by faster-moving melodies played on other instruments.
- Close associations with various forms of dance, dance-drama, and other arts (e.g., shadow puppetry).
- A common historical foundation in Hindu religious cultures, which is reflected symbolically in the music.

Yet while Central Javanese court gamelan music and Balinese gamelan gong kebyar music exhibit key similarities, they sound very different from one another. This can be heard by comparing the Javanese selection of **CD ex. #1-7** and the Balinese selection of **CD ex. #2-12.** Listen to the first two minutes or so of each and make a subjective comparison, noticing how distinct these pieces are in their styles and in the musical impressions and moods they create. Each might be considered emblematic of its own tradition.

"Ketawang: Puspawarna" ("Kuh-tah-wahng Poos-pah-WOR-nuh")

"Jaya Semara" ("Jah-yuh Suh-MAH-ruh")

The Javanese piece (entitled "Ketawang: Puspawarna") captures the majestic, expansive, almost ethereal quality of Central Javanese court gamelan. This is music that evokes the royal pageantry and splendor of a time long ago when gamelan instruments and music served as potent symbols of the power, legitimacy, and perceived semi-divine status of Javanese rulers in royal court life. With its many and varied layers of intersecting melody, extremely wide range of instrumental and vocal timbres, and highly stratified polyphonic texture, all of it anchored by a perpetually recurring cycle of gong tones played on impressive bronze gongs of many sizes, this is music that "aestheticizes the structure of the universe" in Javanese terms. Its cyclic form orders time into cycles that mirror the progress of time and space, its "exaggerated musical stratification" symbolizes the extreme *social* stratification of dynastic Java centuries ago, and its musical texture overall reflects, models, and makes manifest in sound the complex relationships that were believed to exist between individuals, the social order, and the cosmos in ancient Java (Spiller 2008:70).

In contrast, the Balinese piece ("Jaya Semara") captures Bali's signature gamelan sound: resonant bronze gongs, shimmering bronze-keyed metallophones, fast-paced melodies played on metallophone instruments and sets of small tuned gongs, intricate drumming, and a frenetic pace and energy. This is the sound of *kebyar,* a Balinese term that literally means "to flare up" (like a match), though it is sometimes also translated as "lightning." It is fiery, explosive music, born of a time in the early 20th century when Balinese society was in the midst of tremendous social upheaval, moving toward modernity under Dutch colonial rule after some five centuries of Hindu-Balinese monarchies (see Tenzer 1998 [1991], 2000 on kebyar).

Central Javanese gamelan performance.

Balinese gamelan gong kebyar. Notice the very large gongs at the back of the photo. Such gongs are foundational to *gong cycles* in both Balinese and Javanese gamelan music. The two musicians positioned directly in front of the large gongs (who are facing forward rather than sideways) are playing the *reyong*, a melodic instrument consisting of multiple, small kettle-gongs.

We now take a closer look at these two well-known gamelan compositions, beginning with the Javanese piece, "Ketawang: Puspawarna." The word *ketawang* refers to its cyclic form, which is defined by a *gong cycle* of that name with 16 beats. Each ketawang cycle begins and ends with a stroke on the largest, lowest-pitched gong of the gamelan; the other beats are marked by various smaller gongs of higher pitch. The consistent, recurring pattern of gong strokes that results provides the music's main foundation.

"Puspawarna" is the proper name of the piece, which distinguishes it from all other compositions. It is a word meaning "kinds of flowers" and refers to nine different flowers that metaphorically symbolize the nine principal aesthetic states *(rasa)* in traditional Javanese spiritual philosophy; the sung text makes reference to two of these flowers. The melody and text are attributed to a 19th-century Javanese prince, who reportedly composed the piece to commemorate his favorite wives and concubines.

"Ketawang: Puspawarna" was traditionally performed as an entrance piece for the prince during royal ceremonies. It was used both to herald his arrival and to symbolize in musical sound his exalted status and due reverence. The recording heard here on **CD ex. #1-7** (originally released in 1971) was made at the Paku Alaman royal palace in Yogyakarta, Central Java. It features a famous set of gamelan instruments that is more than 250 years old.

The performance begins with an introduction played on a bowed chordophone with two strings, the *rebab*. Drums (*kendhang*) join the rebab about three seconds in, slowing the tempo slightly and cueing the entrance of the rest of the ensemble a few seconds later. The drummer is always the director of the ensemble, even though the drum parts in Central Javanese gamelan music tend to be subtle and understated.

The first stroke on the largest gong (at 0:07) marks the beginning of the composition proper. The 16-beat ketawang gong cycle commences here, as does a slow and steady-paced core melody played on several metallophone instruments (*saron*). During the course of the first gong cycle (0:07–0:22), all of the instruments of the ensemble enter. Most of the instrumental parts other than the drumming and the gong cycle are melodic. Some of the melodies are played on tuned sets of small bronze kettle-gongs (see photo, p. 91), others on a wooden-keyed xylophone-type instrument, others yet on keyed metallophone instruments or plucked

chordophones. Some are quite sparse, steady-paced, and slow-moving, while others move along quickly with a great deal of rhythmic activity, or else seem to float temporarily beyond the confines of the metric rhythmic structure altogether.

The overall effect is of a complex and richly enveloping multiple-melody texture. The various layers of "basic" melody and melodic elaboration seem to weave in and out of each other like the many strands of a most intricate tapestry, with all of them ultimately answering to the authority of the drummer's direction (tempo changes, cueing of new musical sections) and the underlying constancy of the gong cycle.

Beginning with the second gong cycle, its arrival marked by a second stroke on the largest, lowest-pitched gong at 0:22, the vocalists—a male chorus and two female soloists—come increasingly to the fore. The multitiered symbolism of the sung poetic text—flowers, aesthetic philosophy, spirituality, and reflections on life, love, and romance all rolled into one—finds poignant parallels in the rich multidimensionality of the musical texture that frames it.

The historical significance of this recording of "Ketawang: Puspawarna" extends beyond its status as an exemplar of Central Javanese gamelan artistry. It was one of the selections included on the now-legendary Voyager Golden Record, a gold-plated, copper record album that was launched into space onboard NASA's two *Voyager* spacecraft in 1977. NASA's aim in producing the Golden Record was to create for posterity (and for the possible benefit of extraterrestrial life forms yet unknown to us) a compilation of sounds and images that would collectively portray the diversity of life and culture on earth. As of 2008, the two *Voyager* spacecraft had become just the third and fourth human-made objects ever to escape entirely from our solar system. They will presumably fly around in outer space as a time capsule of human cultural achievement for billions of years, or until some intelligent extraterrestrials manage to capture them (and perhaps figure out how to listen to the record as well), whichever comes first.

The Balinese counterpart to "Ketawang: Puspawarna" in our gamelan style comparison is "Jaya Semara" (Victorious Semara) (**CD ex. #2-12**). The piece is named for the god of love in Hindu-Balinese mythology, Semara, who resides in the floating sky and is married to the moon. It was composed by I Wayan Beratha (b. 1924; see the photo, p. 18), arguably the most important and influential Balinese composer of the 20th century. The introductory section of the piece, called the *kebyar* (which gives the ensemble its name), accounts for more than half of the performance's four-minute length. It alternates between explosive unison passages played by the entire ensemble and rapid interlocking passages that highlight individual sections of instruments within the ensemble. The *reyong,* which consists of a set of small kettle-gongs played by four musicians (see photo, p. 92), gets the most features, with especially impressive bursts of interlocking at 0:26–0:32 and 1:01–1:30. The high-pitched **gangsa** metallophones (see photo, p. 95) put their interlocking skills on display in the passage from 0:48–0:58. The two **kendang** drummers get their turn to shine in an extended interlocking duet from 1:51–2:10 (note that the spelling for the Balinese drums, *kendang,* differs slightly from that for the Javanese drums, *kendhang*).

gangsa (GAHNG-suh)
kendang (kuhn-DAHNG)

The arrival of the gong cycle at 2:13 marks the beginning of the second main section of the piece, which continues until 3:29. Like its Javanese ketawang counterpart, this Balinese gong cycle has a length of 16 beats, but its sequence and pattern of gong strokes is different. The first beat of each gong cycle is marked by a very large, low-pitched gong (see photo, p. 92). Certain other beats within the cycle are marked by higher-pitched gongs. There is also a small, muffled gong that punctuates every one of the 16 beats of the cycle, providing a steady-beat pulse for the other musicians and for listeners (no instrument of equivalent function is used in the Javanese gamelan). A steady-paced core melody moves along at the same rate of 16 beats per cycle; this is performed on metallophones of relatively low pitch (e.g., the instrument seen at the bottom-left of the photo on p. 95).

A significant contrast to the Javanese piece is in the area of tempo, which in "Jaya Semara" is very fast. Each 16-beat cycle takes only about five seconds to complete (e.g., 2:13–2:18, 2:19–2:24). In "Ketawang: Puspawarna," the first gong cycle is 15 seconds long (0:07–0:22) and the second one, played at an even slower tempo, occupies a full 24 seconds (0:22–0:46).

Drumming is another area of marked contrast between the two pieces, and between Central Javanese and Balinese gamelan generally. In the Balinese case, like in the Javanese, it is the drumming part that directs the ensemble, signaling changes in tempo, cueing new sections of the piece, and so on. But whereas in the Javanese example there is just a single drummer who plays in a relatively understated manner, the Balinese example features two drummers playing fast and complex interlocking patterns in a flashy, virtuosic style. One drum is the "male," the other the "female" (though the two players are typically of the same gender, traditionally, but not always, male).

Complex, interlocking textures dominate the music at many other levels as well: all of the fastest-moving melodic parts result from two or more players performing different patterns that interlock to create an integrated whole. As in the opening kebyar, the different instrumental sections here are featured one after the other in spectacular interlocking displays as the form unfolds (e.g., drums at 2:13, metallophones at 2:31, kettle-gongs at 2:48). In this second section, however, a steady-beat accompaniment grounded in the music's 16-beat gong cycle and core melody provides a firm foundation for the interlocking pyrotechnics that emerge above it.

insights and perspectives

The Paired Tuning of Female and Male Instruments

One of the most striking features of the sound of a gamelan gong kebyar is its shimmering quality. This owes much to the unique **paired tuning** of sets of Balinese gamelan instruments. As noted, the gamelan gong kebyar features a number of melodic metallophone instruments called gangsa, which come in different sizes and octave ranges (see photo, p. 95). There is either one pair or two pairs of gangsa in each octave range. One instrument of each pair is identified as the "female," the other as the "male." The bronze keys of each male-female instrument pair are tuned to produce the exact same sequence of pitches. However, each female note is tuned slightly *lower* than its male counterpart. **Online Musical Illustration #21** illustrates this. First you hear a five-note ascending scale played on a female metallophone; then you hear the same scale played on that metallophone's male counterpart instrument. Notice how all five notes in the "male" scale are slightly higher in pitch.

Listening to these two different versions of the same scale, you might think that the two instruments are simply out of tune relative to each other. This apparent "out-of-tuneness" is intentional, however, for when the male and female notes are played together, the blending of their different pitches creates an acoustical beating effect called **ombak** (OAM-bahk), or "wave," that is the essence of the gamelan's brilliant, shimmering sound. Ombak is illustrated in **Online Musical Illustration #22.** In the example, you first hear a single tone played on the female instrument, then the "same" (slightly higher) tone played on the male instrument, and finally both female and male struck simultaneously to produce the ombak wave effect. After this, you hear the full scale of five notes illustrated earlier, but this time with *all* five notes played together on both the male and female metallophones, producing a series of ombak tones from bottom to top.

Balinese say that it is the ombak effect that breathes life into the sound of a gamelan. Without it, a gamelan is *mati,* literally, dead. Symbolically, then, it is the union of female and male elements that creates life in the gamelan, just as it is through the union of female and male in human life that new life is created. On another symbolic level, the lower-pitched tuning of the female instruments may be interpreted generally as a manifestation of Hindu-Balinese notions about gender, where femaleness is associated with the earth and maleness with the sky. (This is similar to the concept of Mother Earth and Father Sky in certain Native American cultures.)

The piece concludes with powerful, full-ensemble unison passages (3:30-end)—minus the gong cycle and core melody—that are reminiscent of the opening kebyar.

Comparing "Ketawang: Puspawarna" and "Jaya Semara" enables us to see how two different traditions with a shared ancestry and many closely related musical and cultural elements—Central Javanese court gamelan and Balinese gamelan gong kebyar—can yield music of strikingly different sound and character. We now turn our attention to other forms of Balinese gamelan, and ultimately to the gamelan beleganjur in particular.

BALINESE GAMELAN DIVERSITY The gamelan gong kebyar, though it is the best-known form of Balinese gamelan on an international scale by far, is, like its musical relative the gamelan beleganjur, but one of more than two dozen distinct types of gamelan found on the tiny, hyperartistic speck of the earth that is Bali. Each type has its own sound and characteristic style. Some feature bronze gongs and metallophones like those heard in the gamelan gong kebyar. Others do not, relying instead on instruments made with sounding materials of iron, hardwood, bamboo, and other substances. There is even one kind of gamelan, to which we will be introduced later, that uses no instruments per se at all, only voices. The music of some gamelans, like that of the grand and ancient *gamelan gong gedé* ("gamelan of the great gongs"), is in many ways closer in character to the regal Central Javanese gamelan tradition than to the fiery style of kebyar. And other gamelan musics bear little apparent resemblance to either of these. Different types of Balinese gamelan also are distinguished by cultural rather than specifically musical criteria. Each one has a unique, designated role within Balinese culture, being associated with particular rituals, ceremonies, dances, dance-dramas, shadow puppet plays, competitive events, and regional styles.

sekehe (SUH-kuh)

The culture of gamelan in Bali is not only rich and diverse, but also extraordinarily active. There are literally thousands of functioning gamelan clubs (*sekehe gong*) on the island dedicated to the preservation and cultivation of its myriad gamelan traditions. In the most densely populated areas, such as the capital city region of Denpasar and Ubud to its north, one can hear a different gamelan rehearsing on the corner of virtually every square block in the weeks leading up to a major gamelan competition.

Of all the many different traditions that are carried on by Bali's scores of gamelan clubs, none is more ubiquitous or fundamental to the meeting of ritual and social requirements of Balinese life than the gamelan beleganjur.

Gangsa-type metallophones of a gamelan gong kebyar.

The Gamelan Beleganjur: An Introduction

We begin our journey through the world of gamelan beleganjur with our first Musical Guided Tour, in which the following elements are introduced and explained:

- The instruments of the ensemble.
- The basic **gong cycle** (i.e., the recurring sequence of strokes on different gongs that serves as the music's foundation).
- The relationship between the music's core melody and the elaboration of that melody in other instrumental parts.
- The standard rhythms and interlocking rhythmic and melodic patterns employed.
- The stratified structure of the music, in which higher-pitched instruments play at faster rates than lower-pitched ones.

Though specifically intended as an introduction to the gamelan beleganjur and its music, this tour also focuses on musical elements and types of instruments that are characteristic of many other types of Balinese gamelan, including the gamelan gong kebyar. Many of these characteristics are even found in Central Javanese gamelan and gamelan traditions of other islands and cultures.

The text in the box below is a transcript of the audio Musical Guided Tour. As you listen to this tour at the Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/bakan2e), follow along with this transcript. Listening through headphones or good quality speakers is recommended.

musical guided tour

The Gamelan Beleganjur

The basic tempo-keeping instrument of the gamelan beleganjur is a medium-small gong called *kajar* (from the root *ajar,* meaning "to line things up"). It keeps a steady beat, like this [♪].

The root foundation of beleganjur music is a *gong cycle* of eight beats called **gilak** (GEE-lahk). It employs two very large gongs called the **gong ageng** (gohng ah-GUHNG), or "great gongs"; plus a medium-sized gong, the *kempur.* Here is the lowest gong ageng, which is identified as the female gong [♪] ; now the slightly higher-pitched male gong [♪]. Finally, here is the kempur [♪] . Combined together with the time-keeping kajar in the context of the eight-beat gilak gong cycle, these instruments sound like this [♪]. An

The instruments of the gamelan beleganjur: bendé, gong ageng (female, male), and kempur in back row, left to right; kendang (drums); reyong (4), kajar, kempluk (optional instrument, not discussed), and ponggang (2) in second row, left to right; cengceng (8 pairs) in front row. Note that the beleganjur version of the reyong consists of just four small kettle-gongs, each hand-held and played by a separate player. The reyong of the gamelan gong kebyar (see photo, p. 92) is a different type of instrument. All subsequent reyong references in the chapter are to the beleganjur type shown here.

additional, clangy-sounding gong called the *bendé* [♪] is usually added to the gilak gong cycle in beleganjur as well. Here is its contribution [♪]. The order of the gong strokes also may be reversed in gilak, which gives the gong cycle a rather different character, like this [♪].

The next musical layer above the gong cycle is the melodic layer. This has two components:

- A core melody played on a pair of tuned, hand-held gongs (the *ponggang*), which sounds like this [♪]; and
- Rapid-paced elaborations of the core melody played on a set of four smaller, higher-pitched, hand-held gongs called **reyong.** Each reyong "pot" is played by a different player. Player 1 performs this pattern on the highest pot [♪]. That pattern is then doubled on the lowest pot, like this [♪]. The second-highest pot fills in some of the rhythmic spaces, like this [♪]. Then the third-highest pot fills in the rest [♪]. Here now is the complete reyong part together with the core melody and the gongs [♪].

The third and final layer of the beleganjur musical texture is provided by drums and cymbals. There are two drums, which are called kendang. One is the female drum [♪]; the other, slightly higher in pitch, is the male drum [♪]. They are played in complex interlocking patterns, like this [♪]. The two drummers are the leaders of the beleganjur ensemble.

The rhythms of the crash cymbal parts are closely aligned with the drumming. There are eight pairs of cymbals, called *cengceng* (chayng-chayng), and eight cymbal players. The cymbal section alternates between performing unison rhythmic figures like this [♪] and interlocking patterns like this [♪]. The most common rhythm for cymbal interlocking is a simple pattern that sounds like this [♪]. By having some of the cymbal players play that pattern on the beat [♪], others play it starting just after the beat [♪], and the rest play it starting just ahead of the beat [♪], but all at the same time, a continuous stream of interlocking rhythmic sound is generated [♪]. This pattern of rhythmic interlocking is called **kilitan telu** (kee-lee-TAHN tuh-LOO). It is the basis of a great variety of different interlocking textures in Balinese music, some melodic, others purely rhythmic.

By way of conclusion, here is the complete gamelan beleganjur, played in a traditional style that incorporates all of the elements outlined above [♪].

Kilitan Telu Interlocking Rhythms: A Musical Symbol of Communal Interdependence

The interlocking texture of the kilitan telu rhythmic patterns, as described and illustrated in the preceding Musical Guided Tour, is interesting not only on a purely musical level, but as a symbol of broader Balinese cultural values as well. Specifically, the kilitan telu and related forms of interlocking are poignant musical symbols of *communal interdependence* in Balinese society. In most every realm of life, from rice cultivation to the meeting of civic duties and religious practice, Balinese people give high priority to working together collectively in pursuit of their communal goals. Individuality and individual expression, so highly prized in Western cultures, tend to be less emphasized among the Balinese. The kilitan telu elegantly symbolizes a Balinese cultural vision of an integrated, interdependent community. Each of its three rhythms is identical to the other two but for its placement relative to the main beat, yet none of these rhythms is considered to be complete by itself; each one *needs* the other two. The kilitan telu whole, as represented sonically by the continuous stream of interlocking rhythm created when all three patterns are played together, is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Balinese Kecak and the kilitan telu

The rhythmic patterns and interlocking textures of the kilitan telu extend across the full range of Balinese gamelan music, from beleganjur cymbal patterns to the intricate melodic tapestries of pieces like "Jaya Semara" (**CD ex. #2-12**). Another context in which they figure prominently is **Kecak,** a Balinese dance-drama with music provided by a gamelan comprised not of

Kecak (Ke-CHAHK)

A Balinese performance of Kecak.

instruments per se, but exclusively of voices, sometimes upwards of 200 of them! Appropriately, this massive vocal ensemble is called a *gamelan suara,* meaning "voice gamelan."

The musical roots of Kecak are found in an ancient trance ritual called Sanghyang Dedari, in which mesmerizing vocal chanting of the kilitan telu and other rhythmic patterns by a group of men surrounding an oil lamp was used to induce trance in female spirit mediums. During the ritual, these mediums would summon ancestral spirits to aid the village community during a time of crisis, especially if the villagers feared that they were under siege by malevolent spirit beings.

In Kecak, the small vocal group of Sanghyang Dedari is expanded into a huge rhythmic chorus, and gamelan gong cycles, melodies, and textures are recreated vocally, with onomatopoeic or other syllables substituting for the different gamelan instruments (for example, "sirrr" for the large gong and "pur" for the smaller gong called kempur). The interlocking rhythmic patterns of the kilitan telu—performed using the vocal syllable *cak* (chak)—remain central to the music. **CD ex. #2-13** is an excerpt from a Kecak performance that illustrates this spectacular and unique sound.

The Kecak dance-drama involves the enactment of episodes from a grand Hindu epic, the Ramayana. The most popular plot involves the kidnapping of a beautiful princess (Sita) by an evil king (Rawana) and her eventual rescue by her beloved Prince Rama and an army of monkeys. The musicians of the vocal gamelan double as actors, playing the roles of the monkeys in Rama's army.

In Bali, Kecak is promoted as an authentic, traditional Balinese dance-drama. In actuality, it is a modern invention, resulting in large part from a collaboration between Balinese musicians and dancers and an expatriate German painter named Walter Spies in connection with a 1933 German film entitled *Insel der Dämonen* (Island of Demons) (see Bakan 2009, Dibia 1996:6–9). Kecak was eventually developed into a dramatic production for tourist performances, and that is its primary cultural niche to the present day.

Experiencing Balinese interlocking, Kecak-style

To get a sense of how it feels to perform interlocking Balinese rhythms like those heard in Kecak, try performing the kilitan telu rhythms charted out in Figure 7.1 with some of your

FIGURE 7.1

Kecak performance exercise: Interlocking kilitan telu rhythms.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(1)
Pung	X	•	•	•	X	•	•	•	(X)
Chak 1	X	•	X	X	•	X	X	•	(X)
Chak 2	•	X	•	X	X	•	X	X	(•)
Chak 3	•	X	X	•	X	X	•	X	(•)

friends. Use the sound "chak" to articulate the notes with your voice, and if there are several of you participating, have one person mark out a steady pulse on the syllable "pung" while the others do interlocking "chak" patterns. Repeat the eight-beat cycle of Figure 7.1 multiple times without pause if you can. If you are uncomfortable doing this exercise vocally, you can clap out the rhythms instead.

The Gamelan Beleganjur in Battles of Good versus Evil

Perceived threats from malevolent spirit beings are an abiding concern for Balinese individuals and communities. Beleganjur music often plays a key role in ritual activities enacted to combat the forces of evil. According to Balinese lore, the gamelan beleganjur was originally created by evil spirits of the Lower World. Later, it was transformed into a powerful force for good after coming into the possession of the Balinese people of the Middle World. It has been an important source of mediation between the three worlds of the Balinese cosmos—Lower, Middle, and Upper—ever since.

In ritual contexts such as cremation processions, beleganjur music is performed to intimidate and drive away malevolent spirits who are said to travel to the earthly Middle World in order to cause harm to people and departing souls of the dead and to disrupt the delicate balance of the cosmos. Despite its supposed underworld origin, the imposing sound of beleganjur music is believed to have the power to frighten evil spirits, who it is hoped will be inclined to scatter in fear rather than face human adversaries equipped with such a potent sonic weapon.

Beleganjur music in Hindu-Balinese cremation processions

Beleganjur music is played in many kinds of rituals, but its presence is nowhere more crucial than in the grand processions of Hindu-Balinese cremation rituals (*ngaben*). The act of cremation is regarded as the first essential step that frees the soul, or **atma,** of the deceased from its ties to the earthly world so that it can commence its afterlife journey to worlds beyond. Ideally, this journey leads to the paradise-like Upper World of the gods and ancestors, where the atma goes to await reincarnation and a return to the Middle World in some form, or, in the most sublime of outcomes, to experience liberation from the cycle of reincarnation altogether and gain a permanent home in the Upper World.

ngaben (nya-buhn)

First, though, the body or exhumed remains (bodies of the dead are sometimes buried for a lengthy period of time prior to being cremated) must be ritually prepared and taken in a large cremation tower (*wadah*) (see photo, p. 100) from the family home compound of the deceased to the Temple of the Dead at the far end of the village. This journey takes the form of a communal procession. The procession ideally involves the participation of all members of the deceased's **banjar.** The term *banjar* is usually translated as "village ward" or "hamlet," though "neighborhood organization" may be more apt. A banjar typically consists of between 50 and 500 families and is responsible for planning and producing most of the core communal, religious,

banjar (BAHN-jahr)

Cremation tower being carried in procession.

and social activities of its membership (Eiseman 1990:72–73). The planning and production of cremations and other mortuary rituals represent the highest calling of the banjar community.

The procession to the cremation grounds is thought to be fraught with peril. Deceased souls who have yet to be cremated are considered dangerously vulnerable to the meddlesome practices of bhutas, leyaks, and other evil spirits. It is feared that these forces of evil will abduct the uncremated, unliberated atma and drag it down to the underworld. The banjar community uses all resources at its disposal to ensure that this does not happen. The performance of beleganjur music is among the most important of these. The music is believed to help both the atma of the deceased and the banjar community in several different ways, both during the course of the procession and during the act of cremation itself.

At the start of the procession, the beleganjur group assembles and lines up immediately behind the cremation tower. It maintains this position throughout the procession. Men and women singing sacred verses also gather in close proximity to the tower. Although the singing is entirely unrelated to the beleganjur music, the two together contribute to a rich musical cacophony that helps to generate the desired state of *ramé*, or "crowdedness," that is a hallmark of virtually every Balinese ritual or social occasion. Other types of processional gamelan may contribute to this ramé soundscape as well, and the general rule is that the more kinds of music there are—the more "crowded" and multifarious the soundscape is, in other words—the better.

insights and perspectives

Caste and Class in Bali

As in other Hindu societies such as India, social organization among the Balinese has traditionally relied upon a *caste system*. A caste is a hereditary social class. In caste societies, every individual is born into a specific caste. One's caste may determine anything from educational and professional opportunities in this life to one's spiritual destiny in lives beyond.

The Balinese caste system is different from the caste system of India (where the whole concept of a social system organized around caste is now officially banned by law, though the vestiges of a caste-based social order are by no means entirely gone—see also Chapter 8, p. 125). In the Balinese system, there are four castes: the priestly caste, the warrior caste, the merchant caste, and the commoner caste (*sudra*—literally "outsider"). About 90 percent of Balinese Hindus belong to the commoner caste. There is no "Untouchables" (Dalit) caste in Bali, in contrast to the traditional Indian caste system.

Functionally, caste affiliation in Bali has mainly to do with one's religious life and obligations: temple affiliations, cremation rites, in some cases priestly duties. Beyond the religious sphere, in social and professional life, caste is much less operative, though not necessarily irrelevant. With the exception of certain sectors of the priesthood, Balinese from all castes associate freely with one another in daily life and business and are generally at liberty to pursue the educational and professional paths of their choice and take part equally in civil affairs.

The tower consists of multiple tiers that represent the three worlds of the Balinese cosmos. The body of the deceased is placed near the top of the tower, symbolizing the hope of its ascent to the Upper World. It is wrapped in a long white cloth, symbolizing purity. The number of tower carriers depends on the size of the tower. It may range from a half dozen men for a small tower to upwards of 20—and in some cases many more than that—for a large one. The largest towers are reserved for wealthy and high-caste individuals (see "Insights and Perspectives" box on page 100 regarding caste).

guided listening experience

Beleganjur Music Performed during a Balinese Cremation Procession

- CD Track #**2-14**
- Featured performer(s)/group: Beleganjur group of Banjar Belaluan Sadmerta, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia
- Format: Excerpt
- Source recording: Field recording by the author

This selection is an excerpt from a 1995 field recording of a small cremation procession in Bali. It was recorded from "inside" the procession to capture the feeling of motion and the vitality that characterize such events. It sounds best through headphones.

As the recording begins, we find ourselves on a street in Denpasar outside the home of the deceased. The members of the banjar have been summoned to begin the procession to the cremation grounds. A group of women and men sing sacred verses (*kidung*) as poetic offerings to the gods and ancestors, imploring their benevolence to ensure a good cremation and safe passage of the departed soul to a good afterlife. The body of the deceased, adorned in a long white cloth, is being placed in the upper tiers of the cremation tower. We hear clicks and taps as final adjustments are made to the tower and the body is eased into its proper place. The tower bearers stand ready to lift the heavy tower onto their shoulders and prepare themselves for the long march ahead. Procession organizers move about the area, telling people to step backward or forward into proper formation and closing off the street to traffic. The beleganjur group takes its place immediately behind the tower. (*Note:* There is no reyong section in the ensemble in this example, as sometimes occurs in ritual beleganjur performances like this one.)

kidung (kee-DOONG)

At 0:36, the lead drummer (performing on the "male" drum) starts to play, cueing the rest of the musicians to raise up their instruments and "announcing" to the entire congregation that the procession is about to begin. He is joined in a brief interlocking flourish by the second drummer (playing the "female" drum) at 0:40, and this cues the entry of the full ensemble at 0:41. Just as the first gong stroke and cymbal crash are sounded, the tower carriers hoist the cremation tower up on their shoulders and the procession begins, with everyone moving at a quick and energetic pace. Unison cymbal rhythms, reinforced by the drumming, are pounded out over the propulsive gong tones of the gilak gong cycle. The unison rhythms give way to a brief passage of interlocking rhythm at 0:53.

Beleganjur ensemble, positioned immediately behind tower, performs in a cremation procession.

Next, at 0:56, the drums and cymbals lay out momentarily while the gong cycle continues. Interlocking drumming and cymbal rhythms follow, with the cymbal section playing its signature kilitan telu patterns (1:06–1:38). The dynamic level of the cymbals and drums rises and falls at different points, reflecting and influencing the pace and energy of the procession. The lead drummer keeps a careful eye on the proceedings, calibrating and adjusting the musical intensity in accordance with the event's functional needs. At 1:39, the cymbals drop out and the two drummers come to the fore, playing an intricate drum duet. The cymbals sneak back in at 1:50, then launch into their kilitan telu interlocking again at 1:54, rising and falling in dynamics and ending with an emphatic CENG! CENG! at 2:05. The drummers and cymbal players rest as the gong cycle continues through to the fade-out ending.

guided listening quick summary

Beleganjur Music Performed during a Balinese Cremation Procession (CD ex. #2-14)

0:00–0:35

- Sound of crowd assembling, singing of sacred verses (kidung).

0:36–0:55

- Entry of lead drummer (0:36), cueing beleganjur ensemble and signaling beginning of procession.
- Full ensemble enters over gilak gong cycle at 0:41 (as tower carriers hoist tower onto their shoulders and the procession begins); unison rhythms in cymbals.
- Brief passage of kilitan telu cymbal interlocking cymbal at end of section (0:53–0:55).

0:56–1:05

- Gong cycle only (no drums or cymbals), followed by interlocking drumming and return of cymbals.

1:06–1:38

- Long passage featuring kilitan telu cymbal interlocking.

1:39–1:49

- Drum duet feature section.

1:50–end

- Cymbals reenter, more kilitan telu interlocking; excerpt fades out after 2:05 as gong cycle continues.

Crossroad battles and a musical ladder to the Upper World

The beleganjur ensemble's assigned task in the cremation procession is far from over at the point where the music fades out at the end of the preceding musical selection (**CD ex. #2-14**). It plays continuously from the start to the finish of the procession, providing a steady yet dynamic sonic backdrop to the ritual proceedings.

Its role is especially important at crossroads along the procession route. Balinese believe that crossroads are the locations where bhutas and leyaks congregate in greatest abundance. They are very dangerous places, especially for vulnerable, uncremated souls of the dead, upon whom the evil spirits are most likely to prey. At every crossroad the cremation tower is spun around in a circle at least three times, as quickly as possible (see the photo, p. 100). This is done because it is believed that the bhutas and leyaks can only travel in straight lines. Thus, the spinning of the tower is thought to confuse them and prevent them from invading the tower to capture the atma.

The spinning of the tower at crossroads is accompanied by beleganjur music of especially great volume and intensity. This energetic music serves several purposes. First, it is believed that it has power, in and of itself, to frighten and deflect potentially meddlesome bhutas and leyaks. Second, it is used to inspire physical strength and courage among the carriers of the heavy tower, who face a formidable challenge in their efforts to spin the tower with sufficient

speed and energy. Third, it is hoped that it will embolden the atma of the deceased itself, who it is believed otherwise may be tempted to flee the tower in fear of the advancing evil spirits, destroying its prospects for a good cremation and a successful afterlife.

At the end of its trek, the processional entourage finally reaches the cremation grounds. The beleganjur group concludes its performance with a climactic passage played just after the tower is lowered to the ground. The body (or its remains) is then removed from the tower, ritually prepared for cremation, and encased in an animal-shaped sarcophagus while the beleganjur musicians briefly rest. Then, as soon as the burning of the sarcophagus begins, they start playing again, performing music of a quieter and more meditative character in a song of farewell that is intended to accompany the departing soul on its journey. This music may be described metaphorically as a ladder upon which the atma, having achieved the first stage of its liberation from the bonds of earthly life and the precarious state of death before cremation, may finally begin its ascent to the Upper World.

Walking Warriors: Worldly Battlegrounds of Beleganjur Music

In exploring the role of beleganjur in Hindu-Balinese cremation rituals, we have seen how it functions as a music of battle, in particular, of battles fought between human communities and their evil spirit adversaries over control of the fates of deceased souls.

Beleganjur music also was performed for battles of a different kind in former times: battles of war fought by the armies of rival Balinese kingdoms. Bali was ravaged by frequent and brutal wars throughout much of its precolonial history. Warfare was glorified. The Balinese kings (*rajas*) were regarded by their subjects as semidivine beings. To fight for one's king and his kingdom was thus to fight on behalf of the deities. The great Balinese warrior was a heroic figure.

Warfare in Bali was accompanied by grand pageantry and ritual, and music played on the gamelan beleganjur, the "gamelan of walking warriors," was key. Balinese armies marched into battle to the accompaniment of beleganjur. The music served to inspire the warriors to bravery and to strike terror in the hearts of their enemies. With a faint hum of gongs advancing like a distant storm before an explosion of lightning cymbals and thunderous drums, beleganjur music heralded the impending doom of battle with foreboding power and force. Human rather than spirit adversaries represented the principal targets of beleganjur's threatening tones in this context, but the basic theme of a music used for battle connects the worlds of beleganjur as a music of cremation rituals and as a historical music of actual warfare.

Lomba beleganjur: The modern beleganjur contest

Though beleganjur's traditional role as a music of warfare has been rendered obsolete in modern times, the revered image of the heroic Balinese warrior of old has by no means disappeared. It is kept alive in many different contexts, from the famous Baris "warrior's dance" (see photo, p. 104) to countless dance-dramas and shadow puppet plays (*wayang kulit*) that chronicle the martial exploits of both the historical and mythical Balinese past.

This heroic warrior's image resurfaced anew in the mid-1980s with the invention of the modern beleganjur contest, or *lomba beleganjur*. In a lomba beleganjur, numerous beleganjur groups representing different banjars, districts, or regions of Bali compete against each other in a formal competitive environment. The first lomba beleganjur was held in Denpasar in 1986. More than two dozen groups from the city and its surrounding region (Badung) competed. The performers were all male, predominantly teenagers and young men in their early 20s.

Badung (Bah-DOONG)

The contest was a great success and within short order had become the model for scores of similar events held all over the island. These contests range from small regional competitions featuring just a handful of groups to islandwide championships played out before audiences of thousands in high-profile, politically charged events. The larger contests are frequently held in

Baris dancer in stylized warrior costume.

Group performing in a beleganjur contest.

conjunction with election campaigns and political rallies. Many are sponsored by Balinese cultural agencies of the Indonesian government. The synthesis of Balinese cultural pride and modern Indonesian nationalist values that these contests are said to invoke fits well with an idealized, Unity in Diversity–based image of Indonesian cultural nationalism.

Women's and children's beleganjur groups have emerged since the 1990s, though the contest style of beleganjur, in common with beleganjur played in traditional ritual contexts such as cremations, is still mainly identified with men, and indeed with core Balinese conceptions of manhood and masculinity (see also Chapter 2, pp. 16–18).

Kreasi beleganjur: The contest musical style

kreasi (kray-YAH-see)

The lomba beleganjur contest event has given rise to a dramatic, neo-traditional beleganjur musical style with its own, unique performance aesthetic. This is known as **kreasi beleganjur,** or "new creation beleganjur."

Traditional beleganjur such as that performed in cremation processions is quintessentially *functional* music. Its sole purpose is to support the ritual it accompanies. Kreasi beleganjur is something else altogether. It is flashy, fast, complex, inventive, full of musical contrasts and surprises, and enhanced by elaborate pageantry, colorful costumes, and impressive choreographed movement sequences (see the photo on p. 106). Yet for all of that, it remains strongly rooted in the musical soil of traditional beleganjur.

Contest audiences may be very large; thousands of spectators come to the biggest events. They also can be quite raucous and unruly, pressing forward and encircling the musicians with almost suffocating closeness as the contest officials attempt to push them back out of the performance arena. At a good contest, the energy is electrifying as the musicians and the crowd feed off of each other's excitement and intensity.

The exciting, virtuosic style of a beleganjur contest performance is well illustrated by **CD ex. #2-15.** This is an excerpt from a 1995 field recording made in Bali that features a composition by the great beleganjur composer and drummer I Ketut Sukarata. The group featured is from the Sanur Beach region of southeastern Bali, where the contest was held. We first hear them approaching from the distance. The master of ceremonies builds up anticipation as they near the judging area. Applause from the crowd marks their arrival. All of the instruments except the gongs drop out for a while. Then the full group reenters overtop the continuing gilak gong cycle—first drums and reyong kettle-gongs, then cymbals—and the music becomes highly energetic.

I Ketut Sukarata.

I Ketut Sukarata (Ee Kuh-TOOT Soo-kah-rah-tuh)

Sanur (Sah-NOOR)

This is music in which precision, virtuosity, and originality, not just functionality, are both valued and formally graded. Its main "job" is to impress and entertain the adjudicators and audience rather than serve the functional ritual requirements of a religious ritual. The goal of the performers is to win the contest rather than battles against malevolent spirit adversaries.

Tradition and innovation in kreasi beleganjur: An elusive balance

Kreasi beleganjur differs from traditional beleganjur in the high value it places on the following:

- Compositional originality.
- Ensemble virtuosity (*Note:* not *individual* virtuosity—the group, rather than the musician, is always the "star").
- Emphasis on showmanship, both in the playing of the music itself and in **gerak** (literally "movement"), which are choreographed sequences performed by the musicians (see the "Insights and Perspectives" box, p. 106).
- Varied textures, in which different sections of the ensemble (drums, cymbals, reyong) are featured in turn.

gerak (GUH-rahk)

In all of these priorities, kreasi beleganjur exhibits strong influences drawn from the style of kebyar music, such as that heard and discussed earlier in **CD ex. #2-12** ("Jaya Semara"). Some beleganjur composers also have been influenced by popular music styles. Sukarata, for example, gained notoriety in the late 1980s for his incorporation into beleganjur of rhythms adapted from hip-hop and funk.

The key to creating a successful, prize-winning kreasi beleganjur contest piece is to be found in achieving a balance between beleganjur traditionalism and modernity. On the one hand, a high priority is placed on adhering to key elements of form and style that define traditional beleganjur music: the eight-beat gilak gong cycle, kilitan telu interlocking, conventional beleganjur instrumentation and stylistic features. On the other hand, this traditional base needs to be embellished by elements of novelty, compositional innovation, virtuosity, and showmanship.

insights and perspectives

Gerak: The Choreographic Element in Kreasi Beleganjur

Gerak are the choreographed movement sequences in kreasi beleganjur performances. They are executed by the musicians themselves as they play. This is one of the highlight features of the beleganjur contest style. The root of gerak is to be found in choreographic sequences that alternately invoke and "comment upon" the central figure of the archetypal traditional Balinese warrior and his *kepahlawanan,* or "heroic," character. Classic poses of battle and martial arts maneuvers are precisely executed by the musicians in their mutually reflective duet of sound and movement. These choreographic images are juxtaposed to others that draw from various beleganjur-related domains, such as the spinning of the cremation tower at a crossroad during a cremation procession. Gerak also may be used to humorous effect. The gerak sequences for Sukarata's "Brek Dan" (Break Dance), for example, caricatured the sometimes comical moves and grooves of nightclub dancers in Bali.

All told, kreasi beleganjur gerak represents a mélange of diverse choreographic and symbolic expression. Lighthearted, satirical moments ebb and flow against the current of more solemn and reverential characterizations. Gerak choreographies offer a poignant commentary on the complex and multidimensional nature of contemporary Balinese-Indonesian identity, one that is completely consistent with the character of kreasi beleganjur music itself.

Gerak maneuver in a beleganjur contest.

The right balance is difficult to achieve. Groups that fail to bring enough creativity and novelty to their performances are met with indifference and may even be ridiculed. But those that stray too far from the style and character of traditional beleganjur in their innovations risk public scorn and possible disqualification.

Achieving the elusive balance: The kreasi beleganjur music of I Ketut Suandita

If there is any figure in the kreasi beleganjur world whose music epitomizes an ideal balance of traditionalism and creative innovation, it is I Ketut Suandita. Suandita grew up playing beleganjur, kebyar, and other styles of gamelan and studied composition with I Ketut Gedé Asnawa and other master teachers. By the age of 23, he had achieved the unprecedented distinction of being the composer of the winning composition in Bali's most prestigious beleganjur contest three years straight (1990, 1991, and 1992). Not only that, but he directed three different groups from three different villages to those championships, and performed as the lead drummer for two of them. Experts like Asnawa describe the early 1990s as a "golden age" of kreasi beleganjur, pointing to Suandita as the exemplary beleganjur composer of that period.

I Ketut Suandita (right).

Suandita (Swahn-DEE-tuh)

guided listening experience

"Wira Ghorava Cakti '95" (Kreasi Beleganjur), by I Ketut Suandita

- CD Track #: **2-16**
- Featured performer(s)/group: Beleganjur group of Banjar Meranggi, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia
- Format: Excerpt
- Source recording: Field recording by the author

Suandita's distinctive kreasi beleganjur style is well exemplified in the work "Wira Ghorava Cakti" (Friendly and Spiritually Powerful Hero), a prize-winning piece performed here (in an excerpt from a 1995 performance) by the group from the banjar of Meranggi that Suandita directed to the 1992 beleganjur championship. This ensemble is recognized as one of the best beleganjur groups ever.

"Wira Ghorava Cakti" ("Wee-rah Go-rah-vah CHAK-tee")

"Wira Ghorava Cakti" never loses sight of its traditional beleganjur roots, but it pushes the boundaries of tradition with a host of innovations that were highly novel for their time. These include:

- Sections in which the gong cycle drops out completely.
- Passages that feature just one type of instrument performing unaccompanied, such as the reyong feature section at 0:19.
- A large variety of melodic and rhythmic variations, all highlighting ensemble precision and virtuosity.
- A wide range of tempos and frequent changes in dynamics.
- More complex styles of interlocking, such as having eight different interlocking cymbal patterns rather than just the three standard patterns of the kilitan telu.

Listen to the example now, following along with the Guided Listening Quick Summary on the next page and trying to hear the musical features identified.

Crossing International Borders

Composers from outside of Indonesia have long held a fascination for gamelan music. Ever since the important French composer Claude Debussy heard a Javanese gamelan at the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, many non-Indonesian composers have been influenced by, and in some cases written works for, Javanese and Balinese gamelan: John Cage, Lou Harrison, Colin McPhee, Benjamin Britten, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Michael Tenzer, Wayne Vitale, Evan

guided listening quick summary

"Wira Ghorava Cakti '95," by I Ketut Suandita (CD ex. #2-16)

0:00–0:06

- Excerpt begins with impressive interlocking drumming, syncopated cymbal rhythms; gilak gong cycle provides foundation.

0:07–0:18

- Brief passage featuring distinctive, eight-part interlocking cymbal texture (0:07–0:09).
- Reyong, drums, and other instruments come in from 0:10 on.

0:19–0:27

- Unaccompanied reyong feature (gong cycle drops out); superb example of fast, intricate reyong interlocking.

0:28–1:14

- Gong cycle returns; talents of full ensemble on display; good examples of more eight-part cymbal interlocking from 0:38.

1:15–1:28

- Transition to slow-tempoed section of the piece; contrasting musical character.

1:29–2:11

- Slow section proper begins (over a dramatically slower gilak gong cycle).
- Unpredictable and dramatic changes in tempo, texture, and rhythm.

2:12–end

- Drums and cymbals play at double the tempo of the other instruments, creating an effect of two levels of tempo (slow and fast) occurring at once.
- Excerpt fades out as performance continues (3:00).

Ziporyn, Barbara Benary. Even pop stars like Janet Jackson (on "China Love") and Beck (on "Loser") have used digital samples of gamelan in their music.

Indonesian composers have likewise been influenced by Western and other international musics, both in the popular music arena and in the experimental, avant-garde genre of Indonesian *musik kontemporer* ("contemporary music"), which combines Indonesian and non-Indonesian musical elements in novel ways. A number of prominent Balinese composers, including Asnawa and his brother I Komang Astita, have composed internationally acclaimed musik kontemporer works.

musik kontemporer (moo-SEEK koan-tuhm-poh-RAYR)

Astita (Ah-stee-tuh)

On the popular music side, the contemporary Balinese musician of widest international reputation today is the virtuoso electric guitarist I Wayan Balawan, who leads the innovative band Batuan Ethnic Fusion (BEF). Balawan and BEF were the first Balinese artists to be signed by Sony BMG, one of the largest and most influential multinational record companies. The group's 2005 Sony BMG release *Magic Finger* features a track entitled "Country Beleganjur," which is also included in its entirety on your CD set as **CD ex. #2-17.** This selection combines elements of beleganjur and kebyar music from Bali with elements of American country music, bluegrass, rock, funk, and jazz; there even seem to be some traces of polka in the mix, and the whole production has a lighthearted, tongue-in-cheek quality to it. Balawan's blistering speed on the guitar, a signature feature of his style, is put on fine display in the bouncy, bluegrass-tinged opening section of the track following the introduction (0:15–0:54). The lively, two-beat groove laid down by the electric bassist and the drum set player here is enhanced by kilitan telu-type cymbal patterns furnished by four cengceng players performing in the standard beleganjur interlocking

style. (A video performance, http://wn.com/Batuan, which was available at the time of this writing, has the cengceng players wearing Balinese attire identical to that worn by competitors in Balinese beleganjur contests.) A fun and quirky section from 0:55–1:07 juxtaposes a polka-like melody in the guitar part to kotekan-style melodic interlocking reminiscent of beleganjur reyong parts. The clash of Western and Balinese pitches here creates an effect that is at once intriguing and humorous. The next section of the arrangement is all percussion (plus some percussive, Kecak-style vocals), with the cengceng section playing in precisely the manner they would in a Balinese beleganjur contest (including fine displays of kilitan telu interlocking) and the drum set backing them up with a driving, funk-rock groove (1:11–1:29). The cengcengs and drum set are eventually joined by a pair of Balinese kendang drums (1:30–1:49), which also are played in the beleganjur contest style. Following the percussion feature, the texture and style change abruptly as Balawan launches into an improvised jazz guitar solo accompanied by the rhythm section (1:50–2:28). Unison figures by the cengcengs, along with vocal parts akin to melodies heard in Kecak and occasional violin riffs, provide an interesting twist to the otherwise straight-up jazz style. Finally, Balawan and the band return to the lively two-beat groove and country/bluegrass/Balinese style of the opening to round out the performance (2:29–end).

I Wayan Balawan playing a double-necked electric guitar.

guided listening experience

"B.A.Ph.PET," by Michael Bakan

- CD Track #: **2-18**
- Featured performer(s)/group: Charles Tremblay (scratch turntable soloist) with the Florida State University Balinese Gamelan
- Format: Excerpt
- Source recording: From the personal archive of the author (all rights reserved)

Gamelan performance groups are active today in many countries, from the United States and Canada, to the United Kingdom, Italy, and Japan. The majority of these groups specialize in Javanese gamelan traditions, but there are a number of Balinese gamelan ensembles as well. The best-known of the latter is Gamelan Sekar Jaya, based in Berkeley, California. Additionally, there are Balinese gamelan programs at a number of universities, including UCLA, the University of British Columbia, Bowling Green State University, and Florida State University (FSU). The final piece of music we will explore in this chapter, "B.A.Ph.PET," was composed for the student Balinese gamelan group I direct at FSU.

"B.A.Ph.PET" is a post-traditional Balinese gamelan piece scored for gamelan gong kebyar instruments, the four reyong kettle-gongs of a gamelan beleganjur, keyboard synthesizer, synthesized drums and percussion, electric bass, and scratch turntable soloist. The scratch turntable part is improvised; all of the other parts are composed. The turntable soloist is Charles Tremblay, who was an FSU student, gamelan member, and dance club DJ working in the Tallahassee area when this recording was made (1997). Charles, a percussionist by training, performed with the FSU gamelan for several years. He was a standout member of the group, excelling especially in the difficult art of Balinese kendang drumming. For his final concert with the ensemble, we decided to create a work that would highlight his talents as a turntablist while

Florida State University Balinese gamelan, with Charles Tremblay playing kendang (drum).

exploring some new possibilities of intercultural gamelan music. "B.A.Ph.PET," short for "Big Attitude Phat Pet" (in honor of a dog with a rather memorable personality), was the result.

The gamelan aspect of "B.A.Ph.PET" incorporates many conventional Balinese elements: gong cycle, core melody, interlocking parts, a texture that features fast-moving parts in the high-pitched instruments and slow-moving parts in the low-pitched ones. All of these Balinese elements, however, are tied to Western-style chord progressions and synthesizer melodies in some portions of the piece. And they are progressively encompassed by hip-hop/funk drum rhythms, bass lines, and improvised turntabling during the second part of the work, which commences at 1:26.

Many of the rhythms and interlocking patterns of "B.A.Ph.PET," including the opening rhythmic ostinato played on muffled reyong kettle-gongs, derive from a shortened variant of the basic kilitan telu rhythm. Rather than the full pattern of [x-xx-xx-], a truncated pattern of [x-xx--] is used instead (see Figure 7.2). Uconventional clusters of gamelan pitches (chords) add dissonance to the musical effect.

During the first minute of the piece, the gamelan instruments enter one after another, section by section. Multiple ostinato layers are stacked atop each other as more instruments join in. Many of the parts interlock, until all of the rhythmic spaces are ultimately filled in by a dense texture of interlocking melody and polyphonic richness. To this texture is finally added a synthesizer melody, which arrives at 0:54, supported by low gong tones and an electric bass part.

The second part of the piece commences with a return to the single reyong texture of the opening at 1:26, followed by the entrances of synthesized drums (1:30), electric bass (1:33),

FIGURE 7.2

Basic kilitan telu rhythmic pattern compared to truncated "B.A.Ph.PET" rhythmic pattern.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(1)
Kilitan telu	X	•	X	X	•	X	X	•	X	•	X	X	•	X	X	•	(X)
B.A.Ph.PET	X	•	X	X	•	•	X	•	X	X	•	•	X	•	X	X	(•)

Two scratch turntablists. Afrika Bambaataa, the "Godfather of Hip-Hop," is seen in the left-side photo.

and scratch turntable soloist (1:39) in quick succession. Beginning at 2:29, the gamelan instruments gradually reenter amidst this radically transformed musical enviroment in the same order as before, and playing essentially the same parts. The music builds progressively, both in instrumental layers and in intensity, through to the full ensemble climax near the end (3:55).

guided listening quick summary

"B.A.Ph.PET," by Michael Bakan (CD ex. #2-18)

PART I

0:00–0:13

- The four reyong kettle-gongs come in one after the other, together building a dissonant cluster of notes (chord).
- Ostinato rhythm is a shortened variant of the basic kilitan telu rhythmic pattern.

0:14–0:53

- Large gong enters, followed by metallophones (gangsa).
- Instruments continue to enter, one by one, gradually filling out texture with multiple layers and interlocking ostinato parts.

0:54–1:25

- Synthesizer melody unfolds over steady, slow-moving core melody in lower-register metallophones.
- Sequence of low gong strokes (supplemented by electric bass tones) combines elements of a Balinese-style gong cycle and the bass line of a Western-style chord progression.

PART II

1:26–1:41

- All instruments drop out except for single reyong (like at the beginning).
- Synthesized drums enter (1:30).
- Electric bass enters, establishing funk groove (1:33).
- Scratch turntable sneaks in and builds with a crescendo (1:39–1:41).

1:42–3:37

- Improvised scratch turntable solo—soloist: Charles Tremblay (*Note:* new bass line begins at 2:16).
- Second, third, and fourth reyong kettle-gongs reenter, one after another, beginning at 2:29.
- All other gamelan instruments gradually reenter, building as before.

3:38–end

- Return of synthesizer tune over gamelan core melody, low gongs, and electric bass, plus all other instruments; dense, layered, polyphonic texture.
- Climax of piece arrives at 3:55, followed by fade-out ending.

Summary

Though it covered a broad range of gamelan and gamelan-based music traditions—Central Javanese court gamelan, Balinese gamelan gong kebyar, Balinese Kecak, and intercultural fusion music—the principal focus of this chapter was the gamelan beleganjur. After situating beleganjur in its broader musical, social, and cultural contexts and following a Musical Guided Tour, we explored the ensemble's multiple roles and functions in traditional Hindu-Balinese cremation rituals (ngaben). From there, we moved on to the modern, contest style of kreasi beleganjur. We concluded with explorations of intercultural fusion music that combines elements of Balinese gamelan and Western popular music styles.

A unifying theme of this entire journey was the principle of interlocking. A specific, ubiquitous set of interlocking rhythms, the kilitan telu, was tracked through virtually all of the music introduced. Sometimes left intact in its conventional form and at other times transformed through various types of manipulations, this enduring component of Balinese musical identity took on many different forms but was always found to be present in one guise or another. Moreover, the interlocking principle underlying the kilitan telu was shown to inform larger cultural practices and values that are central to Balinese life, such as the high priority placed on communal interdependence.

Whether across oceans, between cosmic realms, or between music instruments, the concept of interlocking permeates gamelan music and its culture on many levels. It is a key to understanding both the resilience and vitality of the Balinese musicultural tradition.

Key Terms

gamelan
gamelan beleganjur
Central Javanese court gamelan
Bahasa Indonesia
Unity in Diversity
Agama Tirta
Bali Aga
gamelan gong kebyar
gangsa
paired tuning
ombak
gong cycle
gilak
gong ageng
reyong
kilitan telu
Kecak
atma
banjar
kreasi beleganjur
gerak

Study Questions

- What is a gamelan?
- The best-known gamelan traditions of Indonesia are from what two islands?
- What are some of the basic similarities and differences between Central Javanese court gamelan and Balinese gamelan gong kebyar?
- What kinds of instruments are used in the gamelan beleganjur? Is it usually played from a seated position or in processional style?
- What is the capital city of the Republic of Indonesia? What is the capital city of Bali?
- What are the best-known gamelan traditions of Java and Bali, respectively? (*Hint:* gamelan beleganjur is *not* a correct answer.)
- What were the *general* musicultural features of gamelan music outlined in the chapter?
- What is ombak? Paired tuning?
- How does the kilitan telu set of rhythmic patterns, as well as other sets of interlocking patterns that are pervasive in Balinese music, represent a musical manifestation of important *cultural* values in Balinese society? What other kinds of cultural (including religious) symbolism are present in gamelan music?
- In what ways does beleganjur music function as a "weapon" in the battles against evil spirits that occur during Hindu-Balinese cremation processions?
- In what year was the first beleganjur contest held? Where did it take place?
- What features of musical form and style distinguish kreasi beleganjur from traditional beleganjur (and what common features link the two)?
- What is gerak, and what is its importance in kreasi beleganjur performance?
- What innovations did the composer Suandita introduce into kreasi beleganjur music?
- What famous French composer first heard gamelan at the World's Fair in Paris in 1889 and subsequently was influenced by the experience?
- What Balinese and American popular music styles are combined in I Wayan Balawan's "Country Beleganjur"?
- How does the piece "B.A.Ph.PET" build upon standard musical conventions and instrumentation of Balinese gamelan music? In what ways does it depart from gamelan tradition?

Discussion Questions

- The history of the Balinese dance-drama Kecak provides an interesting example of the kind of complex relationships between tradition and modernity that define many world music traditions. Though it is promoted as a "traditional Balinese genre," it is in fact a product of 20th-century intercultural innovation. Try to think of types of music with which you are familiar that are marketed as "traditional" and "authentic" despite being modern and contemporary in many if not most respects. Discuss these in class.
- In this chapter, "B.A.Ph.PET" is presented as a piece belonging to the tradition of Balinese gamelan. What do you think of this? Should music of this kind be played using gamelan instruments, or is this inappropriate? Is there any point at which musicians should be expected to draw the line in terms of how far they go in their efforts to fuse very different music traditions? On these same terms, what are your thoughts and views on Balawan's "Country Beleganjur"?

Applying What You Have Learned

- Look closely at the kilitan telu rhythmic patterns charted in Figure 7.1 (p. 99). Try to figure out how all three patterns are in fact the "same" rhythm placed at different points relative to the main beat. One of these rhythms is known as the "follower," another as the "anticipator." Can you tell which is which and explain why?
- A metaphor of battle is central to the cultural functions of beleganjur music on many levels. Thinking about what you have learned about the beleganjur tradition in this chapter, create a list of different ways in which this battle metaphor plays out in actual Balinese cultural practice, both in traditional ritual contexts and in modern beleganjur contests.
- Search YouTube for video examples of gamelan and Indonesian popular music. Write a brief report on your findings.

Resources for Further Study

Visit the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/bakan2e, as well as the author's personally maintained Web site at www.michaelbakan.com, for additional learning aids, study help, and resources that supplement the content of this chapter.