

# Asia/Music of Indonesia

R. ANDERSON SUTTON

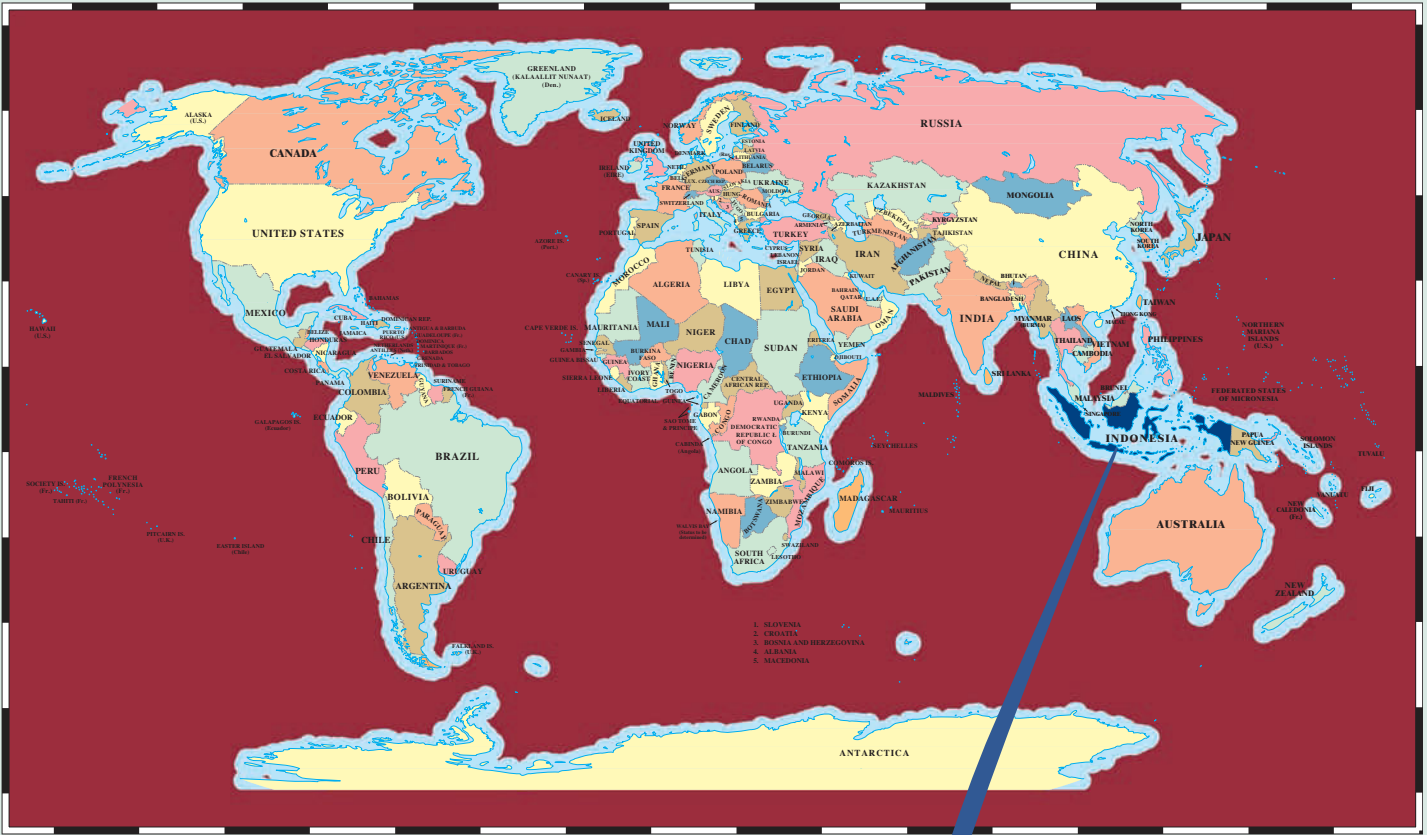
Indonesia is a country of astounding cultural diversity, nowhere more evident than in the stunning variety of musical and related performing arts found throughout its several thousand populated islands. Known formerly as the Dutch East Indies, Indonesia is one of many modern nations whose boundaries were formed during the centuries of European colonial domination, placing peoples with contrasting languages, arts, systems of belief, and conceptions of the world under a single rule. The adoption of a national language in the early twentieth century was a crucial step in building the unity necessary to win a revolution against the Dutch (1945–1949). Today, a pan-Indonesian popular culture has been contributing to an increased sense of national unity, particularly among the younger generation. Nevertheless, recent strife between ethnic groups, which dominated international headlines about Indonesia at the turn of the millennium, has challenged this sense of unity. Indeed, though we can identify some general cultural traits, including musical ones, shared by many peoples of Indonesia, to speak of an “Indonesian” culture or style of music is problematic. Regional diversity is still very much in evidence.

Most Indonesians’ first language is not the national language (Indonesian) but one of the more than two hundred separate languages found throughout this vast archipelago. Further, although many are familiar with the sounds of Indonesian pop music and such Western stars as Beyoncé and Justin Timberlake, they also know their own regional musical traditions. In Indonesia many kinds of music exist side by side in a complex pluralism that reflects both the diversity of the native population and the receptiveness of that population to centuries of outside influences. Indonesia is, then, a country truly home to worlds of music.

What first impression might this country give you? You would probably arrive in the nation’s capital, **Jakarta** (jah-kar-tah), a teeming metropolis of more than ten million people—some very wealthy, most rather poor. Jakarta is near the western end of the north coast of **Java**, Indonesia’s most heavily populated (but not largest) island. (See the map on the following page.) The mix of Indonesia’s many cultures among themselves and with Western culture is nowhere more fully realized than in this special city. Many kinds of music are heard here. Western-style nightclubs, karaoke bars, and discos do a lively business until the early hours of the morning. Javanese *gamelan* (gah-muh-lahn; percussion ensemble) music accompanies nightly performances of *wayang orang* (wah-yang oh-rang) theater,

C H A P T E R

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an elaborate type of dance-drama from central Java. You might also run across Jakarta's own *gambang-kromong* (*gahm-bang kroh-mong*; small percussion ensemble) and perhaps a troupe from Bali, Sumatra, or any of the many other islands performing at the national arts center Taman Ismael Marzuki or the Indonesian cultural park Taman Mini. As you begin to find your way around the city by taxi, bus, or three-wheeled *bajaj*, you may develop a taste for highly seasoned food. You will certainly get a sense of Indonesia's many cultures by roaming this complex city. Much of what you encounter, however, has a strong presence in the various regions in which it is rooted.

## Central Java

Java is an island about the size of New York State (just less than 50,000 square miles). With over 100 million people, Java is one of the most densely populated regions in the world. (Indonesia's total population is about 220 million.) Most of the central and eastern two-thirds of the island is inhabited by Indonesia's largest ethnic group, the Javanese, roughly 75 million people who share a language and other cultural traits, including music, though some local differences persist. In **Sunda**, the western third of the island, live the Sundanese, who have a language and arts distinct from those of the Javanese. Despite its dense population, Java remains mostly a farming society, with wet-rice agriculture as the predominant source of livelihood. Although most Javanese profess to be Muslim, only a minority follow orthodox practice. Many adhere to a blend of Islam with Hinduism and Buddhism (introduced into Java over one thousand years ago) and with what most scholars believe to be an even earlier layer of belief in benevolent and mischievous spirits and in ancestor veneration. The worldview that embraces these many layers of belief is often referred to as *kejawèn*—literally, “Javanese,” or “Javaneseness,” a term that indicates its importance in Javanese self-conception. Since the mid-1980s, however, Javanese have increasingly embraced a less syncretic and more orthodox Islam.

From Jakarta a twelve-hour ride on bus or train through shimmering wet-rice fields, set in the plains between gracefully sloping volcanic mountains, leads to **Yogyakarta** (often abbreviated **Yogya** and pronounced *jog-jah*). Yogya is one of two court cities in the cultural heartland of Central Java. The other, about forty miles to the northeast, is **Surakarta** (*soo-rah-kar-tah* or *soo-raw-kar-taw*; usually called “Solo”). Most Javanese point to these two cities as the cultural centers where traditional *gamelan* music and related performing arts have flourished in their most elaborate and refined forms. These courtly developments contrast with the rougher styles associated with the villages and outlying districts.

Yogya is a sprawling city with a population of about 500,000. It has several multistory malls and hotels but few other buildings taller than two stories. Away from the several major streets lined with stores flashing neon signs and blaring popular music, Yogya in many ways resembles a dense collection of villages. Yet at its center stands one of Java's two main royal courts, the official home of the tenth sultan (His Highness Hamengku Buwana X; *hah-muhng-koo bu-waw-naw*). Unlike any Western palace or court, this is a complex of small buildings and open pavilions appropriate for the tropical climate. It was not designed

merely for comfort, however. Endowed with mystical significance as an earthly symbol of the macrocosmos (the ordered universe), the court is oriented to the cardinal directions. The ruler, whose residence is located at the very center of the court, is imbued with divine powers, as were the Hindu-Javanese kings many centuries ago.

In many of these pavilions are kept the court *gamelan* ensembles. Some date back many centuries and perform only for rare ritual occasions, while others have been built or augmented more recently and are used more frequently. Like other treasured heirlooms belonging to the court, most of these sets of instruments are believed to contain special powers and are shown respect and given offerings. Also kept in the palace are numerous sets of finely carved and painted *wayang kulit* (*wah-yang koo-lit*; puppets made of water buffalo hide) used in all-night performances of highly sophisticated and entertaining shadow plays. Classical Javanese dance, with *gamelan* accompaniment, is rehearsed regularly and performed for special palace functions.

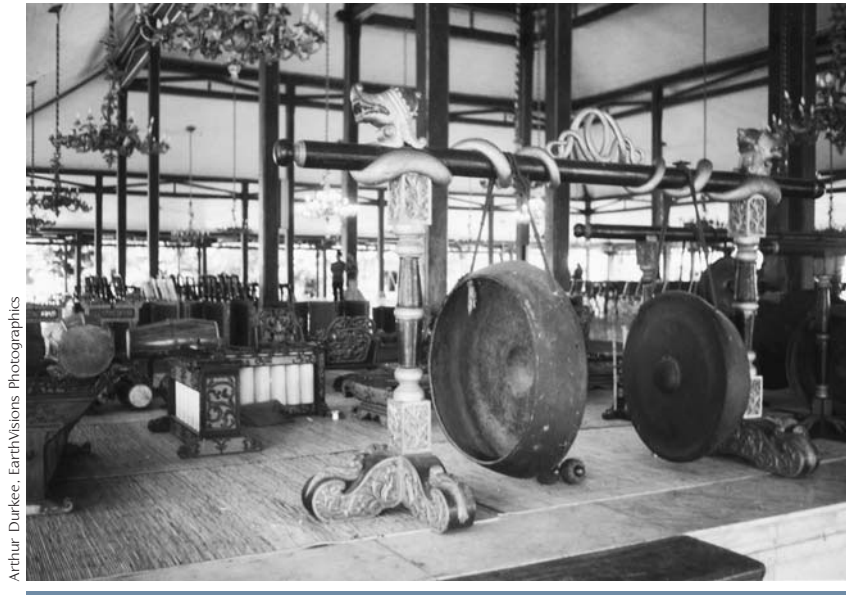
Though the court is still regarded as a cultural center, it is far less active now than it was prior to World War II (during which the Japanese occupied Indonesia). Much activity in the traditional Javanese arts takes place outside the court and is sponsored by private individuals and by such modern institutions as the national radio station and public schools and colleges. In the rural villages, which long served as a source and inspiration for the more refined courtly arts, a variety of musical and related performing arts continue to play a vital role in Javanese life.

## GAMELAN

The word *gamelan* refers to a set of instruments unified by their tuning and often by their decorative carving and painting. Most *gamelans* consist of several kinds of metal slab instruments (similar in some ways to the Western vibraphone) and tuned knobbed **gongs**. The word “gong” is one of the few English words derived from Indonesian languages. (Two others are “ketchup” and “amok.”) In English, “gong” may refer to any variety of percussion instrument whose sound-producing vibrations are concentrated in the center of the instrument, rather than the edge, like a bell. In Javanese, it refers specifically to the larger hanging knobbed gongs (see Figure 7.1) in *gamelan* ensembles and is part of a family of words relating to largeness, greatness, and grandeur—*agung* (“great,” “kingly”), *agung* (“large”), and *gunung* (“mountain”). In addition to gongs and other metal instruments, a *gamelan* ensemble normally has at least one drum and may have other kinds of instruments: winds, strings, and wooden percussion instruments (xylophones).

Some ancient ceremonial *gamelans* have only a few knobbed gongs and one or two drums. The kind of *gamelan* most often used in central Java today is a large set, comprising instruments ranging from deep booming gongs three feet in diameter to high-pitched gong-chimes and slab instruments, with three drums, several bamboo flutes, zithers, xylophones, and a two-stringed fiddle.

Instruments in the present-day *gamelan* are tuned to one of two scale systems: *sléndro* (*slayn-dro*), a five-tone system made up of nearly equidistant intervals, normally notated with the numerals 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 (no 4); and *pélog* (*pay-log*), a

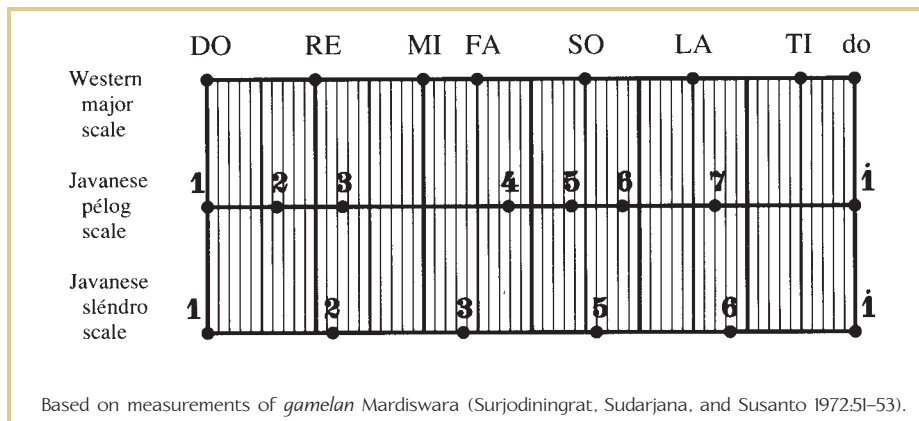


Arthur Dunlee, EarthVisions Photographics

FIGURE 7.1

The *gamelan* Kyai Kanyut Mèsem (“Tempted to Smile”) in the Mangkunegaran palace, Surakarta, Central Java. In foreground: *gong ageng* and *gong siyem*.

seven-tone system made up of large and small intervals, normally notated 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Some *gamelans* are entirely *sléndro*, others entirely *pélog*, but many are actually double ensembles, combining a full set of instruments for each system. A Western piano can replicate neither of these scale systems. Transcription 7.1 shows the Western major scale, consisting of “whole tone” and “half tone” intervals (that is, eight adjacent white keys on the piano, starting with C as “do”), in comparison with sample intervals for one instance of *sléndro* and one of *pélog* (these are not entirely standardized, as I explain further on).

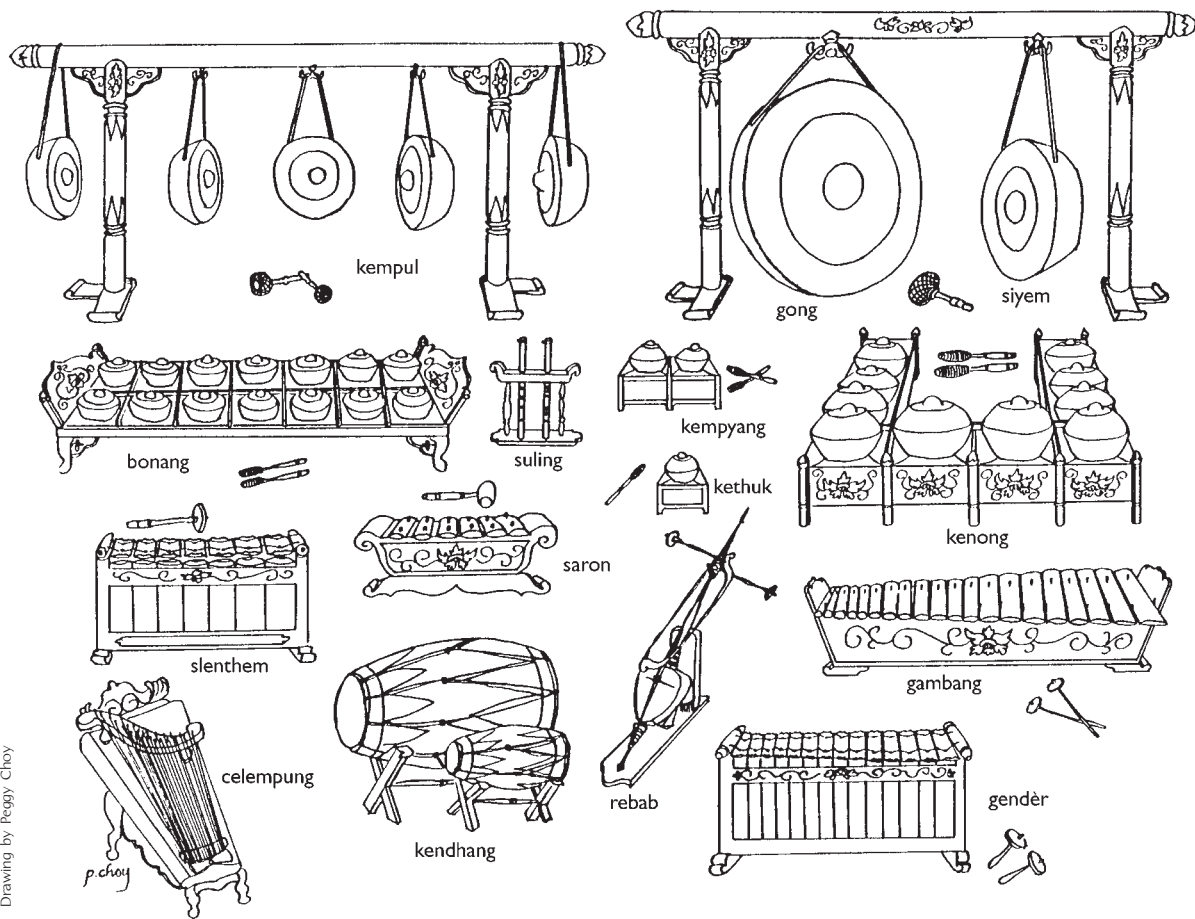


TRANSCRIPTION 7.1  
Western scale and representative *pélog* and *sléndro* scales.

## GAMELAN INSTRUMENTATION

The instrumentation of a full *sléndro-pélog gamelan* varies slightly, but it usually includes all or most of the instruments given in the list (see instruments boxes on pages 304–306). Most of these are illustrated in Figure 7.2.





Drawing by Peggy Choy

FIGURE 7.2

Central Javanese *gamelan* instruments.

## Knobbed-Gong Instruments

*gong ageng*

Largest of the hanging gongs, suspended vertically from a wooden frame; one or two in each *gamelan*; often simply called *gong*; played with a round, padded beater.

*siyem* (see-yuhm)

Middle-sized hanging gong; usually from one to four in each *gamelan*.

*kempul* (kuhm-pool)

Smallest hanging gong; from two to ten per *gamelan*; played with a round, padded beater.

*kenong* (kuh-nong)

Largest of the kettle gongs, resting horizontally in a wooden frame; from two to twelve per *gamelan*; played with a padded stick beater.

*kethuk* (kuh-took)

Small kettle gong; one for each scale system; played with a padded stick beater.

*kempyang* (kuhm-pyahng)

Set of two small kettle gongs, for *pélog*; played with padded stick beater.

- bonang barung***  
(bo-nahng ba-roong) Set of ten, twelve, or fourteen kettle gongs resting horizontally in two parallel rows in a wooden frame; one set for each scale system; often simply called *bonang*; played with two padded stick beaters. *Barung* indicates middle or lower register.
- bonang panerus***  
(pa-nuh-roos) Smaller member of the *bonang* family; same as *bonang barung* but tuned an octave higher; one for each scale system. *Panerus* indicates highest register.

## Metal-Keyed Instruments

- saron demung*** Largest member of the *saron* (sah-ron) family; six or seven thick metal keys resting over a trough resonator; usually one or two for each scale system; often simply called *demung*; played with a wooden mallet.
- saron barung*** Like *saron demung* but an octave higher; usually from two to four for each scale system; often simply called *saron*.
- saron peking*** Like *saron barung* but an octave higher; often simply called *peking*.
- gendèr slenthem***  
(guh-n-dehr sluhn-tuhm) Six or seven thin metal keys suspended by strings over cylindrical resonators made of bamboo or metal; one for each scale system; often simply called *slenthem*; played with a padded disc beater.
- gendèr barung*** Thirteen or fourteen thin metal keys, suspended over cylindrical resonators; one for *sléndro*, two for *pélog*: ***bem*** (buhm; with tones 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 in each octave) and ***barang*** (with tones 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 in each octave); often simply called *gendèr*; played with two padded disc beaters.
- gendèr panerus*** Like *gendèr barung* but an octave higher.

## Other Melodic Instruments

- gambang*** (gahm-bahng) Seventeen to twenty-three wooden keys resting over a trough resonator; one for *sléndro*; one or two for *pélog*; if two, like *gendèr barung* and *gendèr panerus*; if only one, exchange keys enable player to arrange instrument for *bem* (with scale 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 in each octave) or for *barang* (with 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7); played with two padded disc beaters.
- celempung*** (chuh-luhm-poong) Zither, usually supported at about a thirty-degree angle by four legs, with twenty to twenty-six strings arranged in ten to thirteen “double

	courses” (as on a twelve-string guitar); one for <i>sléndro</i> , one or two for <i>pélog</i> (compare <i>gambang</i> ); plucked with thumbnails.
<i>siter</i> (si-tuhr)	Smaller zither, resting on floor or in horizontal frame, with from ten to twenty-six strings in single or double courses, one for <i>sléndro</i> , one or two for <i>pélog</i> (compare <i>gambang</i> and <i>celempung</i> ); plucked with thumbnails.
<i>suling</i> (soo-leeng)	End-blown bamboo flute; one for <i>sléndro</i> , one or two for <i>pélog</i> .
<i>rebab</i> (ruh-bab)	Two-stringed fiddle; one or two per <i>gamelan</i> .

## Drums

<i>kendhang gendhing</i> (kuhn-dahng guhn-deeng)	Largest of the hand drums; two leather heads, laced onto a barrel-shaped shell; one per <i>gamelan</i> .
<i>kendhang ciblon</i>	Middle-sized hand drum; like <i>kendhang gendhing</i> ; often simply called <i>ciblon</i> ; one per <i>gamelan</i> .
<i>kendhang ketipung</i>	Smallest hand drum; often simply called <i>ketipung</i> ; one per <i>gamelan</i> .
<i>bedhug</i>	Large stick-beaten drum; two leather heads tacked onto a cylindrical shell; one per <i>gamelan</i> .

There is no standard arrangement of these instruments in the performance space except that they are almost always placed at right angles to one another, reflecting the Javanese concern with the cardinal directions (see Figure 7.3). Generally the larger gong instruments are in the back, with the *saron* family immediately in front of them, *bonang* family and *bedhug* drum to the sides, other melodic instruments in front, and *kendhang* drums in the center. The placement of the instruments reflects their relative loudness and their function in the performance of pieces, to be discussed shortly.

The *gamelan* instruments are normally complemented by singers: a small male chorus (*gérong*) and female soloists (*pesindhèn*). Java also supports a highly developed tradition of unaccompanied vocal music, which serves as a major vehicle for Javanese poetry. Although Javanese have recorded their sung poetry in several writing systems for over a thousand years, these are normally sung rather than read silently or aloud. Even important letters between members of the nobility were, until the twentieth century, composed as poetry and delivered as song. Although the postal system has eliminated this practice, vocal music, whether with *gamelan* or unaccompanied, enjoys great popularity in Java today.





R. Anderson, Sutrion

FIGURE 7.3

Members of the Pujangga Laras *karawitan* group performing at a wedding in Eromoko, Wonogiri, Central Java, August 3, 2006.

The relation between vocal and instrumental orientations in *gamelan* music is reflected in the two major groupings of instruments in the present-day Javanese *gamelan*: “loud-playing” and “soft-playing.” Historical evidence suggests that these two groupings were once separate ensembles and were combined as recently as the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Associated with festivals, processions, and other noisy outdoor events, loud-playing ensembles were strictly instrumental. Soft-playing ensembles were intended for more-intimate gatherings, often indoor, and involved singing. Even today, performance style distinguishes these two groupings. In loud-playing style, only the drums and louder metal instruments are used (see the left-hand column of Table 7.1). In soft-playing style, these instruments, or most of them, are played softly, and the voices and instruments listed in the column on the right are featured.

TABLE 7.1 The Two *Gamelan* Instrument Groups.

*Loud-Playing Instruments*

*gong ageng*

*siyem*

*kempul*

*kenong*

*kethuk*

*kempyang*

*bonang* family

*saron* family

*slenthem*

*kendhang* family

*bedhug*

*Soft-Playing Instruments*

*gendèr barung*

*gendèr panerus*

*gambang*

*celempung*

*siter*

*suling*

*rebab*

## GAMELAN CONSTRUCTION

Bronze is the preferred metal for *gamelan* manufacture, owing both to its durability and to its rich, sweet sound quality. Brass and iron are also used, especially in rural areas. They are considerably cheaper than bronze and easier to tune but less sonorous. Bronze *gamelan* instruments are not cast but instead forged in a long and difficult process. Though the metal worker in many societies occupies a low status, in Java he has traditionally been held in high regard. Forging bronze instruments not only requires great skill but also retains a mystical significance. Working with metals, transforming molten copper and tin (the metals that make bronze alloy) into sound-producing instruments, is believed to make one especially vulnerable to dangerous forces in the spirit world. For this reason the smiths make ritual preparation and may actually assume mythical identities during the forging process. The chief smith is ritually transformed into Panji, a powerful Javanese mythical hero, and the smith's assistants to Panji's family and servants (see Becker 1988; Kunst 1973:138).

The largest gongs may require a full month of labor and a truckload of coal for the forge that heats the metal. Only after appropriate meditation, prayer, fasting, and preparation of offerings does a smith undertake to make a large gong. The molten bronze is pounded, reheated, pounded, reheated, and gradually shaped into a large knobbed gong that may measure three feet or more in diameter. A false hit at any stage can crack the gong, and the process must begin all over.

## GAMELAN IDENTITY

A *gamelan*, particularly a bronze set with one or two fine large gongs, is often held in great respect, given a proper name, and given offerings on Thursday evenings (the beginning of the Muslim holy day). Though *gamelan* makers have recently begun to duplicate precise tuning and decorative designs, each *gamelan* is usually a unique set, whose instruments would both look and sound out of place in another ensemble. Formerly it was forbidden even to attempt to copy the tuning and design of palace *gamelan* instruments, as these were reserved for the ruler and were directly associated with his power.

The variability in tuning from one *gamelan* to another certainly does not stem from a casual sense of pitch among Javanese musicians and *gamelan* makers. On the contrary, they take great care in the making and in the occasional retuning of *gamelan* sets to arrive at a pleasing tuning—one that is seen to fit the particular physical condition of the instruments and the tastes of the individual owner. For example, I spent one month with a tuner, his two assistants, and an expert musician as they gradually reached consensus on an agreeable tuning, and then altered the tuning of the many bronze gong and metal slab instruments through a long process of hammering and filing—all by hand. Bronze has the curious property of changing tuning—rather markedly during the first few years after forging and more subtly over the next twenty to thirty years, until it has finally “settled.” It might seem that the lack of a standard tuning would produce musical chaos, but the actual latitude is rather small.

## GAMELAN PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS

Despite the changes wrought by modern institutions in the contexts of music making and the ways music is understood, Javanese music is more closely interrelated with other performing arts and more intimately bound to other



Arthur Durkee, EarthVisions Photographics

FIGURE 7.4

Musicians playing the *gamelan* Kyai Kanyut Mèsem. Mangkunegaran palace, Surakarta, Central Java. In foreground: *Sarons*, *kempul*, and gongs on left; *saron peking* and *bonangs* on right.

aspects of life than are the arts in the West. Concerts of *gamelan* music, with an audience sitting quietly and paying close attention to the music, have only recently appeared and serve mostly to present new, experimental works. In contrast, presentations of the more traditional *gamelan* music are best understood as social events that involve *gamelan* music. They usually commemorate a day of ritual importance, such as a birth, circumcision, or wedding. Normally a family sponsors such an event and invites neighbors and relatives, with others welcome to look on and listen. The invited guests are served food and are expected to socialize freely throughout the duration of the event. No one expects the guests to be quiet during the performance of pieces or to pay rapt attention to them the way an audience does at a Western concert. Rather, the music, carefully played though it may be, is seen to contribute to the festiveness of the larger social event, helping to make it *ramé* (lively, busy in a positive way). Connoisseurs among the guests will ask for a favorite piece and may pay close attention to the way the ensemble or a particular singer or instrumentalist performs, but not to the exclusion of friendly interaction with the hosts and other guests. Although the music is intended to entertain those present (without dance or drama), it also serves a ritual function, helping to maintain balance at important transitional points in the life of a person or community.

More often, *gamelan* music is performed as accompaniment for dance or theater—a refined female ensemble dance (*srimpi* [sreem-pee] or *bedhaya* [buh-daw-yaw]; see Figures 7.5 and 7.6); a flirtatious female solo dance; a vigorous, martial lance dance; or an evening of drama based on Javanese legendary history, for example. A list of traditional genres currently performed in Central Java with *gamelan* accompaniment would be long. Some are presented primarily in commercial settings, with an audience buying tickets. Others most often involve a ceremony.

The genre held in the highest esteem by most Javanese, and nearly always reserved for ceremony, is the shadow puppet theatre or *wayang kulit* (see Figures 7.7 and 7.8),



FIGURE 7.5

Dancers at Pujokusuman in Yogyakarta perform a *srimpi*, female court dance.



Peggy Choy

which dates back no fewer than one thousand years. Beginning with an overture played on the *gamelan* during the early evening, shadow puppet performances normally last until dawn. With a screen stretched before him (almost all Javanese puppeteers are male), a lamp overhead, and puppets to both sides, one master puppeteer (*dhalang*) operates all the puppets, performs all the narration and dialogue, sings mood songs, and directs the musicians for about eight hours with no intermission.

Although the musicians do not play constantly throughout the evening, they must always remain ready to respond to a signal from the puppeteer. He leads the musicians and accents the action of the drama through a variety of percussion patterns he plays by hitting the wooden puppet chest to his left and the clanging metal plates suspended from the rim of the chest. If he is holding puppets in both hands, he uses his foot to sound these signals. He must be highly skilled as a manipulator, director, singer, and storyteller.

The puppeteer delivers not a fixed play written by a known playwright but rather his own rendition of a basic story—usually closely related to versions performed by



Arthur Durkee, EarthVisions Photographics

FIGURE 7.6

Dancers at the Pakualaman palace in Yogyakarta perform a *bedhaya*, female court dance, here with innovative costumes.

other puppeteers, but never exactly the same. It might be a well-known episode from the **Ramayana** (rah-mah-yah-nah) or **Mahabharata** (ma-hah-bah-rah-tah), epics of Indian origin that have been adapted and transformed in many parts of Southeast Asia and have been known in Java for one thousand years.

During a shadow puppet performance, the *gamelan* plays music drawn from a large repertory of pieces, none specific to a single play and many of which are played in other contexts as well. A good musician knows many hundreds of pieces, but like the shadow plays, the pieces are generally not totally fixed. Many regional and individual variants exist for some pieces. More importantly, the very conception of what constitutes a *gendhing* (guh-n-deeng)—a “*gamelan* piece” or “*gamelan* composition”—differs from the Western notion of musical pieces, particularly within the Western “classical” tradition.



Arthur Durkee, EarthVisions Photographics

FIGURE 7.7

Puppeteer Ki Gondo Darman performing *wayang kulit* at the ASKI Performing Arts Academy in Surakarta.

## GAMELAN MUSIC: A JAVANESE *GENDHING* IN PERFORMANCE

We can best begin to understand what a Javanese *gendhing* is by considering one in some detail—how it is conceived and how it is realized in performance. Listen to *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar” (CD 2, Track 21). This is from a tape I made in a recording session in Yogya with some of the most highly regarded senior musicians associated with the court. It was played on a bronze *gamelan* at the house of one of Yogya’s best known dancers and choreographers, R. M. Soedarsono, who founded the National Dance Academy (ASTI) in Yogya and recently retired from serving as Rector of the Indonesian Institute for the Arts (ISI).

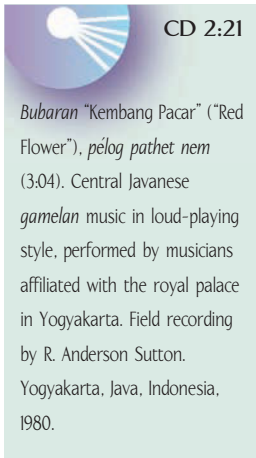
Note that it is an example of loud-playing style throughout, in the *pélog* scale system, with small and large intervals. It uses the tones 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, with an occasional 4, but no 7. Javanese normally refer to *gendhing* by their formal structure, in this case *bubaran* (boo-bah-ran; meaning 16 beats per *gongan*, 4 *kenong* beats per *gongan*); the name of a particular melody, here, “**Kembang Pacar**” (kuhm-bahng pah-char; a kind of red flower); the scale system (*pélog*); and the modal category (*pathet nem* [pah-tuht nuhm]).

What about its structure? How does this piece—or, more precisely, this performance of this piece—organize the sounds it employs? Unless they are connected directly to a previous piece in a medley sequence, Javanese *gendhing* begin with a solo introduction, played on one instrument or sung by a solo singer. Here a short introduction (*buka*) is played on the *bonang* by the well-known teacher and musician Pak Sastrapustaka (1913–1991). Refer to the Close Listening guide for the timings of the various sections.

During the latter portion, this *bonang* is joined by the two drums *kendhang gendhing* and *ketipung*, played (as is customary) by one drummer—in this case, the court musician Pak Kawindro. The drummer in a Javanese *gamelan* acts as a conductor, controlling the tempo and the dynamics (the relative levels of loudness and softness). He (or she) need not be visible to other musicians, since the “conducting” is accomplished purely through aural signals. The drummer does not stand in front of the ensemble but sits unobtrusively in the middle of it.

Although we discussed the choice of *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar” at this recording session, experienced musicians recognize the identity of the *gendhing* from the introduction and do not need to be told what piece is about to be performed. The *bonang* player (or other musician providing an introduction) may simply play the introduction to an appropriate piece and expect the other musicians to follow. At the end of the introduction, most of the rest of the ensemble joins in, the large gong sounds, and the main body of the *gendhing* begins.

The structure of this main body is based on principles of balanced, binary (duple) subdivision and of cyclic repetition. The basic time and melodic unit in *gendhing* is the *gongan*, a phrase marked off by the sound of either the largest gong (*gong ageng*) or the slightly smaller *gong siyem*. For most *gendhing* these phrases are of regular length as measured in beats of the *balungan*, the melodic part usually played on the *slenthem* and the *saron* family—almost always some factor of two: 8 beats, 16 beats, 32 beats, 64 beats, 128 beats, 256 beats. (In the genre of pieces that serve as the staple for accompanying dramatic action, as we will see later, *gongan* are of irregular length, and the regular unit is marked instead by the smaller gong *kempul*.)





## Close Listening

### BUBARAN "KEMBANG PACAR"

CD 2:21

COUNTER NUMBER

COMMENTARY

#### *Buka* (introduction)

0:02	Initiated by <i>bonang barung</i> .
0:05	<i>Kendhang</i> joins in and slows the tempo.
0:10	Other instruments join in, gong marks end of <i>buka</i> .

#### Statement 1 of main body of the piece

0:11	1st <i>gongan</i> (major phrase) begins.
0:24	2nd <i>gongan</i> begins.
0:37	3rd <i>gongan</i> begins.
0:51	4th <i>gongan</i> begins.

#### Statement 2 of main body of the piece

1:04	1st <i>gongan</i> begins.
1:17	2nd <i>gongan</i> begins.
1:30	3rd <i>gongan</i> begins.
1:44	4th <i>gongan</i> begins.

#### Statement 3 of main body of the piece

1:56	1st <i>gongan</i> begins.
2:07	2nd <i>gongan</i> begins.
2:18	3rd <i>gongan</i> begins.
2:29	4th <i>gongan</i> begins.
2:30	Tempo begins to slow in response to <i>kendhang</i> .
2:49	Final gong beat marks the end of this performance.

The *kenong* subdivides a *gongan* into two or four shorter phrases, and these are further subdivided by *kempul*, *kethuk*, and in some lengthier pieces *kempyang*.

These structural principles result in a pattern of interlocking percussion that repeats until an aural signal from the drummer or one of the lead melodic instruments (*bonang* in loud-playing style, *rebab* in soft-playing) directs the performers to end or to proceed to a different piece. Whereas in Western music composers must provide explicit directions for performers to repeat a section (usually by means of notated repeat signs), in Javanese *gamelan* performance, repetition is assumed.

As we speak of “phrases” in describing music, borrowing the term from the realm of language, Javanese also liken the *gongan* to a sentence and conceive of the subdividing parts as “punctuation.” For *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar,” after the gong stroke at the end of the introduction, the pattern of gong punctuation shown in Transcription 7.2 is repeated throughout. (See the Close Listening guide for timing of the progression in this performance from introduction through the three statements of the four *gongan*.)

### TRANSCRIPTION 7.2

Interlocking punctuation pattern.

<p>t = kethuk N = kenong P = kempul G = gong or siyem w = rest . = one beat in balungan melody</p>	<p>·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   ·   · t   w   t   N   t   P   t   N   t   P   t   N   t   P   t   N G</p>
--	--

The time distribution of these punctuating beats is even, but the degree of stress or weight is not (even though no beat is played louder than any other on any single instrument). Javanese listeners feel the following progression of stress levels (Transcription 7.3), based on the levels of subdivision.

### TRANSCRIPTION 7.3

Stress levels in punctuation pattern.

<b>SUBDIVISIONS</b>																
full gongan:																G
1st level:				N			N				N					N
2nd level:		w				P				P			P			
3rd level:	t		t		t		t		t		t		t		t	
	wk	md	wk	str	wk	md	wk	str	wk	md	wk	str	wk	md	wk	xstr
beat no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	(wk = weak; md = medium; str = strong; xstr = very strong)															

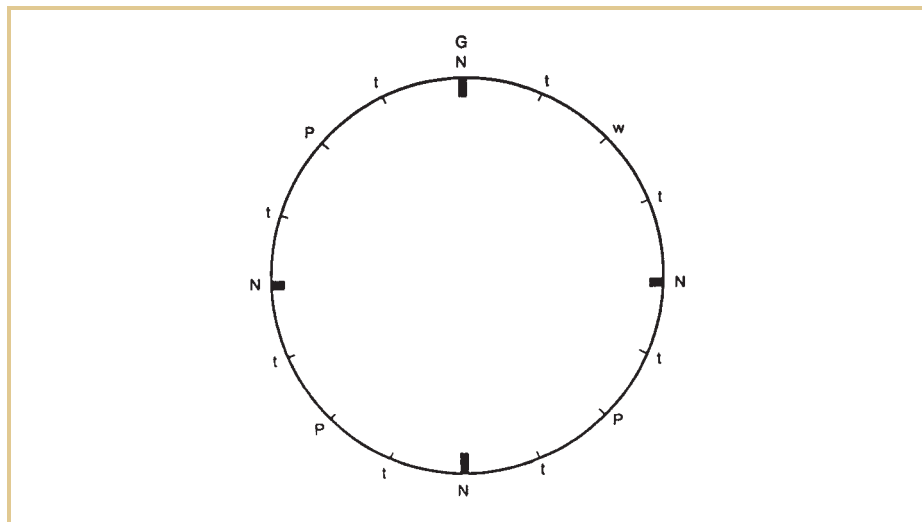
The strongest beat is the one coinciding with the largest and deepest-sounding phrase marker, the gong (G), and with the *kenong* (N), at the end of the phrase. Javanese would count this as one, *two*, three, *four*, and so on, with the strongest beat being the sixteenth. This is the only beat where two punctuating gong instruments coincide. This “coincidence” releases the rhythmic tension that has built up through the course of the *gongan*, giving a sense of repose.

Although in the West we may dismiss events as “mere coincidence,” in Java the simultaneous occurrence of several events, the alignment of days of the week and dates (like our Friday the 13th), can be profoundly meaningful. It is not uncommon

to determine a suitable day for a wedding, or for moving house, based on the coincidence of a certain day in the seven-day week with a certain day in the Javanese five-day market week, and this in turn within a certain Javanese month (in the lunar calendar, rather than the solar calendar used in the West). The simultaneous occurrence of what to Westerners would seem to be unrelated (and therefore meaningless) events—such as the sounding of a certain bird while a person is carrying out a particular activity—can be interpreted in Java as an important omen.

This deep-seated view of the workings of the natural world is reflected in the structure of *gamelan* music, where coincidence is central to the coherence of the music. The sounding of the gong with the *kenong* marks the musical instant of greatest weight and is the only point at which a *gendhing* may end. Other, lesser points of coincidence also carry weight. If we consider the piece in terms of the *balungan* melody, the next strongest stress comes at the coincidence of the *balungan* with the *kenong* strokes. And in pieces with longer *gongan* (for example, 32, 64, or 128 beats), many of the *saron* beats do not coincide with any punctuating gong, making each *kenong* stroke and even each *kethuk* stroke an instance of stress and temporary repose.

The ethnomusicologist Judith Becker and her former student Stanley Hoffman represent the cyclic structure of *gendhing* by mapping patterns onto a circle, relating the flow of musical time to the recurring course traced by the hands of a clock. The pattern used in *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar,” then, can be notated as shown in Transcription 7.4.



TRANSCRIPTION 7.4  
Punctuation pattern of *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar” represented as a circle.

Becker argues convincingly that the cyclic structure of Javanese *gendhing* reflects the persistence of Hindu-Buddhist conceptions of time introduced to Java during the first millennium C.E. and not wholly eliminated by the subsequent adoption of Islam. (For an elaboration of this theory, see Hoffman 1978, Becker 1979, and especially Becker 1981.)

In the performance of many pieces today, the players of most of the punctuating instruments have a choice of pitch. Their choice is normally determined by the *balungan* melody tone played simultaneously or the one about to be emphasized in the following phrase. However, when performing in loud-playing style, musicians sometimes use a single pitch throughout; this reflects the practice of earlier times, when only one *kempul* and one or two *kenong* were made for each *gamelan*. Here the

musicians opt for this older practice; they use *kempul* tone 6 throughout and a special *kenong* tuned to tone 5 in the octave below the other *kenong*. The *kethuk*, as is customary in Yogyakarta, is tuned to tone 2. The gong player chooses to sound the *gong ageng* for only the first and last gong strokes; otherwise he plays the smaller *gong siyem*, tuned to tone 2.

Let us now consider the *balungan* melody of this piece (CD 2, Track 21) performed on the *saron* and *slenthem* and notated as in Transcription 7.5. The system used here and elsewhere in this chapter is the cipher notation system now widely used throughout central and eastern Java. Dots in place of numerals indicate the sustaining of the previous tone. A dot below a numeral indicates the lower octave and a dot above indicates the higher octave. An extra space or two is often given after groups of four beats as a means of marking a “measure”—though in Java the stress is on the last beat, not the first. Today many Javanese musicians refer to notation to learn or to recall particular pieces, but they do not generally read from notation in performance. Further, the notation usually includes only the *balungan* melody and introduction; the parts played on other instruments are recreated in relation to the *balungan* melody and are open to some degree of personal interpretation.


**TRANSCRIPTION 7.5**  
Introduction and *balungan*  
melody in the Javanese  
cipher notation system.

<b>Introduction</b>	(on bonang):	5 3 5 . 2 3 5 6 2 4 5 4 2 15555	G N
<b>Main Body</b>			
punctuation (same each gongan):		t w t N t P t N t P t N t P t N	G
1st gongan:		3 6 3 5 3 6 3 5 3 6 3 5 6 5 3 2	
2nd gongan:		6 5 3 2 6 5 3 2 6 5 3 2 5 3 5 6	
3rd gongan:		2 1 2 6 2 1 2 6 2 1 2 6 3 5 3 2	
4th gongan:		5 3 5 . 2 3 5 6 2 4 5 4 2 1 6 5	

The piece consists of four *gongan* (each, of course, with the same *bubaran* structure), played one after the other. Each of the first three begins with a measure that is played three times in succession and ends on the same tone as the previous gong tone. This kind of regularity enhances the balanced symmetry provided by the punctuation structure. The fourth *gongan*, which stands out with its one sustained note (fourth beat) and lack of internal repetition, is melodically quite similar to the introduction and leads right back into the first *gongan*.

To help you distinguish the sounds of the different layers of punctuation and melody in this piece, listen to a rendition performed by students in the Javanese *gamelan* performance ensemble at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, in which you will first hear just the *balungan* melody, then the other parts added one by one (CD 2, Track 22). Note that, because *gamelan* tuning is not standardized, the exact pitches of the *pélog* tones in the *gamelan* you hear in Track 22 of CD 2 differ noticeably from those of the *gamelan* in Track 21 of CD 2. Neither is considered “out of tune”; they merely differ.

The four-*gongan* melody of *Bubaran “Kembang Pacar”* is first played alone, with no punctuation, drum, or elaboration. As the four-*gongan* melody (or “statement”) repeats, one layer of punctuation, drum pattern, or elaboration is added with each *gongan*. There are four full statements in this selection (see the Close Listening guide).



**CD 2:22**

Demonstration: *Bubaran “Kembang Pacar,” pélog pathet nem (3:55)*.  
*Balungan* melody alone, followed by addition of other instruments one by one. Performed by University of Wisconsin–Madison Javanese *gamelan* ensemble, directed by R. Anderson Sutton. Recorded at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, December 2000.

## Close Listening

### BUBARAN “KEMBANG PACAR”

CD 2:22

#### COUNTER

NUMBER COMMENTARY

#### Main melody—*Gongan A* through *D*

- 0:02 *Saron* and *slenthem* play major phrase A, 1st statement, 16 beats.  
(metal slab instruments)
- 0:17 *Gongan B*, 1st statement, 16 beats.
- 0:32 *Gongan C*, 1st statement, 16 beats.
- 0:46 *Gongan D*, 1st statement, 16 beats.
- 1:00 *Gong* enters, marking end of *gongan D*.  
(Large hanging gong; marks the ends of all major phrases)

#### *Gongan A*, 2nd statement

- 1:04 *Kenong* enters, playing on every 4th beat.  
(Large kettle, horizontally mounted; subdivides the major phrase)

#### *Gongan B*, 2nd statement

- 1:20 *Kempul* enters, playing on the 6th, 10th, and 14th beats.  
(Medium hanging gongs; subdivides the major phrase)

#### *Gongan C*, 2nd statement

- 1:30 *Kethuk* enters, playing on the 1st and 3rd beat of every group of 4 (every other beat throughout).  
(Small kettle; subdivides the *kenong* phrase)

#### *Gongan D*, 2nd statement

- 1:43 *Kendhang* (kuhn-dahng) enters, playing rhythmic patterns that fill the length of each major phrase (16 beats).  
(Set of large and small barrel drums; directs tempo and dynamics)

#### *Gongan A*, 3rd statement

- 1:56 *Saron peking* enters, echoing each tone of the main melody.  
(Smallest, highest pitched *saron*, metal slab instrument; doubles main melody except at slower tempos, when it usually varies the melody)

**Gongan B, 3rd statement**

2:09 *Bonang barung* enters, playing variations and embellishments.  
(Larger, lower-pitched gong-chime; elaborates the main melody and subdivides its beats)

**Gongan C, 3rd statement**

2:21 *Bonang panerus* enters, playing variations and embellishments twice as fast as the *bonang barung* earlier.  
(Smaller, higher-pitched gong-chime; elaborates the main melody)

**Gongan D, 3rd statement**

2:34 Full instrumentation.

2:38 Drummer speeds up tempo nearing the end of major phrase D.

**Gongan A, 4th statement**

2:45 Full instrumentation.

**Gongan B, 4th statement**

2:56 Full instrumentation.

**Gongan C, 4th statement**

3:06 Full instrumentation.

**Gongan D, 4th statement**

3:17 Full instrumentation.  
Drummer signals slowing of tempo to end the piece.

The main body can be repeated as many times as the drummer desires or as is appropriate to the context in which it is performed. Pieces in *bubaran* form are normally played at the end of performances (*bubar* means “to disperse”). The guests or audience are expected to leave during the playing of the piece; thus the number of repetitions may depend on the length of time it takes those in attendance to get up to leave.

Having explored the structure of this piece as performed, let us focus our attention on the part played by the drummer, using the smallest and largest drums in combination. Throughout the piece he plays a pattern generic to the *bubaran* form. That is, the drumming for any of the forty or so other pieces in this form would be the same: a particular introductory pattern, several variant patterns for the main body, and a special contrasting pattern that is reserved only for the final *gongan* and that, together with the slowing of tempo, signals the ending. The patterns comprise a series of drum strokes. Each stroke has a



name that imitates the actual drum sound: *tak*, *dung*, and *dang*—T, d, and D (see Transcription 7.6).

<b>Introduction:</b>															N/G										
5	3	5	.	2	3	5	6	2	4	5	4	2	1	5	5	5	5								
								T	T	d	D	T	d	d	.										
<b>Main Body:</b>																									
	t	w	t	N	t	P	t	N	t	P	t	N	t	P	t	N/G									
(e.g.)	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	6	5	3	2									
A:	d	d	d	D	.	d	d	d	D	.	d	d	d	D	.	d	D	d	D	d	D	.			
B:	T	d	D	.	T	d	D	.	T	d	D	.	T	d	D	.	T	d	D	.	d	D	d	D	.
Ending:	T	d	d	d	D	T	d	d	D	T	d	D	d	D	T	d	T	D	d	D	d	d	.		

### TRANSCRIPTION 7.6

*Bubaran* drum patterns—a generic vocabulary of drum strokes, each with an onomatopoeic name that imitates the actual drum sound (*tak*, *dung*, and *dang*—T, d, and D). T—*Tak* is a short, crisp sound produced by slapping the smaller head of the *ketipung* with the palm.

d—*Dung* is a high, resonant sound produced by one or two fingers striking the larger head of the *ketipung*.

D—*Dang* is a deep sound produced by hitting the larger head of the *kendhang gendhing*, often in combination with *tak* on the *ketipung*.

It is the drummer who first begins to play faster, thereby signaling the ensemble to speed up at the end of the second time through the large cycle of four *gongan*. As a warning that he or she intends to end, the drummer alters the last few strokes in the penultimate *gongan* (in this case from dDdD dD. to dDdD TdD [not shown in the transcription]). This way the other musicians all know to slacken the tempo, though the precise rate is determined by the drummer. The playing of the ending pattern through the last *gongan* confirms his or her intentions.

We have seen how the punctuating gong parts and the drumming fit with the *balungan* in *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar.” We can now turn to the elaborating melodic instruments—here the middle-range *bonang* (*barung*) and higher-range *bonang* (*panerus*)—which normally play at a faster rate, subdividing the *balungan* part and providing variations based on the *balungan* melody. In pieces with *balungan* played at slower tempos, the highest-range *saron* (*peking*) also provides a limited degree of melodic elaboration, but in Yogyanese court style it is sometimes omitted (as it is here).

I mentioned earlier that the only part normally notated is the *balungan*. Other melodic parts are derived through processes generally understood by practicing musicians. Ideally, all musicians can play all the parts. In reality, this is true only in the best professional groups; however, most musicians have at least a passive knowledge of the workings of all the instruments and know how to respond to various signals and nuances.

The two *bonang* here perform in a style called “walking,” usually alternating left and right hands in sounding combinations of tones derived from the *balungan*. Transcription 7.7 shows the *bonang barung* part as it is played the first time through the four *gongan*. The arrangement of kettle gongs on the instrument is given in the upper portion of the transcription; the lower portion shows the actual *bonang* playing in relation to the *balungan*.

## TRANSCRIPTION 7.7

Cipher notation for the *bonang barung* part as played the first time through the four *gongan*—“walking” style.

	4̇	6̇	5̇	3̇	2̇	1̇	7̇																							
<b>Kettles on bonang:</b>	1	7	2	3	5	6	4																							
 <b>Bonang Playing in <u>Bubaran Kembang Pacar</u>:</b>																														
<b>balungan:</b>	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	6	5	3	2														
<b>bonang:</b>	3	6	3	6	3	5	3	5	3	6	3	6	3	5	3	5	6	5	3	6	6	.								
																						2	2							
<b>balungan:</b>	6	5	3	2	6	5	3	2	6	5	3	2	5	3	5	6														
<b>bonang:</b>	6	5	3	5	6	.	6	.	6	5	3	5	6	.	6	.	6	5	3	5	6	.	6							
																							2	2						
<b>balungan:</b>	2	1	2	6	2	1	2	6	2	1	2	6	3	5	3	2														
<b>bonang:</b>	2̇	1̇	2̇	1̇	5	6	1̇	6	2̇	1̇	2̇	1̇	5	6	1̇	6	2̇	1̇	2̇	1̇	6	6	6	.						
																								3	3					
<b>balungan:</b>	5	3	5	.	2	3	5	6	2	4	5	4	2	1	6	5														
<b>bonang:</b>	5̇	3̇	5̇	3̇	5̇	5̇	.	2̇	3̇	2̇	3̇	5̇	6̇	5̇	6̇	2̇	4̇	2̇	4̇	5̇	4̇	5̇	4̇	2̇	1̇	6̇	5̇	3̇	5̇	
																														5

In subsequent repetitions, the *bonang barung* part is similar but not identical. The variations reflect the sensibilities of the player, who both adjusts to tempo changes and alters his or her patterns purely for the aesthetic enjoyment of variation. The *bonang* player has not learned a particular *bonang* part or set of variations, note for note, for this one piece. Rather, the player has thoroughly internalized a vocabulary of patterns known by tradition to fit with certain phrases of *balungan*. What the player usually will have learned about the particular piece, other than its *balungan*, is the octave register in which to play variations (for example, 3 6 3 6 rather than 3̇ 6̇ 3̇ 6̇).

The *bonang panerus* plays similar sorts of variations of the *balungan* melody but at twice the rate of the *bonang barung*. Transcription 7.8 gives *balungan*, *bonang barung*, and *bonang panerus* parts for the first *gongan*. The arrangement of kettles on the *bonang panerus* is identical to that of *bonang barung*, with each tuned an octave higher than the corresponding *bonang barung* kettle.

## TRANSCRIPTION 7.8

*Bonang barung* and *panerus* parts for *Bubaran “Kembang Pacar,”* first *gongan*.

<b>balungan:</b>	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	3	6	3	5	6	5	3	2							
<b>bon. bar.:</b>	3	6	3	6	3	5	3	5	3	6	3	6	3	5	3	5	6	5	3	6	6	.	
																						2	2
<b>bon. pnr.:</b>	363.3636353.3535	363.3636353.3535	363.3636353.3535	656.6535626.626.																			

You can see in Transcription 7.8 how the two *bonang* vary by repetition: 3 6 in the *balungan* becomes 3 6 3 6 in the *bonang barung* part and 363.3636 in the *bonang panerus* part—all heard simultaneously. The players do not mechanically

repeat this pattern throughout, however; they can substitute alternate tones (such as 6 5 3 5 instead of 6 5 6 5) and make other choices. In any case, we can see why the Javanese refer to the *saron* and *slenthem* melody as *balungan*. The term literally means “outline” or “skeleton,” and the *balungan* provides just that for the elaborating instruments (and for voices, in soft-playing style). The degree to which the *saron* and *slenthem* part actually sounds like an outline depends on its tempo and the resulting levels at which the elaborating instruments subdivide it.

### IRAMA LEVEL

In the performances of *Bubaran “Kembang Pacar”* (CD 2, Tracks 21 and 22), the *bonang barung* plays at twice the density of the *balungan*, subdividing it by two. This ratio defines one of five possible levels of *balungan* subdivision known as *irama* (ee-raw-maw) levels. If the tempo had slowed sufficiently (as we will see in the next piece), the *bonang barung* would have doubled its ratio with the *balungan*, subdividing each beat by four. Ward Keeler aptly likens the process to a car shifting gears, in this case downshifting as it goes up a steep grade (Keeler 1987:225). To maintain its relationship with the *bonang barung*, the *bonang panerus* would double as well, resulting in an eight-to-one ratio with the *balungan*. At the slowest *balungan* tempo, the *bonang barung* would have a ratio of 16 beats to 1 *balungan* beat; and the *bonang panerus*, along with several of the soft instruments, would play a full 32 beats for each *balungan* beat!

### PERFORMING YOUR OWN GAMELAN MUSIC

To get the feeling of *gamelan* ensemble performance, all you need is a group of seven or eight people. You can either use available percussion instruments, such as Orff, or simply use your voices. Start by assigning each punctuating instrument to one person. The gong player can simply say “gong” (in a low, booming voice), the *kempul* player “pul” (middle voice), the *kenong* player “nong” (long and high), and the *kethuk* player “tuk” (short and low). Another can be assigned to play the drum pattern (saying the syllables given in the Transcription 7.6 patterns). Then the remaining performers can divide among themselves the *balungan* melody and, if they are inclined, some *bonang* elaboration. With a larger group, people can double up on all instruments except the drum.

First try the piece we have listened to, because the tune is familiar. The “drummer” should control the tempo and play the ending pattern, slowing down, to end. Try different versions, with different numbers of repetitions. You can end at any gong tone, not just at the end of the fourth *gongan*. Then try the piece given in Transcription 7.9, called *Bubaran “Udan Mas”* (literally, “Golden Rain”). You can hear it on the CD recording *Javanese Court Gamelan* from the Pura Paku Alaman (Nonesuch 72044). The gong punctuation is the same as in *Bubaran “Kembang Pacar,”* but the melody differs. The sequence is as follows: introduction, first *gongan* twice, second *gongan* twice, first *gongan* twice, second *gongan* twice, and so on, until your drummer signals an ending. Try to learn it well enough not to need the notation so that, like a Javanese musician, you will be using your ears rather than your eyes.

**TRANSCRIPTION 7.9**  
*Bubaran* “Udan Mas,”  
*pélog pathet barang*.

**Introduction:** 7 7 7 5 6 7 2̇ 2̇ 7 6 5 6 7 6 N/G  
 T T d D T d d 5

**Main Body:**  
 (balungan:) t w t N t P t N t P t N t P t N/G  
 (balungan:) 6 5 3 2 6 5 3 2 3 3 2 3 6 5 3 2

(bonang:) 6 5 6 5 2 . 2 . 6 5 6 5 2 . 2 . 3 3 3 . 3 3 . . 6 5 6 5 2 . 2 .

(balungan:) 7 5 6 7 5 6 7 2 2 7 6 5 6 7 6 5

(bonang:) 7 5 7 5 6 7 6 7 5 6 5 6 7 2̇ 7 2̇ 2̇ 7 2̇ 7 6 5 6 5 6 7 6 7 5 5 5 .

**Approximate equivalents in Western pitches for *pélog* scale:**

(1 = D), 2 = E, 3 = F, (4 = A<sup>b</sup>), 5 = A, 6 = B<sup>b</sup>, 7 = C (1 and 4 not used here)

## A JAVANESE *GENDHING* IN SOFT-PLAYING STYLE

Listen to the next recording, *Ladrang* “Wilujeng,” *pélog pathet barang* (CD 2, Track 23). *Wilujeng* literally means “safe” or “secure.” The piece is often performed at the beginning of ceremonies or rituals to ensure the safety of not only the community involved but also the ceremony or the performance itself. The recording was made at the house of my teacher Suhardi, who lived just outside of Yogya and directed the professional *gamelan* musicians at the Yogya branch of the national radio station, Radio Republik Indonesia (R.R.I.). Some of the performers were professional musicians (at R.R.I. and elsewhere); others were Suhardi’s neighbors who gathered at his house for regular weekly rehearsals on his *gamelan*.

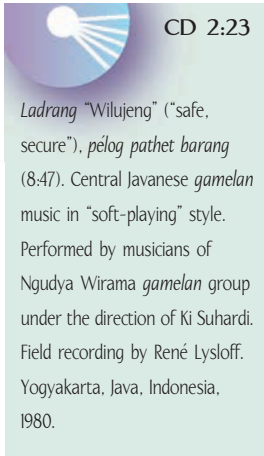
The instruments, which filled much of his modest house when they were spread out for playing, are mostly iron and brass. Perhaps you noticed the contrast in sound quality as the metal percussion instruments first entered. For soft-playing style, however, the quality of singing and the various soft-sounding instruments matters the most, rendering the contrast between bronze and other metals far less significant than it is in loud-playing style. For this reason, some Javanese say that the soft-playing music is more a music of the common people (who cannot afford large bronze ensembles) and the loud-playing music more a music of the court and nobility.

## *PATHET*

Like *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar,” *Ladrang* “Wilujeng,” *pélog pathet barang* uses the *pélog* scale system, but it is classified as *pathet barang*. Javanese generally identify three *pathet* in each of the two scale systems, ordered in relation to the progression in which they are featured in the all-night shadow puppet performances (see Table 7.2).

**TABLE 7.2** *Pathet* in Shadow Puppet Performance.

<i>Sléndro pathet</i>	<i>Pélog pathet</i>	
About 9:00 P.M.–midnight	<i>nem</i>	<i>lima</i>
About midnight–3:00 A.M.	<i>sanga</i>	<i>nem</i>
About 3:00 A.M.–6:00 A.M.	<i>manyura</i>	<i>barang</i>



In actual shadow puppetry today, the first phase may start before 9:00 P.M. and last until well after midnight. The second often begins as late as 2:00 A.M. and the third as late as 4:30. Several schemes are given for music performed outside of the shadow puppet context, but current practice indicates little relation between time of day and *pathet*. Instead, pieces in *sléndro pathet nem* or *pélog pathet lima*, which are usually calm and subdued, tend to be played relatively early in a performance, regardless of the time of day.

Much effort has been spent in defining *pathet* with reference to the melodies of *gamelan* pieces, particularly the *balungan*. The famous Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst noted that certain phrase finals were more common in one *pathet* than another, especially for pieces played primarily in *sléndro* (Kunst 1973). Mantle Hood, one of Kunst's students and a major force in establishing ethnomusicology in the United States, devoted an entire book to the subject, concluding that *pathet* can be distinguished by different cadential patterns in the *balungan* part and the avoidance of certain tones (Hood 1954).

With a larger body of data than was available to Hood, Judith Becker found *pathet* to be "based upon three interlocking factors: (1) melodic pattern, formula, or contour, (2) the pitch level of that pattern and (3) the position of the pattern within the formal structure of a piece" (Becker 1980:81). In *sléndro*, for instance, a measure with the contour of three conjunct steps downward can occur in any *pathet*. Measures beginning on tone 5 and descending to 1 (5 3 2 1) are relatively common in both *sléndro pathet manyura* and *sléndro pathet sanga*, but in *manyura* they normally do not end in a strong position (for example, with a gong stroke), whereas in *sanga* they often do. Measures with the same descending contour, but beginning on tone 6 and descending to 2 (6 5 3 2) are common in both *pathet manyura* and *pathet nem*, but those ending in gong position are more likely to be *pathet nem*.

Javanese often speak of register or pitch level in relation to *pathet*, likening it in some ways to Western concepts of key. Indeed many *gendhing* are played in several *pathet*, just as Western popular tunes are often transposed from one key to another. The relationship to key is most apparent not in the single-octave *balungan* melody but in the parts played on instruments with wider ranges and in the singing. Instrumentalists and singers learn a vocabulary of melodic patterns, which they can readily transpose up or down—and even between scale systems. For example, the pattern one uses to arrive at tone 6 in *sléndro pathet manyura* can be realized one tone lower, with the same physical processes, to end on 5 in *sléndro pathet sanga*. In fact, most Javanese say that *pathet sanga* is simply *pathet manyura* down one tone. But musicians often describe *sléndro pathet nem*, the lowest of the three *sléndro pathet*, as consisting of an ambiguous mix of phrases from the other two *sléndro pathet*, as is the case in our third example (discussed later).

*Pélog pathet* are understood slightly differently. *Pathet barang* is easily distinguished by the presence of tone 7 and the avoidance of tone 1. Differentiating *pathet lima* from *pathet nem* presents greater problems, since both avoid tone 7, employ the other six *pélog* tones, and do not seem to be simply one or more tones above or below the other. Javanese musicians often disagree over which of these two is the correct *pathet* category for a given piece. Perception of a piece's mood, which is determined by other factors besides melodic contour and register, may also contribute. The calmer pieces would be classified as *lima* and livelier ones as *nem*.

The point here is not to try to present a thorough survey of the many ideas about the concept of *pathet*. Rather, I hope you have learned that *pathet* is somewhat more complicated than its Western counterpart, “mode.” The word *pathet* literally means “limit” and is related to other Javanese words for stopping or delimiting. In many ways it indicates something about the limitations of the piece in question—the tones that will be played or emphasized in the *balungan* melody, the pitch level of the other parts, the mood, and (especially for shadow puppetry accompaniment) the time of day or night at which it is appropriately played. Although the association with mood and time of day suggests comparison with Indian *raga* (see Chapter 6), *pathet* is actually a very different concept. *Ragas* are differentiated from one another by details of interval structure and ornament, as well as contour, but not by register. Hundreds of *ragas* are known, thousands theoretically possible. Indian musicians do not, however, transpose pieces from one *raga* to another, because the *raga* is essential to the aesthetic impact of the piece. *Pathet* is a far more general concept. Only a few *pathet* are identified for each of the two scale systems, and transposition from one *pathet* to another occurs with some frequency.

## A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF LADRANG “WILUJENG”

*Ladrang* “Wilujeng” (CD 2, Track 23) differs from *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar” in many ways. It is in soft-playing style, featuring voices and the various soft-sounding instruments. The introduction is played on the *rebab* (fiddle), with the subtle slides and nuances one could not produce on a fixed-pitch instrument such as the *bonang*. The pattern of punctuation (*ladrang*) is nearly the same as in the previous piece, but it is expanded to fit with *gongan* phrases of 32 beats rather than 16. The players of the *kempul* and *kenong* do not limit themselves to one tone, but instead use a variety of tones, matching or anticipating important tones in the melody.

### Instrumental Playing in *Ladrang* “Wilujeng”

*Ladrang* “Wilujeng” is often performed in *sléndro pathet manyura* as well as *pélog pathet barang* simply by transferring the melodic patterns from one system to the other. Transcription 7.10 presents the introduction, the *balungan*, and the gong punctuation (with pitch choices for *kempul* and *kenong*).

#### TRANSCRIPTION 7.10

*Ladrang* “Wilujeng,”  
*pélog pathet barang*. For  
each section (A and B)  
the gong punctuation is  
shown on the first line  
(letters and numerals)  
and the *balungan* on  
the second.

<b>Introduction:</b>	7 3 2 6 7 <sup>2</sup> . 3 7 7 3 2 7 6 <sup>7</sup> 2 <sup>7</sup> 6 <sup>6</sup>	N/G
<b>A: (<u>umpak</u> section)</b>		
	t w t N3 t P6 t N5 t P3 t N6 t P3* t N6/G	
	2 7 2 3 2 7 5 6 3 3 . . 6 5 3 2 5 6 5 3 2 7 5 6 2 7 2 3 2 7 5 6	
		*(if going to <u>ngelik</u> , P6)
<b>B: (<u>ngelik</u> section)</b>		
	t w t N6 t P7 t N6 t P6 t N7 t P6 t N6/G	
	. . 6 . 7 5 7 6 3 5 6 7 6 5 3 2 6 6 . . 7 5 7 6 . 7 3 2 . 7 5 6	

This piece is considerably more challenging to follow than *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar.” It slows and changes *irama* level in the third measure (3 3 . .), settling by the end of the first *gongan* to a tempo of about 36 *balungan* beats per minute. *Irama* is a level of subdivision of the main melody beat by elaborating instruments. The first section (A) is played twice, then the second (B) once, then first twice again, the



second again, and so on, ending in the first: A A B A A B A A B A. For the final two *gongan*, the tempo first speeds up (but with no change in *irama* level) to about 42 beats per minute and then slows gradually to the final gong. A solo female singer (*pesindhèn*; puh-seen-den) sings for most of the first two *gongan*. At the beginning of the first B and from then on, all the singers join in unison. Further, the *balungan* part is no longer played explicitly. Instead the *balungan* instruments play simple variations based on the *balungan*. (See the Close Listening guide.)

## Close Listening

### LADRANG "WILUJENG"

CD 2:23

COUNTER  
NUMBER

COMMENTARY

0:00	Beginning of introduction, played on <i>rebab</i> (fiddle).
0:07	Gong at end of introduction, the rest of the ensemble enters.
0:18	Change of <i>irama</i> level from level 1 to level 2.
0:49	Gong at end of first statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
1:41	Singers enter in unison, just prior to the end of <i>gongan</i> A.
1:42	Gong at end of second statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
2:36	Gong at end of first statement of <i>gongan</i> B.
3:30	Gong at end of third statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
3:58	End of first verse of unison singing.
4:23	Singers enter in unison, singing second verse.
4:24	Gong at end of fourth statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
5:17	Gong at end of second statement of <i>gongan</i> B.
6:11	Gong at end of fifth statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
6:39	End of the second verse of unison singing.
6:44	Drummer signals acceleration in tempo.
7:01	Gong at end of sixth statement of <i>gongan</i> A.
7:46	Gong at end of third statement of <i>gongan</i> B.
8:11	Drummer signals gradual slackening in tempo.
8:41	Final gong at end of seventh statement of <i>gongan</i> A.

The drummer, with the same two drums used in the previous example (*kendhang gendhing* and *ketipung*), plays standardized patterns specific to *ladrang* formal structure: a *ladrang* introduction, a *ladrang* slowing-down pattern (in the first *gongan*), standard patterns for most of the rest of the performance (with a standard variation each time the B section is played), and finally an ending pattern during the final *gongan*. In accord with the soft-playing style, the drumming is softer and sparser than in loud-playing style. Transcription 7.11 presents the standard pattern used, with minimal variation, throughout all the A sections but the final one.

TRANSCRIPTION 7.11  
Drum pattern, *Ladrang*  
“Wilujeng,” *irama dadi*.

2	7	2	3	2	7	5	6	3	3	.	.	6	5	3	2
.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
5	6	5	3	2	7	5	6	2	7	2	3	2	7	5	6G
d	D	.	d	.dD	.	T	d	d	d	D	d	.dD	d	.dD	dD.dD.dD.dD

Other instrumentalists play variations of the *balungan* melody, producing such a complex heterophony that some scholars identify *gamelan* music as polyphonic, noting the stratification of layers: parts moving at a wide variety of tempi—some at a much faster rate or higher density than others. Generally the smaller, higher-pitched instruments play at the faster rates and the larger, deeper ones at the slower rates. One can get a sense of this stratification by considering the frequency with which the gong is struck, comparing it with *kenong* (here four times per gong), then *balungan* (here eight times per *kenong*), and then the subdividing parts (*bonang barung* and *saron peking* four times per *balungan* beat; *bonang panerus* and many of the soft-playing instruments eight times per *balungan* beat). Thus the instruments playing at the fastest rate, mostly those of higher pitch, actually play 256 beats for every one beat of the gong!

I mentioned earlier that in this example the *balungan* is varied even on the instruments that usually sound it explicitly. After the first two *gongan*, where the *balungan* is played normally, the *saron* play simple variations, adding neighboring tones, while the *slenthem* lags by a quarter beat, all of which contributes to a dreamy blurring that allows the vocal melody to assume prominence.

The combination resulting from the interlocking of *slenthem* and *saron* here is identical to what the much higher-pitched *saron peking* plays, duplicating and anticipating the *balungan* tones in a manner that also resembles closely the “walking” style of *bonang* playing. This means of varying the *balungan* characterizes *peking* playing generally; it is not limited to the few cases where the *balungan* is only implied. (See Transcription 7.12.)

TRANSCRIPTION 7.12  
*Saron peking* passage.  
*Ladrang* “Wilujeng.”

(balungan:	3	5	6	7P	6	5	3	2N)
saron peking:	3355335566776677	6655665533223322						

Throughout *Ladrang* “Wilujeng,” the *bonangs* play in walking style, mixed with occasional reiteration of single tones or octave combinations, as found in the first example, *Bubaran* “Kembang Pacar.” The lengthier time interval between *balungan* beats here, however, provides an opportunity for greater melodic and rhythmic independence from the *balungan* melody. For example, the following phrase is played (with occasional variation) on the *bonang barung* with the *balungan* 2 7 5 6. (See Transcription 7.13.)

<b>balungan:</b>	2	7	5	6N
<b>bonang barung:</b>	2̇	7̇	7̇5̇5̇	5̇ 7̇ . . 5̇ 7̇ 7̇5̇ . 6̇ 7̇ . 6̇

TRANSCRIPTION 7.13  
Bonang barung passage,  
Ladrang “Wilujeng.”

The various soft-playing instruments provide more-elaborate variations that are more independent of the *balungan* part and often inspired by phrases in the vocal parts. Because they blend together in the thick texture of soft-playing style, distinguishing all the soft instruments is difficult. As an example, consider the *gambang* (xylophone), which plays mostly “in octaves”—the right hand usually sounding the same tone as the left, but one octave higher. The excerpt is from the middle of the A section, fourth statement (4:05 to 4:20 on CD 2, Track 23). (See Transcription 7.14.)

<b>balungan:</b>	5	6	5	3P
<b>r.h.</b>	2̇ 3̇ 2̇ 3̇ 5̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 6̇ 2̇ 7̇ 6̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 2̇ 7̇ 6̇ 6̇ 2̇ 2̇ 7̇ 2̇ 3̇			
<b>l.h.</b>	2 3 2 3 5 2 3 5 2 3 5 3 2 3 5 6 2̇ 7 6 5 3 5 2 7 6 7 6 2 6 7 2 3			
<b>balungan:</b>	2	7	5	6
<b>r.h.</b>	3̇ 5̇ 6̇ 7̇ 6̇ 2̇ 7̇ 6̇ 5̇ 6̇ 3̇ 2̇ 7̇ 3̇ 2̇ 7̇ 7̇ 2̇ 7̇ 2̇ 7̇ 6̇ 5̇ 3̇ 3̇ 5̇ 3̇ 5̇ 6̇ 6̇ 5̇ 6̇			
<b>l.h.</b>	3 5 6 7 6 2 7 6 5 6 3 2 7 3 2 7 3 2 7 2 7 6 5 3 3 5 3 5 6 3 5 6			

TRANSCRIPTION 7.14  
Gambang passage,  
Ladrang “Wilujeng.”

In other statements of this passage, the *gambang* part is similar, but not identical. Good players draw from a rather large vocabulary of patterns and vary the repeated passages in performance with a degree of individual flexibility, though not with the range of spontaneity associated with improvisation in jazz or Indian music. The *gambang* player, like the other *gamelan* musicians whose part is not completely fixed, operates with a system of constraints (not quite “rules” or “laws”). At the end of a measure, the *gambang* and *balungan* tones almost always coincide; at the midpoint (second beat), they usually do; on other beats they often do not, even though the *gambang* sounds eight (or in some cases as many as thirty-two) times as many tones as the *balungan*.

### Singing in *Ladrang* “Wilujeng”

Solo singing with *gamelan* is also based on notions of flexibility and constraint. During the first two *gongan* one of the female vocalists sings florid vocal phrases that weave in and out of the *balungan* part. Although her part employs a much freer rhythm than the steady pulsation of most of the instruments (for example, the *gambang* discussed earlier), her melody is also constructed from phrases that usually end on the same tone as the *balungan* phrase, even though in current practice she often reaches that tone a beat or two later than most of the other instruments. Although her phrases resemble those of other singers, in some small ways they are her individual patterns. The vocal text used by the solo singer (difficult to determine in this recording) is not specific to the piece; it is one of many in a well-known verse form fitted to the structure of this *ladrang* and to many pieces in this and other forms.

In contrast to the soloist, the chorus sings a precomposed melody. The text, although agreed on before performance, is again a generic one, used in many *gamelan* pieces and having no connection with the meaning of the title of this piece. To a great degree, Javanese melodies and texts lead independent lives. For example, one may sing a single melody with a variety of texts or sing a single text in a variety of *gamelan* pieces; such choices depend on the wishes of the performers or sometimes (but rarely) the requirements of a particular dramatic scene.

The choral text presents many riddles in which the meaning of seemingly unrelated phrases in the first part suggests the meaning or sound of words or phrases in the second part. The Javanese greatly enjoy this kind of literary indirection, which we can see as an aesthetic expression of the high value placed on subtlety and indirection in daily life. To understand the connections, one must know traditional Javanese culture rather well: history, legends, nature, foods, place-names (in both the real and the mythological worlds), and the Javanese shadow puppet tradition with its many hundred characters. Javanese poetry is difficult to render in English. In the following, the Javanese is given first, with word-by-word translation second (with some double meanings), followed by a freer translation.

Text,  
LADRANG “WILUJENG,”  
PÉLOG PATHET BARANG

1. *Manis rengga. satriya ing Lésanpura*  
sweet decoration (colorful sweet snack), knight of/in Lésanpura  
Beautifully adorned, the knight from Lésanpura. [a kingdom in the Mahabharata]  
*Setyanana yèn laliya marang sira*  
Be loyal if forget to you  
You should be loyal, even if you forget yourself.
2. *Tirta maya. supaya anyar kinarya*  
Water pure, so that quickly be made  
Beautiful clear water, let it be done quickly.  
*Ning ing driya. tan na ngalih amung sira*  
purity/emptiness of/in heart, not exist move only you  
With the purifying of my heart, there is nothing that moves, only you.
3. *Kala reta. satriya ngungkuli jaya*  
Time red (centipede), knight surpass glory/victory  
At dawn, the knight proves exceptional in his glory.  
*Sun mbang-embang hamisésa jroning pura*  
I hope/yearn for have power within domain/palace  
I yearn to exercise power here in this domain.

Some of the riddles here are obscure even to most Javanese. An explanation of two of them should give you an idea of how they work. In the first line of stanza 1, the words *satriya ing Lésanpura* (a knight in the kingdom of Lésanpura) suggest the sound of the first word of the second line *setyanana*, as the shadow puppet

character named Setyaki is a well-known knight who came from Lésanpura. *Kala reta*, in the first line of the third stanza, suggests not the sound but one meaning of the root particle in the compound *mbang-embang* in the second line. Though the two-word expression *kala reta* can mean “centipede,” the two words translate individually as “time” (*kala*) and “red” (*reta*). *Bang*, the root of *mbang-embang*, is another word for red, and *bang-bang wétan* (literally “red-red east”) is a Javanese expression for dawn. In this example, as is common in pieces where male and female singers join to sing, the text is interspersed with extra words and syllables whose meaning may be obscure (underlined in Transcription 7.15), and portions of the text may be repeated. These characteristics strongly suggest the relatively greater importance of what we would call the “musical” elements (pitch and rhythm) over the words, with the words’ meaning often obscured and the words serving primarily as vehicles for beautiful melody. Transcription 7.15 shows the scheme for the first stanza (with *balungan* and gong punctuation given above the vocal line).

Chorus enters at end of second umpak (1:45 on stopwatch):      6 6N/G  
Andhé

ngelik:  
. . 6 . 7 5 7 6N 3 5 6 7P 6 5 3 2N  
-----7-----2----- 2-376----- 2-327-----675-----6532  
\_\_\_\_\_é \_\_\_\_\_ba- bo \_\_\_\_\_Ma- nis \_\_\_\_\_reng- ga

6 6 . .P 7 5 7 6N . 7 3 2P . 7 5 6N/G  
----- 6-535-----6-722-----3276----- 567- 5-632----- 723--223276  
sa- tri- ya ing Lé- san- pu- ra,

umpak:  
2 7 2 3 2 7 5 6N 3 3 . .P 6 5 3 2N  
----- 2--3232--76--53----- 3-566-----5675-----6532  
Ba-bo ba- bo Se- tya- na- na

5 6 5 3P 2 7 5 6N 2 7 2 3P 2 7 5 6N/G  
----- 6-753--2-2-2---232-376----- 2--33-----722-----3276  
yèn laliya marang si-ra ma- rang si- ra

umpak:  
2 7 2 3 2 7 5 6N 3 3 . .P 6 5 3 2N  
----- 2--3232--76--53----- 3-566-----5675-----6532  
A- dèn a- dèn Se- tya- na- na

5 6 5 3P 2 7 5 6N 2 7 2 3P 2 7 5 6N/G  
(no vocal, until end of line, where next verse begins): 6 6  
An-dhé

## TRANSCRIPTION 7.15

First stanza, choral vocal part, *Ladrang* “Wilujeng.”

The second stanza operates the same way, with repetition of the last four syllables at the end of one A section and repetition of the first four syllables of

the second line in the next A. Only the final stanza (here the third, but this could have gone on for many more stanzas) ends after one B and one A and thus does not reach the “*Adèn, adèn*” interjections and the repetition of the first four syllables we would expect in the next A if the performance did not end where it does.

## BIOGRAPHY OF KI NARTOSABDHO—A *GAMELAN* MUSICIAN, COMPOSER, AND PUPPETEER

So far we have focused mostly on musical sound and its structure. But what of the people who are most drawn to this music—the musicians themselves? Javanese and foreign scholars alike have often mentioned the close interrelationship among the arts in Java. In fact, the status of “musician” does not preclude one from dancing or performing puppetry. Many of the better performers in one art are quite competent in several others. In the following pages a consummate artist, one famous as a *gamelan* musician, composer of new pieces, and shadow puppeteer, speaks for himself.

The biography provided here is based on an interview my wife and I conducted with the late Ki Nartosabdho in 1979. (His music is discussed at length in Becker 1980.) We began by asking him how he became a shadow puppeteer. He proceeded to tell us the story of his life from early childhood memories, with just a few questions from us, which I have omitted here.

Since I sat at my school desk in second grade, I had a knack for the arts. Which ones? Painting. Children’s paintings, but even so, with cubist style, realism, expressionism, and my own creations: for instance, a lamb being chased by a tiger, things like that. Now, they really did not give lessons in those kinds of painting for children my age, but I made every effort to see duplications of pictures made by other painters at that time. After beginning to learn to paint, I began to learn classical style dance. I’d dance the role of a monkey, an ogre, and so forth. We actually learned a lot about classical dance—not everything, but a good deal. At that time I lived in my small village, in the Klatèn area [between Yogya and Solo]—called Wedhi. I was born in Wedhi on August 25, 1925. There, when I was twelve years old and in third grade, we had a teacher who gave dance lessons. He was from Solo. We studied so hard that we were able to put on quite an impressive show. It was really rare for village children to have the opportunity to study with a “classical” dance teacher from Solo.

After dance, I began to learn Western music—violin, guitar, cello, and *keroncong*. [The *keroncong* is a small chordophone, like an ukulele, played in the Western-influenced Indonesian genre of the same name. The violin, guitar, and cello he studied were for this same genre, and not for “classical” Western music.] By village standards I did just fine, but not by city standards. After that, I studied *gamelan* music. All these interests took their toll—requiring one to spend time, emotions, and especially money. Especially for musical instruments, what was I to use to purchase one? A guitar in 1937 cost six gulden—Dutch money—or we would say six *rupiah* [Indonesian currency]. I was the eighth of my brothers and sisters; I was the youngest. And I was born into a family that was poor—lacking in possessions, in work, and especially in education. So it is clear that, no matter how much I wanted something, I could not continue my education without any income. My father died just after I began second grade, and my mother, a widow, was already old. So I earned money by making masks—yes, masks in order to



be able to continue school. And I managed to finish fifth grade. And I used to have Dutch language classes after school, but they cost 1.25 gulden each month, so I only took Dutch for two months. They threw me out—because I couldn't pay!

Now, rather than hang aimlessly about the house, when I was a teenager, I took off, without even asking my mother's permission. Where in the world would I go, I didn't know. Like a bird in flight, not knowing where I might perch. It was as if I needed some time to suffer. —Excuse me, I don't usually come out with all this about myself, but today I am.— Anyway, like a bird in flight, no idea where I should perch. I might even be called a *gelandangan* [homeless street person]. If not a *gelandangan*, then an outcast, or a forgotten soul.

I felt that the perch I should take was only to join and follow performing groups: both *kethoprak* [musical drama, with stories from Javanese legendary history] and *wayang orang* [musical dance-drama, based on the same Indian epics as shadow puppetry]. First I joined a *kethoprak* group, working as an actor and as a *gamelan* musician. But what I got for it was very minimal—both artistically and financially. And what was more, the coming of the Japanese reinforced my feeling that I had to keep drifting. A life of wandering about, and in tattered clothing. There were lots of clothes then that no human being should have to wear [burlap bags, etc., as the Japanese took much of the cloth during their occupation], but like it or not, circumstances required it. In Javanese there is a the saying: *nuting jaman kalakoné* ["following the times is the way to act"—or, "go with the flow"]. There are lots of sayings and stories that still have mystical content in Indonesia, still plenty. And you should know, even though in your country there is so much great technology, in Indonesia traditional and mystical matters still persist, and are even gaining in strength.

So, I played with about ten *kethoprak* groups: only one month, then move, three months and move, at the longest, only four or five months, then move. It is called *lècèkan*—not taking care of oneself. Then one day I was playing drum for a *kethoprak* group named Sri Wandowo, playing in Klatèn. This was in 1945, just before the Proclamation of Independence [August 17]. There was a manager, the manager of the Ngesthi Pandhawa *wayang orang* troupe, who happened to be eating at a little eating stall behind the *kethoprak* stage where I was playing. As he ate, he heard my drumming and it made an impression. After going home—from eating frogs' legs—he called three of his troupe members and asked them to find out who it was playing *kendhang* for the *kethoprak*. After that, in brief, I left Sri Wandowo and joined Ngesthi Pandhawa. And what startled the other members was that I was the only member who was nervy enough to play drum at his first appearance. I had lots of experience drumming, but what I knew needed "upgrading."

Now, this guy named Narto [Nartosabdho] was a man without upgrading. Three quarters of the Ngesthi Pandhawa members scorned me, ridiculed me, and seemed disgusted by my behavior. A new member already nervy enough to direct and play drum? Now, in the old days, Ngesthi Pandhawa was just an ordinary *wayang orang* troupe, with lots of free time in its schedule. Well, I took steps for "evolution"—not "revolution," but "evolution." Where was our "evolution"? On the stage of Ngesthi Pandhawa, both in the *gamelan* music and in the dance, and in the new pieces I composed—I should say "we" composed. These were very popular with the public, with the audience. From village tunes to new tunes unknown in Java, such as waltz-time. [Several other composers have also experimented with *gamelan* music in triple meter, including the Yogyanese Hardjosoebroto. It is not clear who can rightfully claim to have done it first.] The piece was *Sang Lelana* ["The Wanderer"]. Also there was *Aku Ngimpi* ["I Dream"] and *Sampur Ijo* ["The Green Scarf"], even for dance!

And [the vocal parts] for these waltz pieces could be duet or trio: one, two, or three voices [singing different melodies]. When we tried these out at Ngesthi

Pandhawa, there were people who predicted that I would go crazy. My response was that we are all human. God gives us cattle, not beefsteak. Once we are given cattle by God, we have the right to transform it into something that is appropriate and useful, in accordance with our taste. All the better if we can bring in rhythms (meters) from outside Indonesia, as long as we don't change or destroy the original and authentic Indonesian rhythms. For example [Nartosabdho taps—on the “x”s in Transcription 7.16—and hums],

#### TRANSCRIPTION 7.16

Ki Nartosabdho's demonstration of *gamelan* with triple meter.

	x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x					
Gong	.	.	3	5	7	6	6	.	5	3	6	5	5	.	3	2	7	2	.	.	5	6	5	3N
	.	.	7	2	6	7	7	.	3	2	7	2P												

Yes, three-four. Now in the old days this didn't exist. And even now, when it does, it causes hassles for all the instruments played with two hands—drum, *gendèr*, *gambang*—hassles, but it turns out it is possible. At first [they played] only the simplest of patterns; now it is enjoyed by many listeners: experts [players] and those who only wish to listen. Now obviously I faced some defiance, lots of criticism that I was destroying [tradition]. I was called “destroyer.” But I didn't take it just as criticism, but rather as a whip—to push me to find a way. Indeed the criticism was justified. So maybe not only in my country, but in yours too, if there is something startling and seemingly irrational suddenly applied [in the arts], it gives rise to much protest and criticism, right? So maybe the life of mankind everywhere is the same. What differs is just their appearance, their language, their traditions, but life is the same, right?

As it turned out I did okay. My manager gave me something: not money, but a name. Before, I had been Sunarto, now Nartosabdho [from *sabda*—see later]. I gratefully accepted this honor, though not without careful consideration of its justification. In Indonesia often a name is taken from one's profession. For example, Pak Harja Swara [*swara* = “voice,” “sound”] works as a vocalist, *gérong*. Then Harjana Pawaka. *Harjana* means “safe” [cf. *wilujeng*], and *pawaka* means “fire”; he was on the fire brigade, someone who puts out fires. Wignya Pangrawit: *wignya* means “skilled,” and *pangrawit* “a *gamelan* player”; so he was someone skilled at playing *gamelan*. Then Nyata Carita: *nyata* is “clear,” “evident,” and *carita* is “story”; he was a puppeteer who was accomplished, skilled in storytelling. And I was given the addition *sabda*. *Sabda* is “the speech of a holy man.” But here I was a composer and drummer at Ngesthi Pandhawa, specializing in *gamelan* music. It did not seem possible that I would utter such speech. I taught singing and *gamelan*. So I wondered how my profession might fit with this name *sabda*.

[In *wayang orang*, one person sits with the musicians and acts as a *dhalang*—not operating puppets, but providing narration and singing the mood songs known as *sulukan*. We learned from interviewing other members of the Ngesthi Pandhawa troupe that, one night when the usual *dhalang* was unable to perform, Nartosabdho took over and, to the amazement of the audience, showed himself to have a fine voice, facility with the somewhat archaic *dhalang*'s language, and a thorough knowledge of the story. This preceded his debut as a *wayang kulit dhalang*/puppeteer.]

Well, on April 28, 1958, I earned the title *dhalang* [here, puppeteer for *wayang kulit*, not *wayang orang*] in Jakarta, at R.R.I. People heard that I was learning to do

shadow puppetry, and in January 1958 I was called by the broadcast director, Pak Atmaka—he's still alive. Would I do a broadcast? [Javanese shadow puppetry, though it uses beautifully carved and painted puppets, is often broadcast over the radio. The audience follows the story by recognizing the particular vocal quality given to each character by the puppeteer, and they also enjoy the music.] I replied that I would not be willing right away. The broadcast would be heard all over Indonesia, maybe even outside the country. This was before all the private radio stations, so broadcasts from the central studio could be heard clearly [at great distances]. I agreed to perform in a few months, in April. What shape should my puppetry performance take, how classical, how innovative? Could I match the quality of my accomplishments in *gamelan* music? How to proceed, it is always a puzzle. There was a woman, a singer (*pesindhèn*) who made a promise: if I could perform shadow puppetry all night, she would give me a kiss. A kiss of respect, right, not an erotic kiss, not a "porno" kiss!

Sometime after coming home to Semarang from performing in Jakarta, I had a guest. His name was Sri Handaya Kusuma, and he came on behalf of the Medical Faculty in Yogya. He wanted a performance around Christmas time. [Though few Javanese are Christian, Christmas is a holiday, and schools are normally on a short break beginning shortly before Christmas and lasting until after the New Year.] I was asked to perform a "classic" story. Now requests began to come in one after the other: Jakarta, Yogya, Surabaya, Solo. Yes, I was earning money, but more importantly I was also earning my name. Nowadays I perform once or twice a week, but have more requests than that. I have even played at the presidential palace in Jakarta for Pak Harto [former President Suharto] four times.

How did I learn? I am what you would call an "autodidact." I read and so forth, but it also took looking at a lot of shadow puppetry performances. I would watch all the puppeteers I could, not only the older ones, but also the younger. And each performance, by whatever puppeteer, offered something new that I could and should incorporate in my own performance.

What about musicians? When I first played in Jakarta, it was the R.R.I. musicians who accompanied me. Elsewhere, I would take a few of those closest to me, my *gendèr* player, Pak Slamet, who came from Yogya and still plays at R.R.I. Semarang. And my drummer was the late Pak Wirya. Since 1969 I have had my own group, Condhong Raos, mostly younger musicians, under thirty-five years of age.

In the early 1970s I began to make cassettes, first of my new *gamelan* pieces, then of full-length shadow puppet performances. There were some discs produced by Lokananta [the National Recording Company] in the 1960s, too. My first set of *wayang* cassettes was the story "Gatutkaca Sungging," recorded in 1974, if I remember correctly. Not so long ago. I don't really have a favorite story—how can you say one is better than another? If someone wants to hire a puppeteer and asks for "Parta Krama," ["Parta, i.e. Arjuna, gets married"] for example, no puppeteer should say he doesn't like that story. That wouldn't be very good!

What changes do I foresee in the next five or ten years? It may be possible to predict changes in technology, but not in culture, not in the arts. Some people think *wayang kulit* should be given in Indonesian language. To me, if a change adds to the beauty of the art, then it can be accepted. If not, then it cannot be. In Javanese there are many ways to say "eat," or "sleep." [He goes on to give examples. Different honorific levels of vocabulary permeate Javanese but are almost entirely absent from Indonesian. Nartosabdho implies, without stating explicitly, that he finds *wayang* more beautiful in Javanese and would like to keep it that way.] I have taken *gamelan* music from various areas of Java, even Sunda and Bali, and used them in the *gara-gara* [a comic interlude occurring at the beginning of the *pathet sanga* section, around 1:00 A.M.]. Not only have I studied these different songs, but I have even taken liberties with them. But other aspects of my puppetry have not been influenced by other regional styles. My style is basically Solonese. Who can predict if it will change, or how it will change?

The preceding few pages have presented my English translation of much of what Ki Nartosabdho told my wife and me when we visited him in his modest home in Semarang. Though he was still giving one or two strenuous all-night *wayang* performances per week, he was already suffering from a kidney disease. In late 1985 Ki Nartosabdho died and left a legacy of hundreds of new *gamelan* vocal pieces, hundreds of musical recordings, and close to one hundred recordings of all-night *wayang* performances. His group Condhong Raos still performs music, but at present no one stands out as such a clear “superstar” within the world of traditional Javanese performing arts—a world that, until the era of mass media, really knew no “star system” at all.

## GAMELAN MUSIC AND SHADOW PUPPETRY

Now that we have had a glimpse of a man deeply involved in both *gamelan* music and shadow puppetry, it is fitting to consider some of the music most closely associated with shadow puppet performance (Figure 7.8). Both the pieces we have studied so far are seldom played for dance or dramatic accompaniment. The musical staples of the shadow puppet repertory are pieces with dense *kenong* and *kempul* playing and *gongan* of varying length—pieces that generate a level of excitement, partly because of the dense gong punctuation. Each *pathet* includes at least three of these staple pieces: relatively calm, somewhat excited, and very excited. The gong punctuation is densest in the very excited pieces and least present in the calmest pieces. The puppeteer determines which piece is to be played; he must be just as thoroughly at home with the *gamelan* music as he is with the many hundreds of characters and stories that comprise this tradition.

We are going to listen to two versions of one of these pieces, the Yogyanese *Playon “Lasem”* (*plah-yon lah-suhm*), *sléndro pathet nem* (CD 3, Tracks 1 and 2),



FIGURE 7.8

*Dhalang* (shadow puppeteer) Ki Bawor, performing an all-night *wayang kulit* near the town of Purwokerto, western Central Java, July 18, 2006.



which exemplifies the “somewhat excited” category. Depending on the mood the puppeteer wishes to establish, the piece can be played in loud-playing or in soft-playing style, or switched at any point. (The calmest of the three is usually in soft-playing style; and the most excited is always performed in loud-playing style.) Also, the length of the piece can be radically tailored to suit the needs of the dramatic moment. Sometimes it may go on, through repetition of a central section, for five or ten minutes. During the course of the all-night performance at which I recorded these examples, the puppeteer (Ki Suparman) signaled this piece to be played eighteen times—all, of course, within the *pathet nem* section of the night, which lasted from about 9:00 P.M. to about 1:30 A.M.

Transcription 7.17 gives *balungan* notation for the entire piece, as well as the *gong ageng* or *siyem* sound at the end of each line, as written. The *kenong* plays on every *balungan* beat, the *kempul* every second beat (except where the gong sounds), and the *kethuk* between the beats.

Introductory portion:	(signal....) 5	Length of Gongan
	6 5 6 5 6 5 2 3 5 6	10 beats
	1 6 5 6 2 3 5 3 2 1 2 1	12 beats
	2 1 2 1 6 5 3 5 2 3 5 6	12 beats
	1 6 5 6 5 3 2 3 1 2 3 2**	12 beats
<b>Repeated portion:</b>		
[:	5 6 5 3 5 6 5 3 6 5 2 6 5 2 3 5*	16 beats
	3 2 3 2 6 5 2 3	8 beats
5 3 5 3	5 2 3 5 1 6 5 3 2 1 3 2	16 beats
	6 6 1 2 3 5 6 5	8 beats
	2 1 2 1 2 1 3 2 5 6 1 6	12 beats
	3 2 5 3 6 5 3 2 :]	8 beats
<b>Endings:</b>		
* from gong tone 5 (first rendition):	2 1 3 2 1 6	
** from gong tone 2 (second rendition):	5 3 2 1 2 6	
-----		
<b>Punctuation Pattern for <u>playon/srepegan</u> form:</b>		
kempul & gong:	P (repeat x ?) G	e.g.: P P P P G
kenong & kethuk:	tNtN (repeat x ?) tNtN	tNtNtNtNtNtNtNtNtN
balungan:	. . (etc.) . .	6 5 6 5 6 5 2 3 5 6

TRANSCRIPTION 7.17  
Balungan notation for  
Playon “Lasem,” *sléndro*  
*pathet nem*.

Notice that here the frequency of “coincidence” between gong punctuators is very high: every second beat! To Javanese, this makes for exciting music, appropriate for scenes charged with emotion, even for fights. Quick rapping on the puppet chest signals the musicians to play. The drummer, playing the middle-sized drum (*ciblon*), and sometimes the *kenong* player as well, enter just before the rest of the ensemble.

The first rendition we will hear takes a little over a minute, only beginning to repeat when the puppeteer signals the playing of a special ending phrase. All the musicians must know one or two of these ending phrases for each gong tone and be ready to tag the appropriate one onto any *gongan* if the signal comes. This first rendition begins in soft-playing style but speeds and gets loud by the end of the first *gongan*, then proceeds through the entire melody, begins to repeat the main section, and ends, on signal, after the first *gongan*. (See the Close Listening guide.)



## Close Listening

### PLAYON “LASEM,” RENDITION 1

CD 3:1

TIME	COMMENTARY	PHRASE IN MAIN MELODY
<b>Introduction</b>		
0:00	Puppeteer knocks on puppet chest to signal musicians to play.	
0:03	Full <i>gamelan</i> ensemble begins to play in soft-playing style, including female singer ( <i>pesindhèn</i> ).	Phrase A, 10 beats of the main melody.
0:11	Puppeteer clangs loudly on metal plaques. <i>Gamelan</i> speeds up and switches to loud-playing style. Female singer and soft instruments drop out.	Phrase B, 12 beats.
0:18	Brief shouts by the puppeteer as rival characters engage in fight.	Phrase C, 12 beats.
0:24	Continued clanging on metal plaques accompanies the fight.	Phrase D, 12 beats.
<b>Central section (repeatable)</b>		
0:31	Drumming and clanging on metal plaques accentuate fight action.	Phrase E, 16 beats of the main melody.
0:38	Lively accompaniment continues.	Phrase F, 8 beats.
0:41	More loud shouts by puppeteer.	Phrase G, 16 beats.
0:50	Lively action and accompaniment continue. Drumming is especially active here.	Phrase H, 8 beats.
0:53	Lively action and accompaniment continue	Phrase I, 12 beats.
1:00	Lively action and accompaniment continue.	Phrase J, 8 beats.

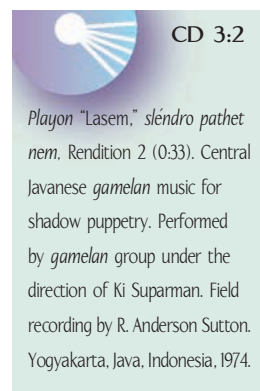
**Repeat**

1:04	Section repeat begins; lively action.	Phrase E, 16 beats of the main melody.
1:10	Puppeteer performs pattern of knocks that signal <i>gamelan</i> musicians to move to ending phrase (K).	Two beats before the end of Phrase E.

**Coda**

1:12	Puppeteer's signal knocks continue, confirming his intention to end the piece.	Phrase K, 6 beats of the main melody.
1:15	Performance of <i>Playon</i> "Lasem" ends; puppeteer continues knocking on puppet chest to set mood, and he begins to speak.	

In the second rendition (CD 3, Track 2; see the Close Listening guide), entirely in loud-playing style, the musicians never even reach the "main" section. To add variety to this rendition, played quite late during the *pathet nem* section (around 12:30 A.M.), the *saron* players play variant phrases for some of the passages notated earlier, although the *slenthem* player holds to the previous version.



## Close Listening

### PLAYON "LASEM," RENDITION 2

CD 3:2

COUNTER  
NUMBER

COMMENTARY

PHRASE OF MAIN MELODY

**Introduction**

0:01	Puppeteer knocks on wooden puppet chest and metal plaques to signal musicians to play.	
0:03	Full <i>gamelan</i> ensemble begins to play in loud-playing style.	Phrase A, 10 beats of main melody
0:08	<i>Gamelan</i> continues in loud-playing style, puppeteer continues rapid knocking on metal plaques.	Phrase B, 12 beats

0:14	(same)	Phrase C, 12 beats
0:20	(same)	Phrase D, 12 beats
0:25	Approaching the gong beat, the puppeteer performs short pattern of knocks that signal <i>gamelan</i> musicians to move to coda.	One beat before end of Phrase D
<b>Coda</b>		
0:26	Puppeteer's signal knocks continue, confirming intention to end the piece	Phrase K' (coda), 6 beats
0:29	Without any gradual slowing down, <i>gamelan</i> ends on final beat of coda.	

Even without such change, we can see that this one piece has the potential for a great variety of renditions, through changes in tempo, instrumentation, and ending points. This is the essence of shadow puppet music—a very well known piece, played over and over, but uniquely tailored each time to fit precisely with the dramatic intentions of the puppeteer and kept fresh by the inventiveness of the instrumentalists and singers who constantly add subtle variations.

## Bali

Just east of Java, separated from it by a narrow strait, lies the island of **Bali** (*bah-lee*). The unique culture and spectacular natural beauty of this island have fascinated scholars, artists, and tourists from around the world. In Bali almost everyone takes part in some artistic activity: music, dance, carving, painting. Although the Balinese demonstrate abilities that often strike the Westerner as spectacular, they maintain that such activities are a normal part of life. The exquisite masked dancer by night may well be a rice farmer by day, and the player of lightning-fast interlocking musical passages who accompanies him may manage a small eating stall.

Most of the several million people inhabiting this small island adhere not to Islam, Indonesia's majority religion, but to a blend of Hinduism and Buddhism resembling that which flourished in Java prior to the spread of Islam (fifteenth to sixteenth century C.E.). In this the Balinese and Javanese share elements of a common cultural heritage. As in Java, we find percussion ensembles known as *gamelan* (or *gambelan*), with metal slab instruments and knobbed gong instruments that look and sound quite similar to those of the Javanese *gamelan*. Some of the names are the same (*gendèr*, gong, *gambang*, *saron*, *suling*, *rebab*) or similar (*kempur*, *kemong*). Most ensembles employ some version of the *pélog* scale