

59. Gong Kebyar de Sebatu (Bali) Baris Melampahan (for Unit 6: Further Musical Understanding)

Background information and performance circumstances

Gamelan Music is deeply embedded in Indonesian (or Javanese) culture. Evidence of the existence of ensembles dates to the 8th Century BC but it is believed that the Gamelan may have been in use 500 years earlier. In Javanese mythology a god, **Sang Hyang Guru**, used a gong to summon other gods and, for more complex messages he added extra gongs, thereby inventing the Gamelan. There are now three main types of Gamelan music: Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese; it is **Balinese** Gamelan (from the Indonesian island of Bali) of which Baris Melampahan is an example. Although Gamelan music on Bali is now regularly performed for tourists it is vital to remember that the principal and original performing circumstances of the music were for **ritual** and **ceremonial** purposes. It is also worth noting that Gamelan belongs to the oral (or perhaps more appropriately 'aural') tradition of folk music – notation is a tool for analysing the music but the musicians themselves learn by ear and are taught by an instructor (called a **sekaha**).

The term '**Baris**' means a line or military formation and, in this context, refers to a traditional male war dance of which there are a great many types, with their differing titles usually referring to the weapons used in the dance: eg. Baris Bedil uses rifles and Baris Bajra uses clubs. **Baris Melampahan**, which developed in the early 20th Century, is an elaborate exception to the norm of Balinese Baris dances. It begins with a series of traditional war dances but then what follows is a dramatic play, usually culminating in a ritual fight. Of paramount importance is the relationship between dance and music; the music is totally sympathetic to the dramatically varying moods of the dancers. The Gamelan players will know the steps of the dances well and the music is designed to synchronise perfectly with every movement of the dancers. The **Gamelan Gong Kebyar** style of playing, of which our excerpt is an example, evolved in the early 20th Century. '**Kebyar**' can be translated as 'bursting open' and typical features of the style are **sudden contrasts** and **extremely rapid virtuosic figurations**; this was very different to the previous, gentler style of playing which had been prevalent. An additional example of the Gamelan Gong Kebyar style, which proves a useful comparison to our excerpt in order to better understand common features, can be found at: -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldPMifPbngc>

Performing forces and their handling

The word '**Gamelan**' derives from the Javanese word 'gamels', meaning to strike.

It is a truism that no two Gamelan ensembles are the same, but most (Anthology No. 59 included) comprise metallophones, gongs and drums. Our excerpt also includes cymbals and bamboo flutes.

The term Gamelan refers to the set of instruments not the players.

These instruments belong as a group and are not interchangeable with instruments from another Gamelan.

The Instruments Of The Gamelan

Here is an explanation of the instruments found in Baris Melampahan.

(reading the score from top to bottom):-

Kempli	a single gong mounted horizontally on a frame struck with mallets wound with string and dampened simultaneously with the left hand. It divides the cycle into regular beats and helps co-ordinate the ensemble.
Kemong	a small hanging gong struck with a soft mallet.
Kempur	a medium sized gong struck with a large padded mallet.
Gong (Ageng)	the largest and most important gong in the ensemble struck with a heavily padded mallet.
Jegogan	a pair of large one-octave metallophones (traditionally thought of as male and female) played with large, cloth-coated, rubber-padded mallets.
Calung	similar to the Jegogan but pitched one octave higher.
Suling	a bamboo flute played utilising circular breathing .
Ugal	a bronze metallophone played with a small hammer.
Gangsa	groups of (male and female) metallophones named according to their pitch: pengumbang (lower pitched) pengisep (higher pitched).
Reyong	a row of twelve small horizontal gongs. The players are split into two groups with both players in the same group playing the same part, but doubled an octave apart.

Kendhang	a pair of two-headed hand drums; the higher pitched (male) drum is called the lanang and the lower pitched (female) drum is the wadon . The drumstrokes used in this excerpt are: - dug (lanang) or dag (wadon): the four fingers of the right hand hit the skin between rim and centre. Tek : a lanang variant where the left head is muted. Pak (lanang) or ka (wadon): a left hand palm 'slap' stroke whilst dampening the right hand head.
Ceng-Ceng	unique to Bali, horizontally mounted pairs of cymbals with varied diameters and thickness, creating differing pitches.

Tonality & Timbre

Baris Melampahan is based on the **pelog** scale.



In keeping with traditional practice a **pentatonic subset** is selected – notes 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6 of the above scale. (N.B. in the Anthology recording the pitches sound approximately a semitone lower than the printed notes above).

This particular subset is called **pelog selisir**. It is one of three pelog **modes** used in Balinese gamelan music. You can listen to a pelog selisir audio file at: -

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Pelog.ogg>

Every gamelan has unique **tuning** which has a fundamental effect on the feeling of tonality of each individual ensemble.

Intervals between notes of the pelog scale differ from gamelan to gamelan and may seem 'out of tune' to our ears.

This concept of variance within accepted bounds is called **wide tuning**.

In addition, pairs of instruments are tuned slightly differently to create **interference beats** (ombak) which, allied to the natural bright tone of metallophones and gongs, give gamelan music its shimmering **timbre**.

Melody

Gamelan music has a basic **core** or **nuclear** melody.

This is repeated, with some variation, throughout and is based on the **pelog selisir**.

On Bali this nuclear melody is called the **pokok**.

Traditionally, as exemplified by Baris Melampahan, this melody is played by the **Ugal**.

This melody is embellished by the addition of other instruments on particular beats of the cycle, eg. in Baris Melampahan, **Jegogang** and **Calung**.

The Ugal melody initially has a **range** of **minor sixth** (low G sharp to E).

Use of upper notes 5 & 6 of the pelog selisir at H on page 527 extend the overall **range** to a **minor ninth**.

In the excerpt the Ugal melody, found in its original form at U on page 523, does alter at times. For example, at A on page 523 pitches are omitted, and at A+ on page 527 notes are altered.

Whilst the Jegogang is unaltered throughout it is worth noting that the Calung alters in accordance with the above described change of Ugal line at H on page 527.

Rhythm and metre

Rhythm is perhaps the fundamental basis of Gamelan music.

Each Gamelan ensemble takes enormous pride in rhythmic skill and precision.

Apart from the opening and closing moments of our excerpt there is a **strict pulse** present.

Gamelan music is based on a **colotomic** structure, a hierarchy of rhythms which dictates the functions of the various musical layers in the piece. Each instrument has a particular function within this structure.

The concept, alien to our Western ears, of an **end accent** is essential for an understanding of the rhythmic structure. Instead of the first beat of a rhythmic unit being most important, in Gamelan Music it is the final beat which has greatest importance. This makes the music **anticipatory** with the stressed beat towards which the music is always heading known as

the **seleh**.

Our extract is based on an **eight note rhythmic cycle**, the eighth of which is the most important and heavily stressed, followed by the fourth, then the second and sixth.

A complete rhythmic cycle is called a **gongan**.

A **keteg** is a four beat pattern within each gongan.

The **Gong (Agong)** defines the cycle by playing on every final beat of every Gonggan (the circle on beat eight of the Jegogan line in the score represents the Gong (Agong)).

The **Jegogang** also divides the cycle at its midpoint (beat four).

A further subdivision occurs in the **Calung** part.

The **Kempli** is known as the 'timekeeper' in Balinese Gamelan music. Here, it defines each of the eight notes of the cycle, aligning with the notes of the pokok melody on the ugal.

Kotekan is the technique of interlocking rhythms in which players playing very different parts synchronise to produce what seems to be a single line. Traditionally, as is exemplified here, it subdivides each Kempli beat into four parts. Normally the Gangsa players would utilise kotekan technique but instead, and unusually, Sangsih and Polos are playing together and subdividing the (Kempli) beat into two parts. Only the **Reyong** is played in the kotekan style. It is joined at this rapid rhythmic pace by **Kendhang** and **Ceng-ceng**.

Each of the two Reyong lines (or four lines at H and AH, where upper octave notes are also employed) is **syncopated** but the overall effect is of an even, relatively undisturbed rhythmic line.

The Kendhang has varying rhythmic styles in our excerpt. In the B sections the rhythm is constant and rapid (relating to Reyong and Ceng-ceng activity) but it has a more fragmentary style elsewhere, particularly in the K sections where its role is dominant. Finally worthy of note is the function of the Kendhang in the final BS section of our excerpt where it clearly dictates the tempo change to the other players.

Texture

As the rhythmic analysis demonstrates, the texture of Gamelan Music is built up of **multiple layers** of musical activity.

In accordance with the Gamelan Gong Kebyar style, texture varies dramatically from section to section. In our excerpt the sparsest texture is the **single musical line** of the Kendhang in the introductory bar (N.B., 'monophonic' is best avoided as a term for this since there is no melodic basis) whereas each **angsel** section utilises every instrument in the ensemble (**tutti**) in suitably dramatic fashion.

Generally, the higher pitched the instrument, the busier the part it plays; eg. the Gong Ageng is lowest and least active whereas the high-pitched Reyong gongs play extremely complex patterns.

Ostinato is an important textural feature. Baris Melampahan does feature variation of the pokok from section to section, but clear unequivocal examples of ostinato can be found each time B arrives with its multiple repetitions of an unaltered version of the pokok.

Heterophony is a word often associated with Gamelan texture. In our extract the interaction between the melodic strands of Ugal and Calung could constitute heterophony, particularly where the relationship between the lines of the two instruments is closest, eg. each occurrence of B.

Harmony

Harmony is not an important feature of Gamelan music.

Any harmony is a product of the combination of the nuclear melody and the accompanying metallophones (Gangsa & Reyong).

This harmony is **pentatonic** due to being based on the combination of pelog selisir pitches.

Harmony (or sometimes the lack of it) can help define the structure. For example, on the fourth (Kempli) beat of each bar in the written score all tuned metallophones play note 2 of the scale (as well as being an important moment in each rhythmic cycle this is also a very useful aural 'marker' to aid listening to the recording whilst following the score). The rest of the cycle generally consists of two or more pitches and sometimes as many as four, eg. the sixth (Kempli) beat of B.

Structure

After an **introduction** played on the Kendhang what follows is a **cyclic** structure with numerous **repetitions** of similar material. Within these repetitions variety is present because of altered **instrumentation, dynamic** or **melodic content**. It is the demands of the Baris dance which generate these variations, for example, the **angsel** section which appears at six different points in the excerpt is a reaction to particularly violent movements made by the dancer. Finally, at the end of our excerpt, there is a reduction in **tempo** leading into the next section of the piece.

The **linear** structure of Baris Melampahan is also defined by **melody**. The **pelog selisir** is a basic element unifying the whole piece and variants of it are ever present.

Finally there is a **vertical** structure which is an essential element of Gamelan Music. Each instrument plays a defined role in this structural hierarchy as follows.

Leadership – signalling tempo changes.

Kendhang

Melody (Balungan) – defining and reinforcing the pokok.

Ugal, Suling, Calung & Jegogang

Punctuation – emphasising the rhythm and metre.

Gong (Agong), Kempuli, Kemong/Kempur & Ceng-ceng

Embellishment – creating high melodic decorations

Gangsa & Reyong