

# Notes on the Balinese Gamelan Musik

by I G.B.N. Pandji

In Bali the many kinds of music instruments are grouped into various gamelan ensembles, each having diverse characteristics and specific uses. In studying the ensembles and instrumentation to be found today in Bali, we discover that while many have been inherited over many generations, some of them are quite recent creations.

A detailed description would take far too long and so I give here a brief outline, which covers:

- a. The tonality and uses of the ensembles,
- b. The instrumental types, their names and uses,
- c. The meter and melody,

and some details about the antiquity and simplicity of the instruments.

## **Gambelan Pelegandjur**

This ensemble consists of the kendang, bonang, bende, kempul, tjeng-tjeng and gong/tjegir. The bonang carries the melodic line. This simple ensemble is used at temples when making “melis” (“mekiis”)—meaning “memapag tirta” (to fetch holy water)—or when calling on the spirits of the dead relatives and so on. It is sometimes used when receiving very honoured visitors. It is very likely that this gamelan is the one known as the “Tjorobalen” in the Solo-Jogjakarta area of Central Java.

## **Gambang and Saron Gambelan**

This consists of two instruments only, the Saron which has 7 tones (septatonic) and is made of bronze, and the Gambang which is made of sections of bamboo. The Saron is the melodic instrument and the gambang accompanies it. This gamelan is used only at the cremation ceremonies to guide the spirits to their resting place. It is never performed as a music piece.

## **Gambelan Semar-pegulingan**

This gambelan has also seven tones (sometimes it may be of 5 tones). It has now reached a near perfect grouping, forming an ensemble as complete as the present-day Gong Kebyar, although it is clearly more ancient with its seven tone system. The ensemble consists of 14 (or 16 Keys) of Terompongs as the melody instruments, the gangsa metallophones, (2 gijing, 2 pemade, 2 kantil, 2 djublag, 2 djegog), getjek/ cymbals, kadjar, klonang, gumanak, gupek, gentorag, kempul, gong and tjuring (gangsa pandjang).

It is used for the “Dewayadnya” ceremony which takes place in temples, and is also performed elsewhere as a instrumental piece.

## **Gambelan Pegambuhan**

This ensemble consists of the gupek (drum), ritjik (small tjeng-tjeng), gumanak, a three-fold gangsa kangsi, gentorag = movable gentas, kadjar, klenang, suling, rebab and kempul.

The suling and the rebab carry the melodic line. While the Pelegandjur, the Gambelan Gambang, and the Semar-pegulingan described above may all be performed as instrumental pieces, the Pegambuhan is used only to accompany the Gambuh dance which according to historic record was already known as far back as the Dahanu-Kahuripan period of the 12th–13th Century A.D.

## **Gambelan Gender**

This gender is in the Slendro and Pelog tonalities. The Slendro type, which is used for Wayang Kulit performances, consists of 4 genders or two pairs of genders one of which sounds an octave below the other pair. (I use the term “octave” reservedly, as it is rather misplaced in a pentatonic system. In Bali this is called one “pengangkep”.)

This gender ensemble may be used as an instrumental piece to celebrate such ceremonies as the “Manusa-Yadnya” or teeth-filing, the 3-month birthday of newborn babies, and for the pitra-yadnya (cremation) and also ceremonies in the temples. In accompanying the Wayang (Shadow Plays) of the “Mahabharata,” a group of 4 genders is usually sufficient, but for the accompaniment of the “Ramayana” epic, or the live “Wayang Wong” performances, the number is increased by the addition of the instruments named: gupek, ritjik, kadjar, klenang, gentorag and kempul.

## **Gambelan Gender Telulas**

The above refers to those genders which use the slendro tonality. We now pass to those of the pelog tonality. The name “Telulas” refers to the number of Keys, which is thirteen.

This ensemble is similar to the Gong-kebyar or the Semar-pegulingan, except that it does not include the trompongs, for the gender telulas themselves carry the melodic line. This gambelan is used specially for the accompaniment of the “Legong Kraton” dance and the “Tjalonarang.” There is a further differentiation between the name gangsa and gender. The Gangsa is struck by one hand while the other hand acts as a damper; the Gender is played by both hands, the left taking the melody and the right adding a decorative arrangement (descant), while the heels of the hands act as dampers.

### **Gambelan Geguntangan**

This ensemble is called geguntangan because two of the instruments are known as guntang. These are of sections of bamboo which are voiced with small slots. The two guntangs are struck so counter to that their tones alternate with the sound of the klenang, being led by the rhythm of the gupek and richik in accompanying the soft melodies of the seruling (flute), and a bass instrument acting as a kempul which consists of two pieces of iron above as the guchi or tong.

This gamelan is one of the most popular in Bali, in spite of its simplicity, due to its being used also for accompanying the “Ardja” dance, which is a synthesis of a dance, the gending/tandak (the chanting) and the dialogue of some scenes of the plays based on the Dahanu-Kahuripan-Pandji cycles. This dance is so beloved by the Balinese populace, for in it they are treated to varied emotional stimulants and impressions such as excitement, melancholy and farce.

### **Gambelan Angklung**

This differs from the Angklung of West Java, for in Bali it is an ensemble of the Slendro tonality, of only 4 tones (1 tone is omitted in the Wayang Genders). (In North Bali we still find 5 tone Slendro angklung.) As a substitute for the rejong which is placed in parallel, the keklentangan are used, which are a pair of bonangs fitted at the ends of a piece of wood. It is played or struck in the same way as the kendang. This gambelan ensemble is used on occasions of grief such as burials, to accompany a funeral procession. Although the angklung we describe here differs greatly in shape to that of the Sunda area of West Java, we can nevertheless see kinds of instruments in the Bali Museum which seem to prove that Bali preceded West Java in possessing the angklung. We still have such kinds of West Java angklung in Bali (Karangasem county) but in Slendro tonality. At one time this angklung ensemble was used for instrumental performances, but nowadays it is used also to accompany dances—a development which is viewed with some disapproval.

### **Gambelan Gandrung**

The instruments of this ensemble are arranged in the usual gong configurations, but the instruments themselves are made of bamboo, forming the rindik, tjingklik or tjungklik (a gangsa made of bamboo) of pelog tonality.

The name gandrung is taken from the dance it accompanies, a kind of social dance, in which the female role is played by a boy, who, dressed up as a girl, invites one of the lookers-on to join “her” in the dance. This dance has become outdated by the fashionable Djoged dance which satisfies public taste much better.

### **Gambelan Djoged**

The gandrung belongs to a past era (in Banjuangi/East Java it is still active), but not so the Djoged. The Djoged is a truly modern creation which came into being at the time of Indonesian fight for Independence. This

instrumental ensemble from the melodic instruments down to the accompanying tjeng-tjeng and gupek at first consisted entirely of bamboo instruments in slendro tonality.

Recent developments have replaced many of these with instruments from the Gong Kebyar ensemble. The dance itself is now a social-fraternising dance where the dancer, a comely girl, selects her partner from the audience by giving a sign with her fan.

### **Gambelan Djanger**

In this ensemble the instruments are not the usual gongs, but are rebanas, which is most unusual. Obviously we are not free of Indian and Arabian influences.

The ensemble consists of the instruments: gender, gupek, getjek, kenong, suling and kempul. The dance is so well known that it is surely unnecessary to say more. It is a dance for young men and ladies sitting opposite each other in pairs on the ground, singing and swaying together.

### **Gambelan Gong Gede**

“Gde” means big, and this ensemble is the largest gathering of forces, but omits the rebab and suling. It is of pelog tonality, and the size of the gangsa is similar to the Java gangsa, not suspended as the gender but hung from nails in the perpendicular position. The ensemble usually accompanies ceremonies at the temples, as a music ensemble only. Sometimes however it is also used to accompany the Baris Gde Dance, a war dance, complete with weapons such as spears, knives and arrows. The tempo is rather [s]low, but quite impressive and proud.

### **Gambelan Selunding**

This ensemble has 7 tones like the Gambang and consisting only of suspended gangsas, from bass to descant made of iron. There are only a few (6) instruments. The kendang is also absent. It is used for accompanying ceremonies, and is usually found in remote villages of Bali, such as Tenganan-Karangasem for the accompaniment of the “Mekare” War Dance and other ceremonial dances.

### **Gambelan Djegogan**

This ensemble is found only in the Djembrana area, and its instruments are similar to those of the Djoged Bumbung, although much bigger in size, using large bamboo sections. It is used to accompany the Djegogan Dance, a type of Javanese Rudat Dance, and it is in the slendro tonality.

### **Gambelan Gong Kebyar**

This ensemble is the most popular and thus the most easily heard in Bali. The total number of instruments is somewhat less than that of the Gong Gde, but clearly it is a development of the Gong Gde, and in practice is very flexible. It is used for many kinds of ceremonies, and may be used to accompany all forms of dancing. The word Kebyar is an onomatopoeic word descriptive of the “byar”

sound of striking all the instruments simultaneously. This makes a startling acoustic enunciation at the commencement of the performance. The rebab and suling are not omitted in this ensemble.

### Tektekan

The Tektekan is not an ensemble in its own right, but is a set of bamboo sections held in the hands of the players, being struck in many meters or rhythmic “metjandetan,” (interlocking) giving point to the chorus in the Kechak Dance.

This is a ritualistic role, the intention being to drive out disease that threatens the village or its surrounding areas. It is to be found only in the Tabanan (Kerambitan) area.

### Genggong (Jew's harp)

This is a quite primitive instrument, made from the bark of the palm tree, cut to the size of about 6 inches and 1 ¼ inches in width. A section is cut lengthwise as the vibrator, and one end is tied with thread. This instrument is sounded by plucking it between the teeth, and is used to produce only four slendro tones. It is a mere toy. Sometimes it may be accompanied by a suling or another genggong to give the sound of the bullfrog.

### Gambelan Luang

This ensemble is very close to the Selunding, which also has 7 tones, but the former is more enriched with other instruments such as: gupek, trompong, gong etc. Besides the bronze gangsas we find the wooden/bamboo saron. It is used instrumentally accompanying the ritual ceremonies as well as the temple-dances. Such ensembles are only a few in Bali.

### Tonality

In the pelog tonality we have several “patet” or modes known as the “tembung,” “selisir,” “sunaren,” “baro” and “lebeng.”

The slendro tonality is divided into the “asep menjan” and “pudak setegal” modes. As I have said above, the fact that in Bali the octaves contain 7 tones is proved in the Gambang and Semar-pegulingan ensembles.

Thus in pelog, with its five tones, two of the seven tones are in effect the minor tones (pemero). Similarly in the slendro tonality we have two types, Slendro 5 which is used for Gender Wayang, and Slendro 4 which is used by the Angklung.

Compared with the Western diatonic system this 7-toned scale approximates the following series:

*The Pelog 7: e f g a b c d (D D# F G A A# C)*

*The Pelog 5: e f g b c*

*The Pelog 4: f g b c*

*The Slendro 4: f g a# c*

*The Slendro 5: f g a# c d*

The gambelans of Bali do not use a conductor. Wherever the kendang (or gupek) is a member of an ensemble, this acts as the orchestral leader. Such leaders are sometimes found at the gangsa giing [gijing] or at the Trompong during classical instrumental music.

### About the Tabuh

While the Tabuh often describes the musical effect, such as “Early Morn” or “Sunrise,” “Fajar Timur” or “Fajar Menjingsing,” (Galang-Kangin) it also takes names according to the number of beats (palet) in one tabuh, e.g. tabuh pisan (one), tabuh dua (2), tabuh telu [3], tabuh empat [4] etc. 1 palet = 16 pokok tones.

The beats are always even in any one measure, such as 2/4, 4/4, 8 or 16, but never 3, 6 or 7 to a measure.

These even numbers of beats are used in arranging the rhythmic disposition of the tones of each instrument. For example, in a melody having 8 beats to the measure, the petuk and the gangsa giing ?? will sound at every beat.

The Djublag will sound at beat	2 4 6 and 8.
The Kempul	2 and 6.
The Kenong in the middle section	4.
The Djegog	4 and 8.
The Gong	8.

This gives some idea of the metric disposition of the gamelan instruments.

Of course we must not omit to mention the dynamic range (pianissimo to fortissimo) and the tempi (Largo to Presto) which are characteristic of Balinese Gambelan Music. These two elements, together with a rich fund of various rhythmic patterns, enliven and inspire the modest idiom which is composed usually of a mere 5 tones.

I trust that these short notes offered as an approach to the music of Indonesia, which has been inspired by our Indonesian Mother-land, will be of interest to all who love music and particularly gambelan music. ▀

---

*Ruby Ornstein is an ethnomusicologist who specializes in Balinese gamelan music. She studied with Mantle Hood, Colin McPhee, and Charles Seeger at the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, where she received her PhD. In Bali she studied principally with the celebrated musician Madé Lebah and was a performing member of Gunung Sari, the world famous kebyar orchestra of Peliatan. Her CD, Gamelan Music of Bali (Lyricord #7179), received the “First Annual High Honors Award” from the Jakarta Arts Council, and the Sendi Budaya Foundation. Her most recent publication, “Wayan Gandera Redux,” in the Journal of the Society for Asian Music, discusses this famous and controversial 20th century Balinese kebyar musician. Her CD of Balinese gamelan angklung music is forthcoming from Smithsonian Folkways. Ruby Ornstein has taught at Brown and Yale Universities and is a member of the Music faculty of the College of Staten Island, CUNY.*

UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM  
 Ethnomusicology Centre 'Jaap Kunst'  
 Kloveniersburgwal 103  
 AMSTERDAM/Netherlands.

(1)  
*Heins: Ind. etnomus. 3<sup>e</sup> je 73*  
 Documentation sheet:  
 1973. BALI (Indonesia)

BALI: TYPES & USES OF MUSICAL ENSEMBLES.-

compiled by  
 IG. B. N. PANDJI  
 Director Konservatori Karawitan, Den Pasar.

NAME & TONALITY	COMPOSED OF INSTRUMENTS	USED AT
1. GONG GEDÉ Pèlog 5 tones <i>pentat</i>	2 gong, 1 kempul, 1 bendé, 1 kemong, 2 réong, 2 trompong, 1 kempyang, 4 jégog, 4 jublag, 4 kenyer/calung, 4 gangsa jongkok pemade, 4 gangsa jongkok kantil, 6 pairs of cymbals, 2 large drums.	Temples, palace: festivities, dance ('Baris'), festive procession (= Déwayadnya).
2. GONG KEBYAR* Pèlog 5 tones <i>pentat</i>	2 gong, kempul, kemong, petuk, réong trompong, 2 jégog, 2 jublag, 2 kenyer, 4 gangsa pemade, 4 gangsa kantil, 2 gangsa pengugal, 2 pairs of cymbals, 2 drums, 2 flutes (1 rebab)	Temple, palace, theatre, public open-air entertainment. Various occasions, mainly for 'show' and dance accompanim.
3. ANGKLUNG Slendro <i>tetra</i> 4 tones (South) <i>pentat</i> 5 tones (North)	Kempul, kemong, petuk, réong (4 pair of kekientangan), 2 small cymbals, 2 jégog, 4 pemade, 4 kantil, 2 small drums, 1-2 flutes (1 set angklung)	Temples: festivities connected w. cremation, funeral, mourning. (= Pitrayadnya)
4. GAMBANG Swara-7 <i>hepta</i>	4 xylophones/gambang, 2 <sup>4</sup> gangsa jongkok (kantil & pamade)	Open-air: generally only for cremation ceremony (in Karangasem also: temple)
5. SALUNDING Swara-7 <i>hepta</i>	Metallophones of flat iron slabs: 2 big slabs: gong & inting, 2 medium-sized: penem & petudah, 4 small slabs: nyong-nyong.	Temple: festivities in the original Balinese villages.
6. LUANG/SARON Swara-7 <i>hepta</i>	2 réong (8 kettles each), gangsa kantil, gangsa pemade, 2 jégog, 1 small cymbal, gong, drum, bamboo saron.	Temple: various ceremonies.
7. SEMAR PAGULINGAN* Swara-7 & Pèlog 5 tones. <i>pentat</i>	gong/kempul, kemong, petuk, 2-4 jégog, 2-4 jublag, 2-4 celuring, 2-4 gender rambat, 4 gangsa pemade, 4 gangsa kantil, 4 gangsa jongkok, 1 trompong, cymbals, 2 small drums, 1 rebab, 2 suling, gentorag, kempyang	Palace, temple. Especially royal marriage festivities. Accomp. of légong & barong dances.
8. GAMBUH Swara-7 <i>hepta</i>	4 large flutes, 2 small drums, rebab, kempul, kajar/petuk, ricik, kenyer, gemanak, klenang, + vocal.	Temple, palace. Accomp. of ceremonial 'gambuh' dance drama.
9. ARJA Slendro & Pèlog <i>pentat</i>	Vocal (actors) + accomp. of 1-2 small flutes, 2-3 guntang/bamboo zither, klenang, ricik, (rebab), gong guci, 2 small drums.	Theatre, open air. General festivities. Accomp. of 'arja' dance drama.

-continued-

(2)

NAME & TONALITY	COMPOSED OF INSTRUMENTS	USED AT
10. GENDER WAYANG* Slendro <i>pentatonic</i>	Quartet of 2 large & 2 small gender (+ dalang-puppeteer).	House; theatre; temple. Accomp. of wayang kulit shadowplay and at (cremation) ceremonies. Also Ramayana/Wayang wong.
11. GANDRUNG Pèlog 5 <i>pentatonic</i>	4 wooden xylophones /cungklik, 2 jègogan, ricik, kajar, gong guci (barrel gong).	Accomp. of flirtation-dance 'gandrung'. Open air: village.
12. GRANTANG JOGED* (=Jogèd bumbung) Slendro <i>pentatonic</i>	6 bamboo xylophones/grantang (tube-shape), ricik, 2 small drums, klenang, gong guci, 1-2 suling.	Open air: village. Accomp. of jogèd dance.
13. GÈNGGONG* Slendro 4 <i>tetrahedral</i>	8 or more mouth harps, suling, tawa-tawa, rebana, ricik, 1-2 drums & vocal.	Social entertainment; theatre.
14. JANGGÈR Slendro & Pèlog 5 <i>pentatonic</i>	2 gender slendro, suling, tawa-tawa, rebana, ricik, 1-2 drums & vocal.	Temple; theatre. Accompan. of 'janggèr'-dance.
15. GONG SULING* Slendro & Pèlog <i>pentatonic</i>	Various types of flutes(suling), 2 drums, petuk, ricik, gong guci, kemong.	House. Social entertainment.
16. PALEGANJUR/ BEBONANGAN Pèlog 4 <i>tetrahedral</i>	8 bonang, 2 bonang for monggang, petuk, kempul, gong, 6 pairs of large cymbals, 2 large drums.	Temple. Ceremonies & processions.
17. TEKTEKAN ?	Bamboo tubes struck together.	Open air: village. Chasing away evil.
18. CARUK <i>sl. pentatonic</i>	1 xylophone, 1 saron.	Temple: ceremony.
19. TROMPONG MISI BERUK	Wooden xylophones with gourd resonators.	Open air: temples. Festivities connected with cremation, funeral.
20. JÈGOGAN <i>tetrahedral</i> Slendro <i>"don't know"</i>	4 large bamboo xylophones.	Open air village entertainment. Accompan. of 'jègogan'-dance.
21. KENDANG MEBARUNG	1 pair of large drums on a stand, stick-beaten.	Open air: house. Ceremony (W.-Bali)
22. SANGHYANG	Small mixed vocal choir	Temple: ritual trance dance.
23. (KECAK* Sl./Pèl. <i>pentatonic</i> )	Large male vocal choir ('gamelan mouth music') & actors.	Theatre. Accomp. of Ramayana dance-drama.

NB. Various small 'background-ensembles', composed of nuclei of above-mentioned larger groups, and modeled after palace customs, are:  
 13a) small angklung = nr. 3 without klenangan and reduced number of instrs.  
 (10a) gender duo;  
 (12a) grantang: 2 bumbung, 1 suling, 1 kendang, 1 kempul, rest as nr. 12;

\* items marked with \* are also used (in slightly modified form) for organized tourist consumption.