

# The Petaluma Gamelan Project

"from the cross-cultural to the creative"

by Jody Diamond and Joan Bell Cowan

©1987 jody diamond and joan bell cowan

This report describes The Gamelan Project, one part of a year-long program sponsored by World Music in the Schools (directed by Tom Sipes), with assistance from Mickey Hart and the Rex Foundation. The object of the program was to bring world music into the entire Petaluma School District, in a unique series of programs stressing direct interaction with instruments and artists, creative as well as cross-cultural music making, and an integrated curriculum to show art and culture in relation to other subjects.

In addition to the unit on gamelan and Indonesian music, there were programs focused on the performing arts and culture of India, Native America, and parts of Africa. While much of the program was designed by the artists involved, all were committed to direct participation by the children and the encouragement of a creativity that crossed the boundaries of culture.

## Contents

PROJECT OVERVIEW .....	2
ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES .....	2
CONCERTS: the community celebrates gamelan! .....	3
EVALUATION: recommendations for future programs .....	4
CHILDREN'S REPORT .....	5

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 1987, four schools in the Petaluma school system and one school in Piedmont (near Oakland) participated in gamelan programs sponsored by World Music in Schools Foundation. This report describes the activities that took place at each school, gives an overview of accomplishments, and makes recommendations for future projects.

The project had, in most cases, five stages. Each was important in realizing the goals of the gamelan program.

- I. **Initial planning** - meeting with principal, teachers, and other staff such as classroom aides, parents, etc.
- II. **Teacher training** - giving teachers skills to lead gamelan sessions, and making plans for integrating the program into their curriculum.
- III. **Classroom instruction** - hands-on instruction for the children with trained artists and guests, including use of related artifacts, and instructions for individualized use of the instruments.
- IV. **Performance** - culmination of the program, showing the art at its highest level, including presentations by Indonesian and Indonesian-trained artists.
- V. **Evaluation** - meeting with children and teachers to assess effect of program and receive feedback for future projects.

The participating schools were:

### **Marin Montessori School**

grades 1-3, 30 students, two weeks, twice a week for 1 hour, 30 in 1 hour session (1 class)

### **Grant School**

grades 3-4, 60 students, twice a week for 2 hours, 30 in 1 hour classes (two classes)

### **Cherry Valley**

grades 5-6, 60 students, two weeks, twice a week for 2 hours, 15 in half hour classes (4 classes)

### **Haven School (in Piedmont)**

grade 2, 30 students, two weeks, twice a week for 1 hour, 30 in 1 hour class (1 class)

### **Mc Near School**

grades 4-5, 60 students, three weeks, twice a week for 2 1/2 hours, 30 in 40 minute classes (3 classes), including one introductory class of 30-40 minutes for each class in the school K-6.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Teachers were provided with a resource book containing information on the arts in Indonesian culture, recipes and directions for classroom projects in the arts, Indonesian folktales, and an introduction to the gamelan. Teachers were responsible for planning classroom activities to supplement the music instruction provided by Joan Bell Cowan. There were projects in most of the classrooms that developed both the cultural and musical components of the program.

*Cultural:* children studied the customs and language of the Indonesian people, cooked food from Indonesia, studied textile arts, made puppets, read Indonesian legends and folk tales. Indonesian artifacts, like masks, cloth, instruments and puppets, were examined by each class. Each class had video tapes of performances by Indonesian artists, and audio tapes of several kinds of Indonesian music.

*Musical:* Children explored the basic musical elements of beat, rhythm, dynamics, melody and phrase, as well as the functions of the various instruments in the gamelan and the Javanese names of the gamelan instruments. Traditional Indonesian pieces were taught, and also used as a basis for improvisation and composition. Many children created their own pieces. The cultural context and meaning of the music was discussed during playing sessions. They also learned cooperative playing, how to hear and follow the drums, and to listen to all the instruments in relation to each other.

Some specific activities at the schools:

**Marin Montessori School** — Cooked Indonesian food, created and performed an original rhyme with music, made costumes, learned melodies and parts for "I Can Dance" and the Javanese "Ricik-ricik."

**Grant School** — Made batik shirts and cooked Indonesian food, improvised and created new melodies for "Pease Porridge Hot" and "Jean Jean," learned and performed "I Can Dance," created and performed an original piece.

**Cherry Valley** — Created and performed a play with music and shadow play on the legend of the Javanese alphabet, made costumes, made shadow puppets and large props, learned the Javanese "Sampak," improvised to "Jean Jean" and "Old Dan Tucker."

**Haven School** (in Piedmont) — Studied a complete unit on Indonesia, including geography, social studies and the arts. Made shadow puppets, created original rhymes and pieces, learned the Javanese "Ricik-ricik," improvised to "Jean Jean" and "Old Dan Tucker" and original pieces. The class put on a concert for the rest of the school.

**Mc Near School** — Improvised and created parts for "Old Dan Tucker," learned and performed the Javanese "Walang Kekek" and "Ting-ting Mo" (Bima's victory dance) and "I Can Dance."

## **CONCERTS: the community celebrates gamelan!**

Each gamelan program culminated in a concert. The purpose of this was to show gamelan at its more advanced level of development, so the children could see that what they had learned was part of an artistic continuum. Indonesian artists participated in all the concerts. The concerts also gave the children themselves a chance to perform.

- The spring program held its concert at the Cinnabar Theatre in Petaluma. At an afternoon concert, each of the three schools presented at least one piece, with the Cherry Valley classes participating in a extensive production of "The Legend of the Javanese Alphabet." The Balinese Gamelan Sekar Jaya performed, with two Indonesian guest artists, who danced and played. An evening concert, open to the community, featured Sekar Jaya, the Cherry Valley School's play, and the Petaluma Community Gamelan playing Javanese music.

- The concert for the Fall program was held at the Petaluma Veteran's auditorium. The afternoon concert featured Sundanese gamelan and dance, led by Undang Sumarna, as well as Indian music and dance from another WMSF program that had been running concurrently. Children from the Mc Near School presented two pieces with dance. The children did not participate in the evening concert, which was a performance of Sundanese music and dance and Indian music and dance.
- The Havens School in Piedmont held a school assembly. An Orff teacher associated with the school, Mary Ann Benson, rented the entire gamelan and took it "on tour" to the other schools with which she worked. At several of those schools there were performances as well.

## **EVALUATION: recommendations for future programs**

I. initial planning — the agreement between the participating school and WMSF should be worked out carefully. WMSF is providing funding, instruments, teachers, resource materials and a concert. The school is providing space, students, teachers, time and commitment to the program. This should include a commitment to integrate the gamelan program into other areas of the curriculum. Only if this happens will the goal of the program be realized.

Having the first workshop for the principals and district supervisors was an important element in the success of this program. We recommend this whenever possible.

Teachers participating in the gamelan program should be selected and notified well in advance of the beginning of the gamelan program. This will allow for optimal planning to integrate the gamelan program into the overall curriculum.

II. teacher training — The training session should be mandatory for any teacher wishing to participate in the program. It should be at least three hours in length. All teachers should receive ample notification of the training session. In some cases, it may be possible for teachers to receive in-service credit for the training workshop.

III. classroom instruction — Classroom sessions should be limited to no more children than the number of instruments, to allow for more individual attention and progress. Additional children may participate as dancers if there is another teacher to supervise and lead that activity. Classes should be 40 minutes each, twice a week. Classroom teachers, if possible, should participate in all sessions of the visiting teacher.

Classroom teachers should lead at least two additional gamelan sessions each week (that is why the teacher training is so important). Curricular activities on Indonesia should be planned for before, during and after the gamelan program. This is important in providing a multi-dimensional understanding of the arts in Indonesia and of the gamelan experience itself.

The instruments should be kept in a permanent space that is open to children, and available to be used by other teachers as well. Free access to the gamelan instruments is an important part of the gamelan program, as it encourages individual exploration.

If possible, Indonesian artists should participate in classroom instruction as well as the final concert, allowing the children a more intimate experience with the artist. If a native

artist is solely responsible for classroom instruction, the inclusion of creative activities should be discussed and planned.

IV. performance — Performances have been overall successful. Some children have been nervous at performing for very large audiences, but most have enjoyed the opportunity. If the performance is the first appearance of a native artist, plans should be made for some interaction between the children and the artist, such as a question-and-answer session or a large dance workshop.

V. evaluation - Teachers should commit to either an evaluation meeting or to filling out evaluation forms. Meetings with the children are also useful, and should be continued. A yearly program evaluation and planning session should take place with the school system and the WMSF staff.

## CHILDREN'S REPORT

Joan Bell Cowan conducted interviews with children at the three schools that participated in the gamelan project during the spring semester. She asked several questions at each school. Following are some of the children's memories and advice for future programs.

1. What did you like about playing gamelan and what did you feel while playing?

### **Marin Montessori (MM) , first through third grade**

It was fun. It made me really happy inside. It sounded like a puzzle all fitting together. We made really pretty music with it, like water. When I sang a gamelan song, I could hear the gamelan play inside me. Very loud, but very beautiful.

### **Grant School (GS), third and fourth grade**

It's a change from rock music. It can calm you down when you're in a temper. When you first play, it's easy. Everyone can play the instruments. Don't have to do school work. It had a pretty sound.

### **Cherry Valley (CV), fifth and sixth grade**

There wasn't a right way or wrong way to play it. All the instruments sounded good together; everything you hit came out as a good note. Real nice, because I could finally play an instrument with others. Made me feel peaceful; if I was in a bad mood, it helped me get out of it.

2. Do you have any suggestions if the gamelan came to your school again, or advise for anyone else who plans to play gamelan?

MM: I didn't like it when the gamelan was gone. If it was here we would be happier, play better and have more fun. I wish we could play more often, like everyday except Saturday and Sunday. It's good and you learn it fast, and after you do it you will feel good inside. If you're afraid at first, afterwards you won't be afraid anymore. Concentrate or else you'll be hitting it so hard that you will make a bad noise. You should go to Indonesia because they bring gifts and nice flowers to the gong.

GS: We need more instruments so everyone can play. Let other grades play the gamelan too. Everyone should take care of the instruments and have respect for them, treat the gamelan as if it were alive. Don't be afraid of playing; you'll love it.

CV: We need a rotating schedule for getting a chance to play all the instruments. We should have a real gamelan or a fake one. If our gamelan was more decorated, we'd be more respectful. You should play the gamelan only if you play it properly and with respect.

3. What did you think about the performance?

MM: The Chinese girls dancing - I liked the smoke and the way they danced. I liked the Cherry Valley play - I liked seeing my friend in it. I liked the dragon. The floor was vibrating from the loudness.

GS: The Balinese were neat, they were more colorful and loud. I liked how the Indonesians dance. Neat to see other people play and act out a play. I liked how the music was background of the play, and how Cherry Valley used the gamelan in a traditional way.

CV: I liked how the Balinese started with three instruments, then added the others and the drums. I liked the decorations. Balinese gamelan was a little overwhelming. I liked the sound of our [aluminum] gamelan better. They knew how to go so fast, but it was too much of the same thing. It got boring; no distinction. Ours is more peaceful and vibrates and stays longer. The Balinese sounded like just one person playing.

4. What did you learn about Indonesia?

MM: They play music at festivals and when something good happens. We learned about what they wear. We learned how they dance.

GS: The people are happy. It's too hot there; I don't ever want to go. Babies learn to play gamelan early. I became aware of how different they are. It was nice to see a different kind of dancing.

5. What memories will you have of this experience?

MM: I'll remember you and the music. The Cherry Valley kids, and Grant School, and the instruments. The shadow puppets. The gongs hanging from two sticks, and how the gongs vibrate the whole floor. The dancers. The sounds of the instruments.

GS: I'll remember the costumes. The fun playing the music: the music, the concert, the sounds, the loud noises. I'll remember when we first learned it. That I learned to play the drum while practicing for the concert. The chant we made up:

*"We're the Grant second grade, we love the gamelan.  
If we had just one wish, we'd play from dusk 'til dawn.  
The music of its instruments has really touched our hearts,  
but these memories will still remain when the gamelan departs."*