"It's Getting Gangsa Up In Here": Balinese Gamelan in the Western Academy

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“It’s Getting *Gangsa* Up in Here”: Balinese Gamelan in the Western Academy

Senior Project submitted to

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of Bard College

By

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Introduction: Institutionalizing Gamelan

Every fall semester, on the first night of rehearsal for the Bard College gamelan, Bill Ylitalo enacts a small ritual: he introduces the new crop of students to the instruments of the gamelan. Many of these students have never performed non-Western music before, let alone Balinese traditional music. Ylitalo is a man in his late fifties, who started his lifelong obsession with gamelan at the University of Wisconsin Madison in his 20’s, and moved out to New York to join the Woodstock gamelan ensemble, Gamelan Giri Mekar. With his jovial attitude and corny humor, (When I asked Ylitalo why he stuck with gamelan, he answered “It really resonates with me”), it’s no wonder why Ylitalo is a favorite among students in the group. He’s shown up to rehearsal in a Run-D.M.C. jacket, and encourages students to create experimental gamelan music.

His excitement over the gamelan pours into the room. “I like to call this music extreme acoustic,” he tells everyone in his semiannual opening spiel. It is an appeal to his audience as much as it is his own humor; Ylitalo is trying to capture the attention of young twenty-somethings, many of whom play in rock bands on campus. The “extreme acoustic” catchphrase makes Balinese gamelan seem exotic and dangerous. In truth, the musical tradition is age old in Bali, but has morphed through many different incarnations. In Bali today, there are many ways in which gamelan music is heard: spiritually, as in the temple; secularly, as in the Bali Arts Festival, and other showcases; and even commercially, through the commodified performance for tourists. In its incarnation in the West, gamelan is primarily secular and has made its home in the American university, at places like Bard College. Unlike the gamelan
rehearsals in Bali, there is not a set group of people that rehearse together for years. Due to the transitory nature of American education, each semester brings a new group of faces.

The rehearsal process will not be easy in the coming semester, and it takes a lot of work to learn a different sort of playing style, teaching style, and culture. Nyoman Suadin, the Balinese instructor at Bard, does not arrive until two weeks into the semester, and this leaves space for the students to orient themselves to the instruments, led by Ylitalo. The first rehearsal is spent slowly opening the students’ ears to the sound of the gamelan, and the individual instruments. Ylitalo loves to introduce the instruments and will spend ten minutes or more just letting the gong play. When he gets to the main instruments of the ensemble, the xylophone-like metallophones called the *gangsas*, Ylitalo turns to the group and grins from ear to ear, as if channeling D.M.C himself: “We’re getting totally *gangsta* up in here.”

Ylitalo’s tongue-in-cheek statement touches on the multiple influences that make up the complex home in which gamelan exists in America. Ylitalo is a Midwestern white American man in his fifties referencing 90’s black hip-hop. There is nothing quite so unequivocally American in its origins as the genre of hip-hop, and the specific era that Ylitalo is referencing was an era of hip-hop that was particularly racially and socially charged. The phrase in question, originally the equivalent of “we getting totally gangsta up in here,” uses traditional black slang, and is an amalgamation of numerous hip-hop tracks: Project Pat’s “We Can Get Gangsta,” Geto Boys, “When It Get’s Gangsta,” and Lupe Fiasco’s “Gangsta (Up In Here).” Ylitalo takes this then, and makes a pun, replacing “gangsta” with the Balinese instrument “*gangsa,*” and creates a hybrid joke intelligible only to those who are versed in American popular culture, 90’s hip-hop, and Balinese gamelan. The audience of students, all born in the late 80’s to late 90’s, understand
the American cultural and 90’s hip hop cues. Once Ylitalo supplies the necessary gamelan
information, naturally, the whole room laughs.

The multiple registers of meaning behind Ylitalo’s joke define the complexities of the
Indonesian musical practice known as gamelan--a melodic percussion ensemble, made primarily
out of metal or wood--as it has traveled away from Bali. Culturally, musically, religiously, the
tradition of Balinese gamelan cannot move across the world and remain fully intact musically,
culturally, and spiritually. In her article, “One Perspective on Gamelan in America,” Judith
Becker begins to examine how this musical practice is reborn in its new soil. She concludes her
article by writing: “But ultimately, if the gamelan is to ever be more than an exoticism in
American musical life, it will have to compromise its Javaneseness” (1983, 88). Although she
examines Javanese gamelan, the key concepts are similar. Balinese gamelan is a foreigner in
American musical history, and it changes and morphs to make way for something new. It
compromises inherent aspects about itself that are Balinese to adapt to something more
American. What Becker does not examine however are the broader features disseminated
through the practice of playing gamelan, including: religious communal space, Balinese
spirituality, Balinese pedagogy and performance style, and modern interpretations of gamelan.
This project examines the tensions that this cultural and musical dialogue creates when Balinese
gamelan is institutionalized in the American academy and seeks to better understand how
Balinese gamelan is performed in the United States, how universities change and adapt it, and
who exactly is creating and existing in these hybrid spaces.

One of the first questions that arises when talking about Balinese gamelan in America is:
how did it get here? But more concretely: how did an entire Balinese gamelan, en masse a
collection of instruments ranging from 15-20 in number, that can only be made by hand in Bali, end up in its first American home, the University of California at Los Angeles? The main force behind this was an ethnomusicologist named Mantle Hood. In the 1950’s, Hood created the first ethnomusicology program in the America, and it was formed under Hood’s notion of bi-musicality. Put simply, Hood believed that the best way for students to learn about another culture’s music was to play it. In his article, “The Challenge of Bi-Musicality,” Hood explains bi-musicality through the lens of Japanese court musicians: “They have undergone rigid training since childhood, not only in Gagaku dances and instrumental techniques, but also in the performance of Western music of the Classical period” (1960, 55). Shortly after this example, Hood remarks that Westerners have “usually limited their interest in non-Western music to passive observation, working with informants, and museum studies” (1960, 56). Hood asserts that American students of non-Western music must become bi-musical in this way, in the same way one becomes bilingual. Hood sees the Japanese court musicians as a model example of his bi-musical concept, and seeks to export and implement this in his academic home.

Hood builds a program to exemplify this idea, and uses his academic interest in gamelan, both Javanese and Balinese as the primary musical ensemble at UCLA. This is the entry point for the groups I will talk about in the project. The Hudson Valley Gamelan and Indonesian Dance of Illinois are both born out of Hood’s idea of bi-musicality, because they encourage young college students who have little to no background in Balinese culture to experience and learn by performance. That being said, there is a substantial shift in what Hood imagined and what exists today. The 1990’s birthed an explosion of gamelan ensembles across the country, but they are not grounded in the idea that the ensembles exist to create fluent gamelan players. These
programs may have cropped up as a result of Mantle Hood’s students entering into their careers in the field. Professor of Religion Richard Davis suggested that the popularity of Golden Tone Records, which produced albums of world music for Western consumption in the 60’s, may have also contributed to gamelan’s popularity. This may have been one of the early entry points to gamelan music for the generation of ethnomusicologists who then had the resources to form their own gamelans in the 1990’s.

Although many of today’s gamelans exist within ethnomusicology programs, they are supported by a strong community, that allows for a fluctuating group of players. The communities now are much more focused on awareness and cultural sharing than the fluency Hood imagined. This will be further explored throughout the project, but this is the sort of exchange that Becker misses in her article. The gamelan adapts for an American university setting, but its adaptation takes Americans and inserts them into a setting that is distinctly Balinese. Nonetheless, Mantle Hood’s bi-musical idea was the spark that brought gamelan to the United States. In Bali, however, the gamelan had been radically changing since the Dutch invasion in the early 1900’s.

A Brief History of the Gamelan in Bali

The main gamelan style that will be addressed in this project is the gamelan gong kebyar, but gong kebyar is a new style that has only existed for the last 100 years. Gamelan has existed in Bali since the advent of metalworking technology nearly a millenia ago. Hindu monarchies were the ruling power in Bali, and these courts were the main patrons of Balinese arts. This period boomed from the 13th century onwards due to the increasing control of Islam elsewhere
in Indonesia, which turned Bali into a Hindu stronghold. Gamelan was the prominent music of both the courts and the temples, and there are over twenty variations of gamelan music on the island of Bali alone, some more prominent than others. Michael Tenzer argues that the topographical layout of the island, extremely mountainous in some areas, accounts for some of the extreme musical diversity, due to isolation, as well as the individual stylistic tastes of the royalty commissioning the music (1998, 23).

The ensemble that exists at Bard, and that is often found across the United States, is *gong kebyar*. *Gong kebyar* was born out of Dutch colonialism at the turn of the 20th century. Music in Bali before the Dutch arrived was traditionally twofold: music in the temple, and music in the courts. This meant that gamelan was largely performed in a secular setting for those of a higher caste. Yet when the Dutch officially invaded in 1906, they removed and lessened the power of the monarchies, effectively taking the instruments from the kings and courts and placing them in the hands of the villages. Tenzer notes that “soon villages were transforming their *pelogongan* gamelans into *kebyars* as fast as they could melt down the delicate bronze keys and recast them for the heavier, larger instrument of the new gamelan” (1998, 23). In what reads as a massively symbolic act, Balinese villagers melted down the instruments of the courts into instruments of the people. This is the instrument that exists at Bard, and is one of the most popular in Bali and in the United States to this day.

*Gong kebyar* has a brighter and louder sound than music associated with the Western tradition, which contrasts heavily to sound of other Balinese gamelans, but even more so to Javanese and Sundanese instruments. Tenzer defines kebyar etymologically, “as ‘to burst open,’ like a flower in sudden bloom, or ‘to flare up,’ like a match. The word itself, heavily stressed on
the second syllable and with a pronounced roll on the ‘r,’ is a perfect onomatopoetic simulation of the ensemble’s signature sound: an explosive, throbbing unison attack” (1998, 77). Tenzer’s depiction of a flower is interesting, in that he does not want to describe the *gong kebyar* too violently without reminding readers of its beauty. Tenzer fails to mention the sheer amplitude of *gong kebyar*, as well as the complexity of it. This romanticism is seen throughout early depictions of Balinese art, and undermines the *gong kebyar’s* history as a revolutionary instrument in its populist incarnation. The concept is both accepted and rejected then by the American participants, who do often have a sentimental relationship with the instruments, yet also a deep respect. Nyoman Suadin takes a more modern definition of *gong kebyar*. He describes is as loud, and “inspired by the youth.” He describes the sound as “shimmering, playful, and fun, just like the youth.” This marks more of the actual sound of the kebyar versus Tenzer’s romantic description, and takes in account the modern history of *gong kebyar*. Ylitalo’s description of the sound as “extreme acoustic” is perhaps more than just a ploy, and a far more accurate description than expected.

The institutionalization of gamelan music in Bali happened shortly after Mantle Hood created the program at UCLA. When Indonesia gained independence from the Dutch in 1945, the arts were in disarray. The Dutch had left a strong imperial footprint on Indonesian culture, as the gamelan *gong kebyar* had virtually wiped out the traditional styles of playing over the forty years under their control. In 1965, Indonesia created what is now known as the Indonesian Arts Institute Padangpanjang. This institution, based off the Western conservatory style, trained Indonesian artists not just in the performance of gamelan, but also in its culture and teaching. Michael Tenzer summarizes that “...Indonesia adopted the standards of a global community
which stresses the benefits of obtaining a degree...Nowadays it is simply assumed that a serious young musician should get a formal education” (1998, 25). The faculty was made up of some of the best Indonesian musicians, and Tenzer notes that they went on to “pursue advanced degrees” in America (1998, 126). Naturally, these musicians then led the American gamelan groups. There is a cyclical nature that exists here that is repeated again and again in the story of gamelan.

**Gamelan Chandra Kanchana: Bali at Bard**

The following section explores the history of the gamelan at Bard. Most of this information comes from the histories given to me by Bill Ylitalo and Sue Pilla, as well as the archives of Professor Richard Davis, which includes email correspondence, programs from past gamelan concerts, Davis’ diary entries and notes, and memos from various members of the college. Gamelan Chandra Kanchana was formed at Bard in 1998, but the history of the instruments goes much farther back than that. The gamelan was collected, in fact, by ethnomusicologist Michael Tenzer on his first trip to Bali in 1977, while he was still completing his Bachelor’s degree at Yale. There he purchased three gangsa, two drums and one of the gongs. After he graduated in 1978, Tenzer went back to Bali and completed the set, all but the ugal and the reyong. This included five more gangsa, two calung, two jegogans, two more gongs, the ceng ceng, and the ketuk. All of the instruments were created by the same smith, Made Gableran, in the village of Blahbatuh, Bali.

Tenzer then took the instruments with him to graduate school at University of California at Berkeley in 1979, where he formed Sekar Jaya, one of the most prominent American gamelan groups in history. Sekar Jaya went on to tour Bali and attend the Bali Arts festival in 1985, and
the governor of Bali at the time, Idi Bagus Mantera, was so taken with the group that he gifted them the *reyong*. Made Gableran threw in the *ugal* and the ensemble was complete. Tenzer moved back to Yale in 1986 to begin teaching there and took the instruments with him. He formed a group called Sekar Kembar, but in 1988 decided to take a break from running an ensemble and chose to sell the instruments. They were purchased by Garry Kvistad, an entrepreneur in Woodstock who ran a chime factory, and the instruments moved to Woodstock (email to Richard Davis, Nov 17, 1998).

In 1998, Kvistad made the same decision as Michael Tenzer did and decided to look for a new home for the gamelan. This is when Richard Davis, professor of Religion and Robert Martin, professor of Music and Philosophy, stepped forward to bring the instruments to Bard. Kvistad agreed to this, under the condition that the community from Woodstock had access to the instruments. In an agreement written from Kvistad to Bard for the transfer of the gamelan, Kvistad wrote that the community group “could be a great advantage as there is a core group of 15 players who have played together for eight years and who could play a key role in helping establish a program at the college” (agreement from Garry Kvistad, June 5, 1998). Kvistad’s request was obviously musically beneficial, as the community group is a seasoned group of players, but it also strongly communally beneficial. It would seem that Kvistad respects the community formed through the playing of Balinese gamelan, and did not want to see this community broken up. More than that, there is a strong desire to be able to share the communal ideals cherished both by the Woodstock players and the Balinese tradition, so that these ideals are not lost in the transfer.
Bard agreed to his terms, and thus Gamelan Giri Mekar moved to Bard, where the student group was formed. Under Kvistad’s suggestion, Nyoman Suadin was hired to teach every two weeks for the first semester of the gamelan’s incarnation. Suadin was asked to name the new student group, and he decided to name them after the room in which they met, the Olin Hall Moon Room. The name Chandra Kanchana, or Golden Moon, has been their name ever since. They performed for the first time publicly on May 3rd, 1999, in the Olin Auditorium, and was received well from the campus (program from gamelan concert, May 3rd, 1999). At the time Suadin could only meet twice a week, so Bard searched for a more permanent teacher. Chandra Kanchana and Giri Mekar went through a slew of teachers, both from Bali and America from 1999 until 2010, when they rehired Suadin.

**Institutional Questions of Competency and Value**

There are complications that arise when non-Western music ensembles are asked to conform to Western institutional ideals, especially those set forth by predominantly Western music programs. (Solis, 2004). This is evident at Bard, where there are two main struggles at play: the value of non-Western music versus Western music, and the questioning of musical competency in non-Western traditions. These struggles are not universal at every school, yet Bard’s particular challenges highlight the complicated nature of inserting non-Western music into Western academia, and thus are important to examine. Bard has struggled over the years in defining how Chandra Kanchana should exist at the college. The identity switches, at times yearly, as to whether the group should be treated as a college ensemble, like the orchestra or
choir, or as more of a club ensemble, like some of the other experimental and non-Western
groups. This leaves the gamelan in a grey area of neither and both, ideologically and financially.

**Competency**

There is no question that Bard values the gamelan and finds it an important resource for
the campus. This was best shown in an email from October of 2005, where Leon Botstein wrote
to members of the music department as well as administrative faculty suggesting bringing in a
master gamelan musician to run and maintain the ensemble, “on a basis comparable to the
conservatory faculty” (email from Botstein, Oct 5, 2005). This suggests a long-term contract for
a skillful musician who can teach others at a high level. The fact that the president of the college
would take the time and the budget to suggest implementing this concept is impressive. It shows
an inherent value in the the program. At the same time, Botstein raises interesting questions.
Should non-Western musical practices be asked to conform to Western institutional learning
styles? There could be many problems that arise from instituting a conservatory style onto
non-Western musical practices. Although it is not within the scope of this project, it would be
interesting to see to what extent this institutionalized learning style has reached Bali, and
whether or not it is different at this point than the institutionalization of music in America.

The master gamelan instructor idea also raises the questions of how one determines skill
levels across musical traditions in a way that is comparable, taking into account education,
language, and teaching credentials in Western academies. This is a reoccurring problem between
the Bard music program and Gamelan Chandra Kanchana. In January of 2008, the Music
Program considered firing Bill Ylitalo. They cite his hiring of a *ketuk* player for a concert and his
promising to pay another member of the group, Sue Pilla, for her help in running errands for the concert as problematic, and James Bagwell suggested hiring a student to, as the ethnomusicology professor at the time said, “do whatever Bill is doing right now.” They go on to say that they know “that Bill is knowledgeable about gamelan and is an adequate gamelan and suling [Balinese flute] player. But he is getting paid for helping set up the gamelan once a week and occasionally leading it if the Balinese teacher is absent” (email to Richard Davis, Jan 31, 2008). These emails display a lack of understanding in the gamelan tradition, how the ensemble operates, and what constitutes a competency within the tradition.

These are all symptoms of a larger institutional ambiguity that Chandra Kanchana has wrestled with since its inception. The previous ethnomusicology professor said that Bill had no “authority to do what he is doing with the budgets,” but in the absence of a full time faculty member in the music program, no one in the program was managing the ensemble or understood what it was Bill was doing, which had been true since the ensemble’s inception (e-mail to Richard Davis, Jan 26, 1999). Richard Davis outlines in a 23 point document that there was no way a part-time student worker could take on the work. Without the help of the members of Giri Mekar, Ylitalo and Pilla included, there is no way any of the concerts could run at the professional level that they do, the professional level expected of music programs performing at a conservatory caliber. There is also a lack of understanding with the tradition itself, as evidenced by the suggestion that a *ketuk* [a small beat-keeping gong] player should not have been hired, whereas the *ketuk* is essential to the operation of the gamelan. Without someone keeping the beat, it would become extremely difficult to perform. This may be comparable to asking a rock band to play without a drummer. Because the instrument is seemingly simple when
viewed through a Western musical lens, it is thus devalued, without an understanding of the instrument’s importance, or the skill level needed to play it.

**Value of Non-Western Music**

More so than any of this, there is a critical conflict between the envisioned conservatory-like program and the gamelan program as it stands. Bard wished to have a master Balinese teacher, but could not, or would not, budget the money to do so. Early on, this manifested as a struggle to find an academic member of the college who would accept responsibility for the management of the group. Michael Tenzer, Garry Kvistad, Richard Davis, and Bill Ylitalo all remarked over the years about the amount of work that has to be put into an ensemble to make it function, and at some point in the history, finding ownership and support for the program became difficult. Davis and Ylitalo for many years ran most of the administrative aspects of the gamelan, and the budget went through Robert Martin’s office, which was the Graduate Studies Office. In 2004, the budget for the gamelan was moved to the music department budget. This began a five year struggle between Bard, Richard Davis, and the music department to define the gamelan program, insure that its leaders are being fairly compensated, and solidify the management of the group (e-mail to Richard Davis, Nov 9, 2005).

Many of the questions of how non-Western music is valued in Bard’s predominantly Western art music program arise through the lens of money: payment confusion, budgetary problems, hiring issues, etc. From 2004 to 2005, Davis communicated with Bagwell multiple times with multiple instances of a lack of payment and reimbursement for the instructor and instructor’s assistant, Bill Ylitalo, over extended periods of time (emails to James Bagwell, Nov
9, 2005, Apr 19, 2006). This speaks to a critical value conflict between non-Western and Western music ensembles in the department. It is hard to imagine a ‘master instructor,’ such as those who exist in the Bard College Conservatory, not being paid and being expected to continue teaching. This is not to say that Bard does not value the music, as this is evidenced by the attempt to turn the gamelan program into a conservatory style endeavor, thus implicitly “elevating” the tradition. The problems arise due to the fact that there is not a preset institutional frame for non-Western ensembles to enter into a collegiate sphere, like there is for Western art ensembles. Without a map of how to institute a non-Western program, people like Richard Davis, Robert Martin, and community members have to build from the ground up, and this takes an immense amount of time, energy, and bureaucratic work. By not recognizing that the gamelan cannot fit a Western art ensemble model exactly, Bard has put Chandra Kanchana at a fundamental disadvantage. This may not be an overt devaluation of non-Western music, but without recognizing the struggles a non-Western music ensemble faces within an institutionally Western art music program, Bard gives preference to Western art music, which is within the personal interest of the president of the college, Leon Botstein, who is also an orchestral conductor (Gregory, 2014).

President Botstein’s suggestion of a master gamelan position, originally proposed in 2005, is raised again in 2007 by Davis and the former ethnomusicology professor in a proposal to the Planning and Appointments Committee (proposal to Planning and Appointments Committee, Apr 15, 2007). The document shows a push to establish a permanent professor who would not only lead the group, but also “serve as a resource for individual instruction in various facets of Balinese music and to be available for class lectures and demonstrations in courses such
as ‘World Music.’” They both note the importance of the ensemble to the wider diversity of the college and the music program. This proposal was not rejected, but overlooked. A member of the committee wrote in an email that the committee “shunted the proposal aside as being for a staff position and thus outside of our jurisdiction…” The former ethnomusicology professor pushed for a response, being cited as saying “Why did they hire an ethnomusicologist if they intend to terminate the main ethnomusicological program at the college?” (email to Michele Dominy, May 24, 2007). This once again points to issues of value, not just for non-Western ensembles, but also the value of those who study non-Western music. There is an assumption by the college that the gamelan program can operate on its own, and thus it is not given the attention that other Western musical programs are given.

The fact that this becomes a monetary issue is also important to note. As the former ethnomusicology professor pointed out, the lack of attention given to the proposal meant that the ensemble would not have a teacher, and thus would have to shut down. Although it seems that Bard was unaware of this immediate conflict, their obliviousness is inherently harmful. This conversation is still relevant today, nearly ten years later, as this sort of program has still not been implemented. Suadin is the returning “master gamelan instructor,” but is only at the college once a week, and is not able to offer the sort of intensive, one on one instruction that would be comparable to a conservatory instructor.

These questions of competency and value that arise show the problems of moving non-Western music into an institutionalized Western academy, as well as highlighting the difficulty and success of the attempt to create a strong gamelan program. This is one of the larger pictures, but many of the interesting moments of change that occur through this movement are
far more interpersonal, than institutional. One of the most prominent of these personal topics is
the concept of religion and spirituality.

**Religion and Spirituality as Critical Concepts**

My ethnographic work has revealed three major concepts in regards to religion and
spirituality: institutional religion, personal religion, and spirituality. Institutional religion is
defined as organizations of religion and their canonic sets of beliefs (such as Balinese Hinduism,
New Age, and Christianity). Personal religion is the concept of a single person’s own religious
identity, which is often far more complicated than the canonic ideas of institutional religion, yet
still influenced by them. Finally, there is the concept of spirituality, which I define as
purposefully ambiguous, in that it allows for emergent relationships between individuals and
practices. There are numerous ethnographic instances throughout this work that will explore
performer’s relationships with music, energy, and the world that lies outside of personal and
institutional religion.

Gamelan in Bali is historically connected with the institutional religion of Balinese
Hinduism. Balinese Hinduism, unlike the Hinduism seen in other parts of Southeast Asia, is a
fusion of Hinduism and the traditions and rituals of the island before Hinduism arrived, primarily
set in animism. Alongside the worship of deities like Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, the worship of
ancestral spirits, Buddhist heroes, and spiritual holy sites are seen. Gamelan is seen as a musical
offering, as intrinsic to worship as it is to village life. On holy days, a cacophony of multiple
gamelans is heard playing in different areas of the temple grounds, based on the level of holiness
ascribed to the style of playing.
Balinese Hinduism focuses on the idea that good and bad must balance for the world to exist in harmony. The gamelan’s tuning is representative of this idea, in that all of the instruments are paired together and tuned slightly apart. This is what creates the shimmery sound of the gamelan. Many gamelans, including Bard’s, are decorated with images of different gods. Bard’s gamelan has images of the god Bomo, a demon turned into a protector. When I asked Suadin about this character, he explained that the demon was defeated in a fight with a heroic god, and the demon appealed to the god, to become a protector. In Suadin’s words, “Who better to spot evil beings than an evil being.” He further explained that good and evil can never be extinguished from the world, so they must learn to balance.

Balinese gamelan is separated into three main categories: music for the gods, music for the gods and humans, and music for pure entertainment. The first category, music for the gods, is only played by the performers for an audience of the gods. This music is played in a temple setting, and is highly sacred. The second category is played more frequently, and is oftentimes heard in the outer courtyards of the temple. But even the secularized gamelan is played during temple festivals, such as the temple birthday, odalan. Gamelan performances are seen as offerings to the gods, no matter the category of music being played, thus it there is an element of gamelan that can not be separated from the concept of religion.

American gamelan groups complicate where gamelan situates itself within institutional religion, by introducing personal religion and spirituality. The American religious makeup of many of the groups is diverse, ranging from Christian, Quaker, Buddhist, and more often with a younger generation, non-affiliated. These many personal religions situate against the institutional religion historically related to Balinese gamelan. Then the religious makeup is further
complicated by spirituality. Many of the performers in the gamelan speak about the music in terms of a loose religious notion; they mention “an energy” when playing, or how the music “makes them feel.” The concept of New Age religion in regards to the gamelan and ambiguous spirituality will be further explored in the chapter on religion and spirituality.

In its Balinese context, the instruments of the gamelan are thought to possess a spiritual quality. These spiritual qualities are then often translated into new meanings in American ensembles. Suadin often spends time at the beginning of the semester explaining how the instruments interact with each other. The gangsas are paired in twos. The “male” instrument is tuned slightly lower than its partner, the “female” instrument. Suadin explains that this is representative of the concept of balance in Bali. One of the first culturally relevant traditions mentioned at the opening rehearsal with Chandra Kanchana is that you must treat the instruments with respect. You must never step over them, or knock into them in anyway, and if you do, you are instructed to apologize to the instruments. Although this may lead to some comical scenes in America, the anthropomorphization of the instruments adds a spiritual level to the ensemble that walks hand in hand with Balinese Hinduism.

There are numerous ways in which these three concepts of religion interact with each other in Balinese gamelan, and these concepts will be further explored and complicated in later chapters.

**Positioning Myself Within the Context of This Project**

I found Gamelan Chandra Kanchana in the same way most students do at Bard: through sheer happenstance. I stumbled upon their performance in my freshman year, 2013, and joined
the fall semester following that. I have been playing with them since then, as well as conducting ethnographic work via participant observation. Many of the commentary made by members of the groups comes from formal interviews and informal conversations over the past three years that I have been performing with Chandra Kanchana. I did my first ethnographic work in the spring of 2014, a podcast that was an exploration into the themes of this project. I am using recordings of both the aforementioned interviews, as well as rehearsals in this project.

I cannot explain exactly what keeps me playing gamelan, but I have always had an interest in Asian music, as well as percussion music. The communal aspects that will be expanded on later are also extremely attractive to me. There is a sense of openness, honesty, and humor that permeates the community, and the hardworking togetherness parallels to my own Midwestern roots, something not lost on other Midwestern gamelan players, such as Bill and Sue. My role as ethnographer and participant is intermingled and I am inherently embedded in this project. Although I do not explicitly look at my own feelings towards many of the topics brought up, they are woven into the story, as I am part of the gamelan. Everyone participates, and everyone is a part of the story.

Summary of Chapters

This thesis is broken into three brief chapters: the first, investigating social practices around spirituality, and the second and third, investigating practices around pedagogy and circulation. All of these chapters are derived from my ethnographic work, held primarily at Bard College. Although Chandra Kanchana is my focal point, other case studies from my work with the Indonesian Dance Institution in Chicago will be brought in as supplementary examples. The
first chapter investigates how Balinese Hinduism is applied in American gamelan ensembles, the complicated relationship between religion and space, and how participant spirituality mixes into performance and reception of the music. The second chapter delves into the pedagogical strategies applied for learning and teaching gamelan in America, com In the third and final chapter, I explore the circulation of gamelan music back and forth between Bali and America, and the new ways in which gamelan is being performed, as influenced by Western culture.
Chapter One: Spirituality and Religion

When a new student comes to rehearse with Chandra Kanchana, they immediately learn two things: first, one never steps over the instruments, and two, you must take your shoes off in the rehearsal space. The first rule is due to the spiritual identity of the instruments. By stepping over them, you are disrespecting their spiritual identity. If you do step over an instrument, you must immediately apologize to it. Unlike the first rule, the second rule of taking shoes off in the rehearsal space is not directly explained as involving any form of spirituality or religious reasoning. It is just what we do. Over time, there were many instances of unexplained ritual at Chandra Kanchana, and I began to realize that what we do was a subtle way of saying it is what the Balinese do. Without this being explicitly said, students accepted any and all rituals of the ensemble as a part of Balinese cultural and spiritual practice. Yet this ritual of taking your shoes off in the rehearsal space became a blurred and complicated example of how Balinese rituals and American perceptions of these rituals combine to create a sense of religion and spirituality entirely different from the institutional religion of Balinese Hinduism and the personal religious and spiritual identities of American participants.

This discovery was prompted by Nyoman Suadin and his shoes. At one rehearsal I noticed that Suadin had his shoes on, and recalled that this was not the first time I had seen the Balinese teacher wearing his shoes in the rehearsal space. During our break, I decided to ask Suadin why he was wearing his shoes, as I assumed, like most students do, that this was a Balinese ritual, and thus the Balinese teacher should have had an interest in following this ritual. Upon asking him why he was wearing them, Suadin jumped back and immediately began profusely apologizing to me. He apologized for “offending me and my traditions,” and excused
himself for “having forgotten.” I was taken aback by his response, due to his uncharacteristic sincerity. Suadin has a robust sense of humor, so this scene caught me off guard, and I stumbled while trying to explain my academic interest, and that I was not, in fact, offended.

Intrigued by Suadin’s reaction and questioning my own assumptions now about the ritual’s origins, I went to Bill Ylitalo to ask why it was we took our shoes off in the rehearsal space. Ylitalo responded that it “is what they do in Bali, especially in the temples. It shows respect for the space and the instruments.” He talked about the element of not just spiritual respect, but also cleanliness, and how this had a duality with the Bard geographic climate. In Bali, they did not want to track in dirt and mud into the temple, and Ylitalo did not want the mud and snow of Bard to track into the space. While we were talking, Suadin walked by and interrupted and apologized again, saying “Oh boy! I must have really offended you.” While Ylitalo and I continued to try and explain my interest and non-offense, Suadin returned to the space to restart rehearsal, shoes attached to feet.

This incident revealed a lot to me about how Americans take in, assume, and understand Balinese spiritual and religious practice as it relates to gamelan performance. Here was a tradition that laid its foundation in Balinese culture, being repurposed into an American ritual. More so than that, it is important to understand exactly where Ylitalo cited as his point of influence for this tradition: the temple. This opens up the vignette to become a conversation on religious space. By asking participants to take their shoes off, Ylitalo is comparing our rehearsal space to a Balinese temple. Thus Suadin’s reaction makes more sense; he does not think he is offending our cultural sensibilities, but our spiritual beliefs. It is also clear that Suadin does not read these reactions as something entirely Balinese, otherwise he would participate in them. It is
also clear that Ylitalo is not pursuing a creation of a religious space, but merely trying to
replicate an authentic Balinese environment. Ylitalo compares the space to a Balinese temple,
but has created a uniquely hybridized American spiritual setting, influenced not just by Balinese
religion, but by our perceptions of their traditions and our own religious identities.

That is not to say that all of the traditions and rituals performed by Chandra Kanchana are
Balinese appropriations. Far from it: many of the rituals, such as the offerings given to the gods
before concerts and the aforementioned embodied respect of the instruments is uniquely
Balinese. But are these performances of Balinese traditions just that: performances? In an
interview with Bill Ylitalo, he elaborates: “At Bard, we have a class that is basically a
performance ensemble. We rarely touch upon cultural context and religion during our
rehearsals. We do maintain a respectful and somewhat authentic atmosphere during our
concerts, with costumes, incense, and prayer, but we do not go into detail with the spiritual
significance of the music and dance.” Engaging in spirituality without context is a double edged
sword. Judith Becker puts it well: “If one conscientiously observes such practices, one may find
oneself in the position of encouraging simple minded, pseudo-mysticism on the part of one’s
students. If one downplays such practices, one is open to the charge of not really teaching the
gamelan tradition” (1983, 85). On one side, the ensemble is respecting and honoring the culture,
by imitating its practices. On the other side, the ensemble could be seen as performing, or even
tokenizing, a culture, instead of respecting it.

Does this make the performances of the religious rituals ungenuine? Much of the
interaction between students and these traditions go hand in hand with the concept of
performance. When students apologize to the instruments, this is usually brought on by a raucous
reminder of the offense from other students. Such a scene is usually loud enough for everyone to hear and there is laughter afterwards. Another example of this performance exists within the concept of offerings. Within Balinese Hinduism offerings to the gods is an extremely important ritual, yet the only time prayer and offering is given to the Balinese gods within Bard’s gamelan program is before a concert starts. This display of offering, although in line with offering given in Bali, also is highly theatrical, given up not just to the gods, but to the audience. These are small examples of how Balinese traditional practice is wrapped up within American ideas of spiritual practice to create not just a new hybridized gamelan space, but also a hybridized gamelan practice.

This chapter delves into the complicated realm of institutionalized religion, personal religion, and spirituality as they are enacted within Balinese gamelan in America. It will specifically deal with how these ideas are manifested under the categories of space and personal belief. It will explore how the space in which gamelan is rehearsed and performed goes through multiple transformations of spiritual and secular identity, both in Bali and in the United States. It will examine the space in which Bard’s gamelan exists, as well the space of gamelan at Northwestern in Chicago. The chapter will also explore the idea of ritual, and how gamelan grapples with multiple religious identities to create a new, hybrid identity, combining Balinese Hinduism, American preconceptions of Bali, and personal religious ideas of gamelan performers.

**Gamelan in Balinese Space**

Writing within a larger anthology on space, Andrew Eisenberg writes within the anthology *Keywords in Sound*, that sound and space are mutually constitutive (2015: 193). Space
is a key concept in the world of Balinese Hinduism and intertwines itself into the musical and ritual performance of gamelan. To help understand this, I will be unpacking the spatial relations starting at the macro level of the island of Bali and moving downwards to the musical categorization of gamelan. The first layer of spatial awareness exists in the context of the island itself. Mount Agung is the spiritual and geographical center of Bali, towering nearly 10,000 feet high. Agung is seen as a stand in for Mount Meru, the central axis of the universe, where in Hindu legend Lord Brahma and other demigods live. Mount Meru is seen not only in Hindu legend, but in Buddhist and Indonesian, particularly Javanese, legends as well. The Balinese people believe that the gods live just above the tip of Mount Agung, and thus prayers for the good and the godly are centered towards the mountain, much in the same way the prayer in the Muslim tradition is focused on Mecca.

The temples then also have a spatial hierarchy. Temples are composed of a series of courtyards, and the further into the temple you venture, the more important the space is, starting with the jaba, or the outermost courtyard. This space is usually not enclosed and is the outside space before entering into the temple. This is generally seen as a secular space. After entering through a gate, the middle courtyard, or jaba tengah is found, enclosed within the temple walls. This space is used for ceremony, and is both a sacred and a secular space. The final courtyard, or jero is further inwards, and once again enclosed within another wall. This is the most sacred space, and holds thrones for the gods to come down and accept their offerings from. The temple coincides also with the spatial element of the island, as the jero section of the temple is also facing Mount Agung. Thus the temple sets itself up as a space that moves from secular to sacred towards the most sacred point on the island.
Gamelan performance is the micro example of these spatial movements, and moves in accordance with the temple. Within gamelan, there are two major concepts to understand the spatial relations of performance. The first is a complex categorization system outlined in Lisa Gold’s book, *Music In Bali: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. In 1971, around the same time as the institution of gamelan conservatories in Indonesia, and in accordance with the fear of losing Indonesian culture to *gong kebyar*, a committee was brought together to categorize Balinese arts. Arts got broken down into three categories: *wali*, sacred; *bebali*, ceremonial; and *balih-bалиhan*, secular. The effect of categorizing these Balinese arts reified them, solidifying something that was previously known, but fluid.

Gold is especially helpful in highlighting the problems with this categorization. She notes that “These three categories already existed to some extent, but the precise placement of genres into categories was, and is, not standardized” (2005, 18). She goes on to explain the religious difficulty within these performance categories. Per the distinction of the committee, *wali* music is for the gods, *bebali* music is for gods and people, and *balih-bалиhan* is for entertainment purposes. Yet, Gold points out that there is no true concept of secular music in Bali, and I would further that this tripartite division mimics institutionalized Western musical categories and was brought over in the move to Westernize the music practices of Indonesia in the 60’s and 70’s. Thus, this concept of secular doesn’t quite fit. Gold writes that “even in tourist performers...always regard the performances with the same reverence that they would temple performances” (2005:18). When the gods are always watching, all music becomes an offering, including modern music such as *gong kebyar*. This will concept will be revisited later in this
chapter when I begin to explore the recreation of rituals within the American concept of gamelan performance.

Yet Balinese musicians and scholars still apply this system, and it applies to the temple context as well. The second major concept is the application of this category system onto the temple layout. Keeping in mind the complexity and fluidity of the above system, there is a musical movement of secular to sacred musically as well as spatially within the temple. The outermost jaba courtyard is the place for the most modern music for entertainment purposes, such as gong kebyar. The middle jaba tengah courtyard is ceremonial gamelan music, sacred music written within the time of the Hindu monarchs, performed for temple goers and the gods. Finally, the innermost jora courtyard holds the most sacred music, pre-dating the Hindu monarchs, which is played purely as offerings for the gods. Once again, in situations such as temple birthdays when these musical offerings are occurring, the gods are known to be all around. Yet, gong kebyar would not be performed in the innermost jora courtyard. This system creates a spatial hierarchy, taking the outside secular space and transforming through movement and musical cues into an inwards sacred space.

In addition to these sacred spaces in which gamelan is performed, Bali is not devoid of secular performance spaces. The primary example of this is the Bali Arts Festival, a space where gamelan is primarily showcased to an audience. Gamelan performers gather from around the island to competing in varying styles in a format that is more about show and winning, than performing for ceremonial purposes. Alongside the Arts Festival is a significant increase in Balinese tourism, which brings many Westerners to the island seeking “authentic” Bali. This is best performed via gamelan, and oftentimes hotels offer gamelan performances. These spaces are
secular realms in which gamelan is performed, the most far removed from sacred contexts within Bali.

Religious studies has a storied history with the idea of distinct sacred spaces and secular spaces, most famously written about by Mircea Eliade in his book *The Sacred and the Profane.* In it he writes: “There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous” (1957, 20). When gamelan moves to the United States, these categories are blown apart, and the relationship between gamelan, secular space, and spiritual space becomes hybridized. The United States is a society with less Hindu temples than Bali, and even less of these temples follow the design of the outdoor temples. This forces the gamelan to move into new contexts. That being said, the Balinese conception of space and sound is still extremely relevant in how religion, gamelan, and space interact, even in these new contexts. The following section addresses the shifts that occur when gamelan enters the secular classroom, the American cathedral, and encounters the American preconceptions about the Balinese spatial relations outlined above.

**Gamelan in American Space: Bard**

By day, Olin 305 looks like the typical Bard classroom. The long, rectangular tables are rolled into a square shape, promoting the sort of discussion Bard’s liberal arts curriculum is famous for. The room sits on the third floor of the humanities building, with Olin’s characteristic large windows looking out onto the scenic college. In summer, you can see students sitting on the lawn accompanied by profsors and books, creating the sort of picture you see on college brochures. Being on the third floor and in the room at which the roof meets its apex, the ceilings
are uncharacteristically high. Yet, a closer look reveals some peculiar elements about the room that differentiate it from the other Olin classrooms. There are shelves built into the sides of the room, locked to the public. Taped onto the wall near the doors are informational posters about the island of Bali. On the other side of the doors, a handwritten note that asks demandingly, “Please return the tables and chairs to how you found them.” And most strikingly, above the typical windows looking outward, one large circular window. Opposite of this window, above the entryway is a drawing of the moon, labeling its different waxing and waning points. It is unclear what the purpose of this is, but you can imagine the moonlight coming in through the window and shining onto the image of the moon.

It is at nighttime that Olin 305 transforms into the Moon Room. When students arrive for gamelan rehearsal, any resemblance to the daytime classroom has been obscured. The doors are open for all to enter and leave as they please. The tables and chairs have been removed, leaving room for the locked shelves to reveal their hidden contents: the gamelan. The instruments are arranged with what Ylitalo calls the rhythm section on one side and the gangsas on the other. Against the windows are the reyong, and in the middle sits the drum. Outside, the tables are pushed against the wall to hold students jackets and bags, and as a place to set up the weekly tea and cookies. Shoes sit under the tables, and chairs are stacked high. Suddenly, the Bali posters and the note calling for order make sense. The Moon Room is no longer a classroom, but a rehearsal space.

This transition from a secular space to a spiritual one is perceived as seamless on the side of the student. Most times, you walk in and the room is set up, or you are helping to position the instruments. But as the earlier ethnographic snippet alludes to, a lot of work is put into making
the Moon Room resemble something Balinese. Ylitalo and many of the other community members, especially Sue Pilla, bring their experience with Balinese culture and gamelan performance to Bard, almost instinctually. The Bali posters link the space to its cultural home. The tea and cookies mimic the same sort of food offerings given up to the gods in the Balinese temple space. The instruments are imbued with some of same spiritual essence as they are in Bali, thus the rule of apologizing to them. Even the shelves that house the instruments were built specifically for the room, giving them a special place to be. This is not the same home of secular learning as Olin 305 during the day. Moreover, it's not the secular rehearsal space found in Blum, Bard’s music building. When you arrive at the Moon Room, you are entering a space marked with spirituality, somewhat like the movement from the outside world into the temple. There is a distinct movement from something secular to something sacred.

Curiously, this is less recognized by Ylitalo and Pilla then it is by the students. Ylitalo says that the ensemble is: “a class that is basically a performance ensemble. We rarely touch upon cultural context and religion during our rehearsals. We do maintain a respectful and somewhat authentic atmosphere during our concerts, with costumes, incense, and prayer, but we do not go into detail with the spiritual significance of the music and dance.” When he says that the group is a performance ensemble, one expects the traditional Western performance ensemble, where the instruments are there and the performers show up and play, much like a classroom where you show up and learn or discuss. Yet, they do not go into why we apologize to the instruments, or take our shoes off. Suadin does not explain this either. Ylitalo is then supported by the fact that both Chandra Kanchana and Giri Mekar play modern gong kebyar music, which
is balih-balihan, the least spiritual. What is created is a space that is uniquely not a Western rehearsal space, but is also not a traditional Balinese space.

This hybridized space creates high amounts of conflict due to its positioning between the sacred and secular. To start, the rest of the college does not view it as a secular space of learning, or a sacred space that must be recognized as such. The gamelan’s home in Olin is a contested one. During the 2015 spring semester, Chandra Kanchana had to start a handful of rehearsals where the first hour had to be “quiet,” because of freshman seminars overlapping in the humanities building and the perception of gamelan music as disruptive noise. The gamelan rehearsal in the Moon Room is too loud to be Western, and the space itself does not fit the parameters of a typical Western rehearsal space. During the day, many other Olin rooms are used for piano and violin rehearsal alongside class discussion, and this occurs without any fuss. That being said, the space is also not seen as a sacred space, which would protect it from outside control under American values. Under the Balinese values, all gamelan music is a gift to the gods, yet there is no mention of treating the Moon Room like a Hindu spiritual space, even when at times the rituals very much treat it that way.

Richard Davis’ archives feature a thought provoking story about the christening of the gamelan at Bard that further highlights these themes. At the event, which members of the Bard administration attended, one of the members of the Bard Chaplaincy decided to give an offering of fire to welcome and sanctify the instruments and the new space for them. Just as the Dean of the College appeared out of elevator, the fire offering set off Olin’s fire alarms, much to the entertainment and chagrin of those attending. This ritual is reminiscent of something vaguely Hindu, due to the prevalence of fire in Hinduism, but is not decidedly of any religious identity.
The chaplain member was Christian, but unorthodox, incorporating womanism and Wicca into their practice. There is a respect to both the instruments and the space that is distinctly Balinese, but this was not a formal Balinese ceremony. The ceremony may have fit well in the outdoor environment of the Balinese temple, and the ritual is treating the space as more of an outdoor temple. But the building is made for the classroom, a space where fire is not something that is invited in.

The Moon Room in Olin is very much the home of the gamelan at Bard. I have found it is actually one of the most memorable sonic experiences that students around campus overhear while at Bard. When you mention the gamelan to a student not in the group, they almost always remark: “Oh, isn’t that the weird music that comes from the third floor of Olin on Monday nights?” The music, just like in Bali, is linked to its space. It holds an identity that is outside the secular classroom and rehearsal space, and also outside the traditional Balinese temple. It is a spiritualized secular space, and its existence is just as fluid, if not more so, than the distinctions made within the Balinese temple. Even so, “Moon Room” and “gamelan” become almost inseparable terms at Bard, creating a truly unique space seen nowhere else on campus.

**Gamelan in American Space: Northwestern**

Bard is not the only place in the United States where the relationship between space and the gamelan becomes complicated. At Northwestern University in Chicago, the Indonesian Dance of Illinois’ gamelan ensemble, headed by Pak Ngurah Kertayuda, also encounters complex spatial situations. IDI performs primarily *gamelan anklung*, as well as *gong kebyar*. *Anklung* is a smaller ensemble than *kebyar*, and thus requires less space than Bard’s ensemble.
When IDI’s gamelan started out, the ensemble rehearsed in Pak Kertayuda’s basement, the first space in which I experienced the group. There were family pictures leading downwards into the basement, a traditional Midwestern “recreational room.” Unlike on the East Coast, where old homes have unfinished spaces under the house, many Midwestern homes have finished basements, that are used for a variety of social purposes, as well as storage. This is where IDI’s gamelan was situated, surrounded by discarded children's books and a drum kit.

The basement setting of Kertayuda’s house takes the anklung fully out of its Balinese spiritual context, as anklung is traditionally a ceremonial processional music for Balinese funerals. I asked Kertayuda about this movement: “When I was a kid, anklung was only for cremation rites. But now, the musicians bring it to America and perform with it. Then, when they go back to Bali, they still want to play anklung! So they do. Now these instruments are not just for temples.” Without the dominant religious culture of Bali, America facilitates a move from the instrument’s sacred temple space to a secular space, such as Kertayuda’s basement, and with it opens up the possibilities of when and where the music can be performed in both Bali and the United States.

Except for the gamelan itself, Pak Kertayuda’s basement is a familiar sight to Americans. There is nothing inherently spiritual residing in this basement, and Kertayuda does not attempt to imbue it with any religious essence. It is a rehearsal space, but not an institutional one. This rehearsal space mimics the American conception of rehearsal space for say a garage rock band. With this extremely non-Balinese, non-institutional space comes the trouble of not fitting into the Western performer’s conceptions of a formalized rehearsal space. Furthermore, as Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan write in their introduction to Audible Empires, there is a history
of viewing gamelan as akin to the Western orchestra (2016, 12). In viewing the gamelan through
a Western orchestral lens, musicians then expect the gamelan rehearsal space to be formal in the
same institutionalized way as an orchestral rehearsal space. Kertayuda’s daughter Chika, who
acts as the liaison for the group, noted that many of their members were uncomfortable
rehearsing within the Kertayuda household, as it did not fit their preconceptions of where music
is rehearsed, or where gamelan exists.

Part of the reason why I believe the hybridized Bard space of the Moon Room is so
accepted is because it fulfills, if only mildly, preconceptions about what Balinese gamelan is.
There is a history as evidenced by early ethnomusicologists and anthropologists such as Colin
McPhee and Miguel Covarrubias, of exoticising and over glamorizing Bali and its musical
tradition. This exoticism is at least subconsciously present in the American mindset, and when
faced with gamelan in a typical American basement, there is a disconnect between Bali and
America. It does not fit the preconceived notion of Balinese music, and with that, Balinese
religion, nor the realized idea of where Western music is rehearsed.

Kertayuda and his family took their participants reactions to heart, and looked for a space
that would be more comfortable more American students. IDI moved their gamelan and the
rehearsals to nearby Northwestern University, specifically within the Alice Millar Chapel. By
situating themselves within a university setting, IDI were afforded the institutional prestige that
comes with the space. The chapel is stunningly beautiful, full of stained glass usually reserved
for old Catholic churches, and only half a block from the coast of Lake Michigan. It markets
itself as a place for Protestant-Christian worship, as well as “A House of Prayer for All People,”
appealing to the younger, less religious students of the college campus. On their website, the
Chapel provides resources for those who wish to hold marriage or funeral ceremonies within its walls. There is a section entitled “Music at Millar,” that advertises the pipe organ and the choir. The website fails to mention that on Saturday afternoons, in a small room overlooking the chapel space, IDI plays a very different kind of funeral music.

The Chapel is, without question, a religious space. Yet, the rehearsal room in which IDI meets resembles a generic recreation space, and therefore carries over less spiritual overtones than Bard’s Moon Room. It is a rectangular room with carpeting, windows looking out that are of standard size. The stained glass of the chapel downstairs is not found here. The walls are tiled, and here too folding tables are pushed against the wall to make room for the instruments. Aside from the shoes stacked against the opposite side of the room, the space feels like any other rehearsal space. There is no mention of Bali or Balinese religious identity, no Balinese posters, no ceremonial food offerings. The gamelan is stored haphazardly in the back of the room. For that matter, there is no Christian iconography in the space either. It is like the assembly of the Balinese temple has been reversed; in its innermost space, the jora is at its most secular. But just as the Moon Room is at Bard, the space is deceptively multipurpose. IDI plays anklung in this ostensibly secular room, which is, as mentioned before, a genre that falls more in the bebali, or ceremonial category of Balinese music. Unlike the performance of the more secular gong kebyar music at Bard in a spiritualized sacred space, IDI performs sacred music in a secularized spiritual space.

This is then amplified, to use the temple courtyard analogy once more, as we venture out into the jaba tengah, or middle space. The room in which the IDI performs overlooks the chapel space itself, and this space’s sacred identity often clashes with the going-ons of the gamelan
rehearsal. When asked about this clash, IDI member Chika noted, “We have to be extra careful during weddings! We actually have had to send some of our members downstairs to make sure we weren’t too loud upstairs.” This is a standout example of the religious hybridity of IDI’s rehearsal space. On one hand, the outer chapel space is being used for its intended religious purpose, and this interrupts the more secular performance space. The sacred identity of the space cannot be so easily stripped for rehearsal purposes. On the other hand, Chika depicts how the group is aware of their own invasion into a sacred space, and how the ensemble must balance their space with the chapel.

The conversation between the Chapel space and IDI’s rehearsal space in regards to space usage opens up a larger discussion on ceremonial space and music, recalling Gold’s commentary on the fluidity of the reification of gamelan categorization. Anklung would be categorized as bebalí music, but in its performance at the chapel divorces itself from its more obvious ceremonial duties. Meanwhile, the chapel is a space for Christian ceremonies, and a wedding is one of the most important ceremonies to occur in a Christian church. The chapel is a ceremonial space, and yet the ceremonial anklung music does not fit with the perception of Christian ceremonial space. One can hardly imagine that the Alice Millar Chapel would promote gamelan music alongside its wedding services. It is also important to note that Chika does not say that they stop rehearsal when weddings occur; they merely ensure that they do not disrupt the outer chapel ceremonies. This is where the multiple layers of spirituality of the space reveal themselves. The room at the Alice Millar Chapel is at the same time sacred and secular, and allows for sacred and secular ceremonies, both in the Balinese culture and in the American Christian culture.
These ethnographic examples of sacred and secular space, both at Bard and with the IDI, highlight a change in how gamelan is spiritually perceived in the United States. When the gamelan moves out of its spiritual home in Bali, and the spaces in which the gamelan resides are new. These new spaces reside somewhere in between, and question how we perceive the ideas of secular and sacred, Bali, and gamelan itself. What helps make these spaces so hybrid are not just the spaces themselves, but also the performers who reside within these spaces. Their own multifaceted religiosity, or lack thereof, also helps to form a new spiritual identity to the gamelan in the United States. The next section will examine how personal religious identity maps onto Balinese gamelan, and what happens when one adopts rituals and ceremonies that are not their own.

**Mapping American Spirituality onto the Balinese Gamelan**

When speaking on “religion” in this chapter, I distinguish between the canonical beliefs of an organized religion as opposed to one’s personal religious identity. “Spirituality” then is a far more ambiguous term, used here to address the loosely defined relationships between gamelan and the self. With this in mind, it would be fruitful to reexamine the story of the the opening ceremony for Bard’s gamelan, which feature an invented fire ritual. I briefly explored how the fire ritual provided clues on how the Moon Room is viewed, but this story also is an entry point into American spirituality and its mapping onto Balinese ritual.

The sanctification of Bard’s gamelan, performed by a member of Bard’s chaplaincy, highlights the religious and spiritual importance of who chooses a ritual and how that ritual reflects their personal beliefs. In wanting to perform a fire ritual, they were professing some of
their own personal spirituality: they read a symbolic meaning into fire, used it to connect
material things with something immaterial. This choice also reflected some of their own thoughts
on Balinese gamelan: as something non-Western, and the sort of activity where a fire ritual
would not seem out of place. In fact, the point that the fire ritual resulted in a comical spectacle
is more telling of how the ritual does not fit in, despite the chaplaincy member’s best intentions.
This is an example of American conceptions of Eastern religion being intertwined with our own
personal spirituality, and then being mapped onto Balinese gamelan. At Bard, these examples are
plentiful, and reflect a larger depiction of gamelan and spirituality across the United States.

The imprinting of American views on Eastern spirituality is a prominent theme seen
throughout my ethnographic work, but yet it is not a conversation that is explicitly addressed by
performers and community members. It was completely acceptable to have a fire ritual at the
opening ceremony of the gamelan, yet no rationale for why this ritual performance was present.
Frequently, the spirituality and the perceptions of Bali are imprinted onto gamelan rehearsal and
performance without any discussion as to why or to clue in observers or student participants.
Ylitalo summarizes the concept well, saying: “Hopefully, the experience of playing traditional
gamelan music at Bard offers students a taste of Balinese Hindu spirituality, through the inherent
cosmic aspects of the sound and the visual effects of the dance offerings.” First, Ylitalo is
supposing that performing gamelan music is spiritual onto itself. He is addressing a common
communal understanding at Bard that the instruments and the music being performed is in
someway spiritual. The relationship Ylitalo and others have with the music is, at least for
themselves, spiritually linked, and they hope to pass this link onto the student performers, even
in vague terms. In speaking about the music this way, Ylitalo’s quote is a self-fulfilling
prophecy: by remarking that the music is spiritual or “cosmic,” students begin to map spirituality onto music they may not have found that way before.

Ylitalo feeling about the sounds revealing “cosmic aspects” provides another lens through which gamelan music is viewed, that of “mystical spirituality,” or “new age.” New Age religion is an amalgamation of many different religious identities, combined with hippie ideology. Bard’s proximity to Woodstock—a known hub for its hippie subculture—is not lost in this analysis, and many of Bard’s community gamelan members are baby boomers, therefore likely linked to a generation associated with Woodstock-style spirituality. It is not surprising that this particular conception of spirituality in particular aligns with Balinese gamelan. Balinese Hinduism is considered exotic Eastern religion, and gamelan’s metallophone, non-Western sound can be familiar to people who also listen to ambient and trance music produced by the New Age community. In his book, American Veda, Philip Goldberg writes on the history of Vedantic Hindu philosophy in America. In attempting to describe this history, as well as its emergence in the realm of New Age, he writes: “In other words, while religious customs, rituals, and dogmas vary, all traditions, if taken deep enough, can bring practitioners to essentially the same place—our silent origin, or essence, which transcends all notions of place, all words, all concepts, all theologies” (2010, 12). Goldberg illustrates how New Age borrows Eastern styles, and importantly for this lens, how Eastern spiritual emblems, such as gamelan, are seen as gateways to a particular spiritual world. Although none of the Bardian members outwardly express this sort of mentality, Ylitalo’s use of the phrase “cosmic aspects,” discussion around how sound feels, and other speech that occurs during rehearsals, implies a relationship between this New Age religiosity and his perception of gamelan music.
These kinds of speech can be linked to a conception of Bali in the American imagination: an island shrouded in mystery, waiting to show its beauty to the Western eye is mimicked via the concept of Balinese music being a vessel for “Eastern spirituality.” Miguel Covarrubias writes in his book Island of Bali that “Although we heard enthusiastic reports about the splendid music of Bali, its subtle beauty and vigor came to us a revelation on our first night on the island” (1937, 188). This exoticizing language helps to promote a view of music and religion through a particular lens of invented Eastern mysticism.

Audience members, just as performers, seek out this mystic lens. When an American audience decides to attend a gamelan performance, there may be little contextual knowledge beforehand, except the understanding that the music is not from here. Bard’s gamelan has an established history in the Hudson Valley, and this means that community members regularly attend our shows. With this again comes the “Woodstock” factor; one particular scene that encapsulates this is a spring semester show heavily attended by community members. In the back of the room where the performance was held, two older community members stood up and began dancing to the gamelan music. They did not dance in any formal Balinese style. This was a free-form, spirited dance. From watching, one could observe that these two audience members felt so connected to the music that they felt moved to stand up and dance. Students conveyed the same story to me at other Giri Mekar and Chandra Kanchana performances, particularly at concerts held off Bard campus, such as the Drum Boogie Festival.

The idea of dancing to gamelan music in this way becomes comical to someone “in the know.” Student performers understand that Balinese gamelan is not a music to which one would traditionally perform contact improvisation. There is also an understanding by many audience
members that a concert by Western standards is a formal space where you remain silent and listen. It is the combination then of an exoticsing of Balinese Hinduism and Balinese gamelan paired with a personal understanding of spirituality that opens people up to this idea of a spiritualized, ecstatic dancing. Audience members, as much as community members, map an idea of Bali and their own relationship between the spiritual and the sonic onto a musical practice that, although sacred in its home context, gets interpreted onto different religious parameters in the United States.

Such practices of spiritual mapping are complicated by the Balinese teachers themselves. There is an understanding through most of the Balinese teachers in the United States that Bali and America are separate entities, and as such are afforded performative differences. They are tolerant of American spiritual ideals, due in large part towards not wanting to offend the very Americans showing interest in their culture. Suadin had particularly enlightening commentary when I asked him about the dancing: “It’s strange. I would never stop someone, because they are having fun. But I think it’s strange. It would be like if I danced Balinese at a hip-hop concert. What would you think of that?” Suadin highlights the real conflict of mapping American spirituality onto Balinese gamelan. For Suadin, it does not make sense. But for these dancing audience members, something spiritual is being conveyed.

Suadin’s remarks also highlight another element of the spiritual mapping that exoticism does not quite fully encapsulate. There is an element of the Balinese ritual practice in gamelan being lost in translation. Under Nyoman Suadin’s direction, every Bard gamelan concert opens with an offering and a prayer that he leads. From the performer’s eyes, this ritual is new and at times confusing. Much like in rehearsal, there is no explanation as to why this is happening, only
in so much to say that it is “good,” or “the right thing to do.” Moreover, this ritual only occurs at the concert, not at dress rehearsals or rehearsals before that. This encourages the musicians to view the ritual as a performance. Yet from the audience's’ perspective, the ritual is an exotic prompt, a confirmation of the exotic spirituality they expected coming into the performance. The perspective not so obviously seen on stage is that of Suadin himself, who although performing, is the only person in the room with an earnest understanding of the religious significance of his actions.

Mediating the way the ritual is seen is Suadin himself. Suadin identifies as a Hindu, and puts in considerable thought behind the scenes, so to speak, in accordance with his religion. “I pray for the gods all the time. I pray for them to help me, to help the students, that nothing bad happens. I pray before the students get [to rehearsal].” In his continuous devotional practice, Suadin produces the broader context that is unknown to the student participants (and, even more so, to audience members). He goes on to explain that: “At one of my other schools, we do a lot more. We have food, and group prayer, and rehearsal cannot start before the gong is hit. But that takes money, and we don’t have that [at Bard]. It does not bother me. I have to respect the culture. And the gods will understand. I do my best.” I asked Suadin if we had the money at Bard, if he would want to do a similar practice here, to which he replied, “of course.” Suadin’s frank discussion reveals that the rituals seen within Bard’s gamelan are taken out of a larger context, in an attempt on Suadin’s part to do what he can in accordance with his religion.

Without more financial support of the gamelan program, aspects like religious ritual have to be cut, leaving musicians and audience members alike with only half of the story.
This is complicated by the relationship between Suadin and the ensemble, defined by a mutual respect that manifests itself as caution. Suadin does not assert his Hinduism and ritual practice out of an interest in not overstepping Bard’s culture. He avoids religion as not to offend. At the same time, many of the Bardian community do not insist on adding more ritual to the rehearsals, because of their interpretation of Suadin’s caution. In an interview with Richard Davis, I asked him about Bard’s lack of religious ritual, and Suadin’s role in this decision. “He’s never insisted on much ritual, nor have any of our other teachers. I must have asked him [at some point for input on ritual], but my recollection, and this is partly just a reconstruction, is that I would have asked him and he would have said something quite casual, like ‘Yeah, okay, we do this in Bali, but we can’t do that here.’ Or something like that. Or ‘I don’t really care about that stuff.’” Davis goes on to say that Suadin is “pretty non-ritualistic,” which complicates what Suadin himself asserts. Davis and other members of the group interpret Suadin’s caution as disinterest, and thus do not push him on this. To be clear, this is a case of lack of communication. Neither party wants to offend the other or overstep any boundaries. But because these boundaries are unspoken, perhaps do to the sensitive and personal nature of religion, a scenario is created in which a more traditionally Hindu gamelan could exist at Bard, but does not. Instead, a middle ground is created where there is some ritual, but that is not the main focus of the group.

There are also instances of embracing the performative aspects of Balinese ritual by Balinese instructors. Within that same interview with Richard Davis, Davis shared a story about a concert where he was asked to perform the opening offering and prayer by a different instructor in Bard’s history. Davis described this instructor as “more into performance.” He liked the idea of the opening prayer, but also noted the lack of Hindu brahmins in the immediate area. A Hindu
brahmin is equivalent to a priest in Catholicism, and the best case scenario would be to have a brahmin perform the prayer. Lacking this, the instructor saw Davis’ Sanskrit scholarship and involvement in the religion department as good enough for Davis to act as brahmin for the show. This prayer consists of the brahmin (in this case, Davis), dressed in performance attire, blessing the performers, instruments, and audience with holy water, as well as lighting and processing with incense. The brahmin would also elaborately recite mantras in sanskrit. This prayer still occurs in the Bard gamelan concerts, enacted by Suadin.

Davis, in addition to being a scholar of Hinduism, has been initiated in a Shaiva Hindu tradition and is in practice a Christian. Enacting the role of brahmin made him very uncomfortable. In the interview, Davis said that “as long as I considered it performance, I felt okay. But if I thought of this as anything that has religious meaning, I thought ‘Oh, I am really counterfeit here. This is exoticising.’ So I felt very ambivalent about doing it. It was kind of fun, and it was kind of weird. But I did it part because [the instructor] liked it.” Davis went on to say that Suadin’s performance of this ritual is more comfortable for him, even though Suadin himself is not a brahmin. Here we see a scenario where religion amplifies questions of authenticity in gamelan in the United States. Religion is extremely personal, and Davis highlights the complicated conversation between performance and staying true to the ritual aspects of gamelan. When put in a position of having to be an authority by an expert, in this case the instructor, the lack of actual connection to the ritual is exposed. This occurs less frequently in other cases, I think in part because of Suadin’s role as ritual leader. It feels less problematic to participate in ritual performance than to lead it, as Davis notes in his comfort with Suadin leading the very same ritual Davis led. Another possible dynamic offered by Richard Davis is the difference of
performing as an Asian versus an American. Hinduism, be it Balinese or otherwise is traditionally an Asian religion, and performing a ritual distinctly non-white as a white person could lead to further discomfort.

When asked about whether ritual should even be present in Bard’s gamelan, knowing that only a partial version of Balinese Hinduism will be reflected in the acts, Davis and Suadin both seemed adamant that it is important to include. As a part of the culture of the music, you could not simply remove it when taken out of its traditional context. Many of the interactions between religion and gamelan in America are complicated, and at times uncomfortable for both the Balinese instructors and American performers, but addressing these interactions allows the gamelan in America to be closer to its original character.

There is also a larger commentary about religion in music to be made here; in the United States religious iconography and terminology is everywhere in our daily lives, but we are accustomed to it. Think about Madonna. Think about how many times the words heaven, hell, and God are used in pop songs. Think about how often we hear church bells in our neighborhoods. As a culture, Americans, especially those who exist in a widely secular academic setting, are numb to pervasive Christianity. American culture broadly tends of secularize Western art music that was previously held as religious. By removing Handel’s Messiah from the church to the concert stage, we disassociate from the religious identity. Yet, we are almost hyper-aware of the role religion plays in Balinese gamelan performance. I would suggest that through the tendency to exoticise non-Western music, students and performers are able to view themselves spiritually and religiously. It is an opportunity to experience the sacred in an otherwise secular performance curriculum.
There are obvious complexities that come when a group of people use a different culture to realize themselves, yet there may also be honest engagement with an important aspect of a specific culture that may create at least some of the spiritual outcomes Suadin and others may wish to achieve. In his chapter in *Performing Ethnomusicology*, David Harnish summarizes the idea well: “Teaching [gamelan] is an ongoing dialectic with compromise. While I insist that students observe such customs as removing their shoes before playing and not stepping over instruments, and I expect them to remember the instruments’ names, I often facilitate learning by limiting Balinese musical terminology or finding Western counterparts” (2004, 132). Balinese gamelan at Bard is definitely an “ongoing dialectic of compromise” as Harnish puts it. In the end, the consensus seems to be that having some religious ritual, which allows the students and community members to engage spiritually, is better than leaving an entire element of the culture behind. This ongoing dialectic of compromise is not just prevalent in religious ritual at Bard, but also in the ways in which the music is transmitted from teacher to student. The following chapter will explore these compromises between teaching styles through numerous ethnographic lenses, considering aspects of transmission such as: the pedagogical styles of Western art music and Balinese traditional music, notation, and tempo.


**Chapter Two: Pedagogy**

My first semester learning gamelan with Nyoman Suadin, in retrospect, was exceedingly challenging and fraught. Many of the students were new to the group, and had joined on a whim. The pieces were difficult, even for the senior students who had played with the group for years. Suadin was a difficult teacher, constantly expecting more out of us. By mid-semester, the student performers, myself included, were visibly frustrated. This was intensified by Suadin’s teaching style, which he refers to as “Balinese style.” This means that there is no, or very little, notation, and all of the music is learned by ear. Unlike in Western rehearsal settings, the learning process is quick, with only a few repetitions before moving on to new parts. Suadin has no patience for slowing pieces down, continuously imploring that we pick up the pace. His frustration with our slow learning capabilities manifests by pre-emptively offering to simplify our pieces, resulting in musicians arguing with Suadin to give them more chances. Suadin will walk away from an instrument, and the musicians playing it, if they are in a particularly difficult section and not comprehending how to play.

Coincidentally, the fall of 2013 was the semester in which Suadin was at his most charmingly kooky. When students would mess up or get lost on particularly difficult sections, they were met with Suadin’s laughter, not scorn. At first, this could be very confusing for students, and almost aggravating. *Why was this teacher laughing at my frustration?* Overtime, I realized that this was a way for Suadin to dispel the frustration. This laughter soon became understood as an inside joke between Suadin and the student. I have been on the receiving end of his laughter many times, and I laugh with him; an understanding is formed that this is not life and death, it is just music. Lighten up. At each difficult turn, Suadin counteracted his own
demanding demeanor with his humor, balancing out the negativity in the room. In trying to get
the students to look at his direction during one piece, Suadin screamed: “Hey! Look at me!” and
after a beat, he cackled: “Am I sexy?” as his smile widened and he showed off his face. As
students we were baffled by this music director, who at the most crucial points of seriousness
dissolved into hilarity.

As the concert neared, it became more and more unlikely that one of our pieces in
particular could be performed without falling apart halfway through. Rehearsal was stressful and
many of my friends in the group dreaded attending. We dreaded the concert. At the dress
rehearsal we ran through all of our pieces, still faltering at times, yet Suadin continued his
humor. He addressed us, saying: “Just smile. Just keep playing. If you are smiling, no one will
know you are not playing correctly. There are many times in Bali when I have no idea.” He
demonstrated this by playing air gamelan, smiling, and cackling. He continued: “It will be great.
I truly love you guys, you are great students.” This was the most heartwarming Suadin had been
all semester, clearly recognizing the concern in the group. Then, after a slight pause, he shouted:
“JUST NIKE!” The room looked dumbfounded, as Suadin erupted into laughter. When he
cUGHT his breath, he continued: “Get it? Just do it! Like Nike!” and then made a check mark in
the air, referencing the Nike company’s logo and slogan.

The concert that followed was not devoid of failure, but it is a treasured memory for both
myself and other students. Many of the performers did not return the next semester, yet when I
interviewed them later on, they expressed adoration for the ensemble. “I would totally do it
again, if I had time. Nyoman was such a character. The concert was so worth it. It made me so
happy.” When pressed on Suadin’s character, the student said: “Nyoman’s difficulty is part of his
charm.” Despite the difficulty, Suadin’s teaching style became a uniting force, that in some ways defines Chandra Kanchana to this day. The pedagogical tactics that are deployed at Chandra Kanchana exist within a larger dialogue of academic performance ensemble schemas, which Solis writes about:

The first we might call ‘realization ensembles’; students enroll in them not primarily for mind opening cultural experiences, but rather to realize pre existing musical skills...We might somewhat waggishly refer to the typical world music group, on the other hand, as an ‘experience ensemble’; students here embrace a second (cultural) childhood, akin to the sort of entirely new musical experience most musicians underwent as children with their first piano lessons or sixth-grade band (2004, 6).

I would suggest that Bard’s gamelan practice falls within this schema of experience ensembles, and the pedagogical methods Suadin and others engage in are in direct conversation with this schema.

One such example of this is the practice of allowing students to switch their instruments after every piece. Hardja Susilo talk about this in Performing Ethnomusicology: “It’s true that in Java musicians can play several instruments, but they don’t play all the instruments that they know how to play all in one night. They would not exchange places unless there was a need to do so...In America this practice is to give different experience to the students, so that they are not stuck to one instrument for the whole semester” (2004, 64). Chandra Kanchana, and many other American student groups, aim to pack the most experience (note Susilo’s own choice of that word) into a short period of time, supposing that a student will only stay in the ensemble for one or two semesters.

Suadin exemplifies the important relationships between teacher, student, ensemble, and learning style, all of which will be explored in this chapter. This chapter explores how different pedagogical styles affect the transmission of gamelan music to American students. Within the
chapter, I problematize two major learning styles: Balinese style, and Western European Art style. These are terms that first became apparent in my ethnographic work, where my teachers would describe a certain pedagogical tools, such as aural learning, as “Balinese style.” Western European Art style then became representative of the opposite of that, a pedagogical style that is primarily notated, among other things. The mission of this chapter is to demonstrate that these two styles are not diametrically opposed, and that the practice of gamelan in America is far more integrated and complicated than at first glance. Every individual teacher has their own personal style, that grabs from many sources, as will be evidenced in this chapter. Teachers develop reputations, and this chapter will highlight their pedagogical differences, at times being lovingly critical to each other. For example, at one point Pak Kertayuda mentioned that Nyoman Suadin was my teacher to the other students, and one student remarked “He’s kind of eccentric, isn’t he?” Each respective section of the chapter will use ethnographic snippets to highlight the unique pedagogy employed by Suadin, Kertayuda, and others.

**Tempo**

To many musicians, one of the more frustrating aspects of Suadin’s pedagogical style can only be described as a “need for speed.” Suadin is consistently pushing the ensemble to play faster. This differs strongly from what most students with Western art performance history have experienced; a focus on learning the music well, then speeding the piece up to its intended tempo. There are times where members of the ensemble, particularly Ylitalo, ask Suadin to slow a section down, and loop it, to facilitate learning. Suadin is often reluctant to do this and will agree with phrases such as “Okay, if that’s what you want to do.” The tone, in my experience,
reminds me of a parent, allowing a child to pursue something the parent would not have advised otherwise. This is indicative of a communication breakdown on pedagogical style. For Suadin, the best way to learn the piece is to learn it in its original tempo. It is equally frustrating for Suadin to slow the piece down to something unrecognizable as it is frustrating for performers to learn something at breakneck speed.

The pacing of Pak Kertayuda’s rehearsals at Indonesian Dance of Illinois in Chicago are very different and were, much like Suadin’s rehearsals, equal parts frustrating and refreshing. In Kertayuda’s rehearsals there was always time for, as he put it, “extensions.” These were times where the ensemble could highlight sections that were troublesome and workshop them, a practice common in Western Art style. Kertayuda took the time to repeat sections and give one on one time to individual students who were struggling, and was not fussed if a student spoke up and asked for help. This is completely opposite to Suadin’s style. At one rehearsal with IDI, we spent nearly 20 minutes working on one song’s slanket, or embellishment. I would not have been able to master this section without the time Kertayuda spent on it, and I left the rehearsal feeling very thankful for this new pedagogical technique. At the same time, Suadin’s employment of what he perceives as a more traditional Balinese style creates muscle memory quickly, and I was able to use this muscle memory to learn Kertayuda’s parts quicker than some of the other students in the group. The slower rehearsal became personally frustrating at times when I had mastered a piece and was waiting for other students to catch up. This learning style benefitted the slowest learner, whereas Suadin’s style encouraged everyone to be quick learners.

I was not able to fully understand Suadin’s need to push the tempo until I was working through a transcription project in which I compared Balinese ensembles to American ensembles.
I was examining a children’s *kebyar* group performing, the eldest of which were maybe in their early teens. I was shocked and impressed by their sheer skill, what I perceived to be worlds ahead of Chandra Kanchana’s playing. While working on an analysis of the piece, I had a persistent, nagging feeling that I recognized it. It wasn’t until after the project’s completion that I realized Chandra Kanchana had been playing the very same piece that semester. By measuring the *ketuk* beats in a beat per minute app, I determined that Chandra Kanchana played the piece at 135 bpm, compared to the Balinese group who played at 145 bpm. Although these two numbers do not seem wildly different, contextually it highlighted the inherent tempo differences between Suadin and Ylitalo’s pedagogical styles.

First, and most obviously, the Balinese group were playing at a faster tempo than the American students *as children*. Some of these students have been playing for the same amount of time as Bard students, but this shows how ingrained gamelan is in Balinese culture. These children, and Suadin himself, grew up with gamelan, and therefore may be more fluent in acquiring playing skills. Comparatively, Bard students have very little to zero musical memory of gamelan prior to joining the group. For Suadin, the tempo of the pieces are ingrained, but for the American students, it is only natural to want to slow the piece down to try and understand the music.

Second, the children’s group’s playing was foreign to me, even though I was playing the same piece once a week in rehearsal. This speaks to a couple different things; the sheer difference in ability and musical recall between the Balinese children and the American students. In many regards, it was unrecognizable to me not just because of tempo, but because of the embellishments and added parts. This reiterates Suadin’s frustration with the slow tempo
preferred by his American students in order to feel secure in the music, and points at how the arrangement is already simplified. This then doubles Suadin’s frustration, because his students are unable to play a simplified arrangement at full speed. But how can Suadin hope to push the ensemble, when I could not, as a music student analyzing the music, recognize it? The natural conclusion is an uncomfortable back and forth between performer and teacher, speeding up the music and learning, and slowing it down.

Some teachers hope to provide the stability that many American students seek by providing additional guidance through notation. Traditionally balinese gamelan is a non-notated musical culture, yet many academics (most famously Mantle Hood) studying the music have tried to use notation as a tool to decipher the form of the music. In America, notation is a contested pedagogical tool, and speaks heavily to the “ongoing dialectic of compromise,” that becomes intrinsic when gamelan is taught in the Western academy.

Notation

The majority of my gamelan playing has been with Chandra Kanchana at Bard, which practices as Suadin puts it, “Balinese style.” Therefore, the majority of my learning has been non-notated. This style does have indigenous terminology connected to it, namely the term *maguru panggul*, literally, ‘teaching with the mallet’ (Bakan, 282). The only instruments that had any form of notation were the *calungs*, and although this seemed out of place to me, I chalked this up to the will of Ylitalo and other community members who provided the notation to the students. Thus, it was fascinating for me when Pak Kertayuda used notation at IDI. At the rehearsals, musicians come in, sit down with the gamelan and Kertayuda starts working through
the music. Kertayuda brought out large white boards that have each songs’ notation written out. This notation is not like Western art style, but relies on a numerical system that relates to the keys on the instruments. The anklung we performed on at IDI only have 4 keys, compared to the larger gangsas of the gong kebyar at Bard. The notation then is a series of 1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s, that coincides with which notes are being played. The form of the piece is written out under headings titled in either Indonesian or English. The notation also incorporates repeat signs taken from the Western style.

Much like experiencing Suadin and Kertayuda’s varying styles in teaching tempo, experiencing their alternating pedagogical opinions about notation was both rewarding and confusing for me. With Suadin, learning occurred, ironically, slower, because students learn everything by ear, which is a skill many students have not previously developed. With Kertayuda, I engaged with the notation very quickly, and could produce the melody after only a few repetitions, although it is important to note that I was using both my muscle memory built by Suadin and my notational skills taught from a background in Western art musical theory.

This became very complicated for me when I showed up for a rehearsal at IDI only to find we were learning a piece that was not written out for us. It was a simple enough piece, repetitive and slow, but I struggled to memorize it without the notes written out in front of me, especially after attending three or four rehearsals previously which had all been notated. At first I took this as a failing on the teaching style, feeling like my failing was proof that Suadin’s style was superior. When we continued on to previously rehearsed piece, sans notation, I began to refute my own assumption, as I found myself engaging with the muscle memory I associated purely with Suadin’s traditional Balinese style. The muscle memory had indeed built up after
paying attention to the written notes, and trying to play this piece without the notes was much
easier than learning a new one from scratch. Later on, with the white board back out, I observed
one of the other IDI students, Sandra, playing. She looked at what she was playing and at
Kertayuda, while still checking the whiteboard at times. I realized that I had crucially
misinterpreted Kertayuda’s style, and that perhaps I had misused the notation. I had gained the
muscle memory, but had used the notation as a crutch, instead of focusing on what I was playing.
Suadin’s style forces you to do this, whereas Kertayuda’s style asks you far more subtly to apply
both the style of aural transmission hand in hand with a more Western art style of notation.

Recalling this now, I am struck by my own misstep in thinking that Kertayuda’s use of
notation was an appropriation of a Western art style of theory. In actuality, I believe that
Kertayuda used notation as a tool within the Balinese style, which was exhibited in its intended
use by Sandra. This was not the only tool Kertayuda used. As a way of learning more complex
vocal lines Kertayuda would have the entire ensemble sing melody lines as they were written on
the whiteboard. For me, this was a fascinating and intuitive learning style, because of my
Western Art background as a choral and opera singer. Kertayuda was teaching us to sight sing,
and this makes internalizing the melodies very easy. Weeks later, I found myself singing the
melodies in my head and even out loud during rehearsal, to help myself memorize the melodic
patterns. Kertayuda’s style of teaching utilizes as many different tactics as possible to teach a
non-native population of style of music that is not intuitive for them. At times, this means using
pedagogical styles that are more familiar to his American students.

Notation’s use within gamelan should not be the chief learning aid as it is in Western art
style. Sandra showed how notation, used in coordination with the Balinese style’s use of muscle
memory, and attention to what the leader is doing, can be very fruitful. Sandra’s use of notation, as well as my own failure due to dependence on it, shows how it can be complicated to introduce notation into Balinese gamelan practice in America. It is so easy to be caught on an extreme of what appears to be a binary opposition of these notated and non-notated practice, much like I was. Oftentimes students, such as myself, have a background in using notation, and when they see it, immediately use it as a tool of dependence. It becomes very difficult to rewrite its usage. Suadin’s use of notation with the calung every semester results in a similar scene as exhibited above, where the students’ performance crashes without the notation. Yet, when engaged with how Kertayuda intends it, as Sandra exhibits, notation could be a tool to boost an American student with a Western art music background.

Notation is further contested between the Balinese teachers themselves. Obviously, Kertayuda and Suadin have differing opinions of this pedagogical tool, despite being from the same village in Bali and speaking fondly of each other. When I asked Kertayuda about their differing styles, Kertayuda said: “[Suadin’s style] is traditional Balinese. My style is very helpful to the students. This way all of the students can learn. We start out slow and calm. Once you learn it, then you remember it in the future. But new students and slower learners, they can still practice.” Kertayuda asserts that his style, combining a slower tempo of learning with notation, is better for the Americans students than Suadin’s “traditional Balinese” style. Essentially, Kertayuda is advocating compromising between Balinese learning and Western Art learning. Months later, I asked Suadin, unaware of Kertayuda’s opinion, about Kertayuda’s heavy use of notation: “Pak Kertayuda uses the whiteboard because he is a dancer. He wants quick results, that are easy for American students. I give the calung notes because I give the gangsas so much
attention. I don’t want them to be sitting there with nothing.” Suadin is asserting that
Kertayuda’s compromise results in a quick product, so that there is focus on dancing.

Kertayuda’s primary art is dance, whereas Suadin’s is music, but these two are essential for each
other in Balinese art. The dancer cannot dance without music, and Suadin points that Kertayuda
is perhaps more invested in the dance than the music. These quick results derived from the use of
notation do not necessarily result in the “best gamelan music” according to Suadin. Suadin goes
on to explain his use of notation as a teaching tool to expedite the pedagogical process, passively
suggesting that if he had the time to fully teach the calungs, he would do away with giving them
notation.

Kertayuda and Suadin are not the only Balinese voices in the notation debate. Hardja
Susilo, who teaches gamelan at the University of Hawaii, was interviewed on the subject of
notation in Solis’ book: “For one thing, what is written is incomplete information. It does not tell
you when and how to accelerate, to stop, to get soft, to get loud, to drop off, to make transitions,
etc. Secondly, it hinders your playing; it makes you less sensitive to interrelationship, less
perceptive to signals, oblivious to concurrent events, etc” (2004, 62). Susilo gets at the
importance of the ensemble as a whole, and the need to understand not just what is written in
standard notation. I think this would be Suadin’s chief complaint here, yet Kertayuda’s use of
notation also encourages this when done right. Sandra spent more time looking at Kertayuda then
she did at the notation. When notation is used as a learning aid, instead of as a replacement for
the teacher, then I believe there can be a balance of its use as a pedagogical tool within the
Balinese style of learning.
As evidenced above, notation can be a double edged sword when employed within American gamelan practice. Michael Bakan writes about this in his book *Music of Death and New Creation*. Bakan was learning Balinese drumming and was attempting to use notation alongside the teachings of his Balinese teacher. At first, mirroring the results of Pak Kertayuda, the notation was extremely helpful. Bakan writes:

I put down my pen...and began to play back what I had written. Immediately, Sukarata joined in with me, but playing the interlocking *wadon* part rather than the *lanang* part he had been demonstrating. Our parts fitted together correctly. Apparently the transcription was accurate. Sukarata seemed impressed, and a little surprised...The musicians of the Seminyak beleganjur ensemble, who had been observing all the while, laughed and nodded approvingly, as though reacting to a clever card trick (1999, 302).

Here we see notation being a helpful tool for quick memorization for Bakan.

As the learning process continued for Bakan, the notation became cumbersome and less helpful, as exhibited by the struggles *calung* performers have within Chandra Kanchana. Bakan writes about this process of notation failing, saying:

In addition, navigating my way through the labyrinth of notation, even when I was nominally successful in the effort, demanded so much concentration that it detracted from my ability to play musically, with the ironic consequence that my playing started to become more stiff and mechanical-sounding with each lesson. An abiding obsession with ‘the notes’ caused me to lose sight of the music, to forget about playing with the style and to neglect the importance of creating a groove with Sukarata (1999, 306).

Bakan’s testimony highlights some of the anxieties of forgetting the context while using the notation, that Balinese teachers such as Suadin has. Furthermore, this resonates with Suadin’s frustrations about students being mechanical, and not entirely understanding the music.

There is no easy answer to whether notation is good or bad for learning Balinese gamelan. Quite simply, it is up to the teacher, and the ways in which they can best communicate with their students. In all of the above examples, we have seen the Balinese teaching Americans;
but what happens when an American attempts to teach other Americans? The next section
section will explore this idea, viewing the pedagogical styles of Bard gamelan member Bill
Ylitalo. Ylitalo pushes both Suadin and Kertayuda’s ideas further, striving for “traditional”
playing oftentimes through non-traditional learning, creating a hybrid approach.

A Hybrid Approach

The first rehearsal of Chandra Kanchana in the Fall 2015 year began, as most of the first
fall sessions do, with a relaxed introduction led by Bill Ylitalo. The semester starts before Suadin
can come and teach, so this leaves a gap period which serves as an introduction to gamelan for
many first time players. This period gives time for the new students to learn the instruments, and
for Ylitalo to give his yearly gamelan “spiel”. He spends his time in the first rehearsal talking a
lot about the instruments, how they sound, and playing each instrument’s notes slowly up and
down. Many of the returning students jump in to talk about the instruments with Ylitalo, and to
explain which are their favorites. The excitement spreads to the new students, and when we get
to basic playing, everyone really enjoys themselves. In this early stage before Suadin arrives,
rehearsals are more about introduction and community building than learning new material. This
focus on community building strengthens the community bond, and I have seen the bond
between fall semester ensembles often be stronger than the spring semester ensembles, where
there is not this relaxed period early on.

Outside of this relaxed period, Ylitalo is the stand in for Suadin for whenever Suadin
cannot attend rehearsal. This happens often enough, as Suadin teaches at many colleges across
the East Coast. Ylitalo’s lessons are often skill based, focused not on rehearsal of repertoire like
Suadin’s rehearsals, but instead on honing in technique. One such lesson focuses on dampening technique, or the act of stopping the previous note with one hand, before playing the next one with the mallet. To do this, Ylitalo will teach a simple melody, sometimes only consisting of one or two notes and cycle it for extended periods of time, allowing students ample time to practice the technique.

Ylitalo’s lessons also sneak in Balinese concepts, much like how a parent will sneak vegetables into a child’s dinner, into the seemingly simple practice exercises. Take the dampening lesson: while each individual plays these two note melodies, Ylitalo is also getting their ears used to major concepts in gamelan playing. He brings in dynamics and starts to acclimate the students towards these cues. He starts to mix in song structure by switching up who plays which note, as well as throwing in an *ugal* [large *gangsa*] solo and a drum solo. Although the students themselves may only be playing one or two notes in this exercise, a collective and interlocking rhythmic pattern is formed, and these patterns will be common in the songs performed later. In this way, Ylitalo’s simple technique exercises are actually preparing the students, whose often have a background in Western styles of music, to start seriously playing Balinese gamelan when Suadin arrives.

For a lot of the returning students, Ylitalo’s teaching can also be extremely tedious. Ylitalo does not often change his rehearsal, focusing on the same lessons repeated over and again. This is not a big deal for many, because they have not had the lesson before or are still learning the concepts, but for committed students who return every semester, the lesson becomes stale. At this point, experienced students have gained a lot of skill as well as structural concepts through rehearsing with Suadin. At times, students will even skip rehearsals when they hear that Suadin
will not be present, anticipating that it will less productive. This does not mean Ylitalo’s rehearsal lessons are bad; to the contrary, I believe they are crucial in filling in a lot of the gaps of what Suadin does not teach up front.

Ylitalo offers a hybrid approach, like Kertayuda, that uses many different familiar tools to address student comfort. In fact, all of the teachers mentioned above, including Suadin and the case that Bakan mentions, are using a hybrid approach of teaching Balinese gamelan. They supplement the “traditional” with the “Western” and the “modern,” as an attempt to bridge the learning gap between Americans and Balinese music. Even through their eclectic, idiosyncratic approaches, they all have a reference point to Balinese style, oft referenced as “groove” or “feel.” They all hint at a different pedagogical tool within Balinese gamelan learning that is hard to teach, or at least that for non-Balinese students takes time to understand. The next section advances an interpretation of what this could mean, when enacted socially. It will address what it is exactly that these teachers are talking about, as well as getting to the heart of is Balinese style.

So What Is Balinese Style, Then?

One of the most crucial underlying concepts that plays into these pedagogical differences is an aspect of Balinese style that is often hard to describe: feeling. This has to do with the sort of music Balinese gamelan is; it's always social, always interlocking, always united. Unlike Western art style, it is very rare to practice away from the ensemble. There is not a culture of taking your instrument home and rehearsing and coming back to the group prepared. J. Lawrence Witzleben has an insightful quote about this in his article within Performing Ethnomusicology. He said this about performing a piece early in his study of gamelan:
After practicing it for many hours on my own, I performed it with the beginning group as part of the annual ‘Pau Hana’ gathering of student ensembles, and felt quite pleased with myself. Pak [Hardja] Susilo kindly praised my performance, then went on to explain that ‘we don’t play it that way in Java.’ I had learned the notes almost perfectly, but played them in the wrong place. (2004, 146).

Not only does this speak to the communal aspect of gamelan performance, but it also highlights the importance of interlocking patterns. If you play the notes in the wrong place, you cannot accurately match your fellow players. To truly achieve good gamelan playing, there is an element of releasing yourself from the notes and the playing and tuning in with the music and your fellow players.

There is a history of ethnomusicologists trying to accurately capture this phenomena, sometimes in misguided ways. Colin McPhee wrote in an article, *Children and Music in Bali*, later cited by Michael Bakan in *Music of Death and New Creation*, that:

The teacher does not seem to teach, certainly not from our [a Western] standpoint. He is merely the transmitter; he simply makes concrete the musical idea which is to be handed on, sets the example before the pupils and leaves the rest to them. It is as though, in teaching drawing, a complex design were hung on the wall and one said to students, ‘Copy that.’ ...He explains nothing, since for him, there is nothing to explain (1999, 282).

McPhee is obviously mystified by, as well as rehearsing a language of exoticism around, a style of pedagogy far removed from notated, formulaic Western art style. McPhee is looking for the ineffable within gamelan practice. I propose however that what McPhee sees as mystical is actually the social foundation upon which gamelan is built. Gamelan is a practice built on trust; trusting your teacher, your peers, and yourself.

One way Suadin attempts to teach trust to his students is through communication while playing. Suadin is always stressing how important it is for us to look at each other while performing. Many times students get caught up in the notes of the gamelan, and only look down
at what they are playing. In doing this, they lose sight (and sound) of what is going on with the rest of the ensemble. I have seen this actually operate to the detriment of performers, as they get out of sync with the rest of the ensemble, miss cues, or ignore tempo instructions. This is what Susilo was talking about when he mentions that notation does not provide information on “how to accelerate, to stop, to get soft, to get loud, to drop off, to make transitions, etc” (2004, 62). This information is provided by the other ensemble members, like the ketuk player, the gong player, the ugal player, and the drummer. On top of this, gamelan is an inherently interlocking music. All of the different instruments speak to each other and fit together in different ways, thus it is necessary for all of the performers to not just communicate with each other, but to trust that everyone is together. This is why Suadin stresses eye contact with others so often during rehearsals.

Bakan comes to a similar conclusion after struggling to learn Balinese drumming. It was not until the end of his learning period with his teacher that he realized the crucial missing part in his education: trust. This was the key to creating the “groove” he mentioned earlier. He writes:

When Sukarata finally forced me to trust him…the depth of my understanding of what trust meant to him and should mean to me became far greater than it would have had my resistance to his will not been so strong…He wrenched me from a musical place where I had been determined to remain and showed me that true musical experience is the experience of trust, that only when we learn to trust one another, to dissolve in the realization of our shared humanity, will the music finally play (1999, 333).

I find Bakan’s talk on a shared humanity to be a bit too close to McPhee’s exoticising to be comfortable with it, but it cannot be denied that a teaching of trust, both of other performers and of your teacher is essential to good gamelan performance. I see trust as the through line that shoots through many pedagogical methods within gamelan: as students we are encouraged to trust your muscle memory, trust your teaching, trust your peers playing. This, I would submit, is
part of the difficulty in parting with notation for American students; they are asked to trust everything but the visual.

Suadin’s consistent wish to speed things up, and to not repetitively cycle sections of the piece, is also a wish for his students to trust him; to trust that if they keep at it, they will learn how to play. Bakan writes about this as well, saying:

As was mentioned, [the drum student] jumps directly into the act of drumming without first listening to what he is being instructed to play. In contrast to a schooled Western musician facing similar learning challenges, [the drum student] approaches his formidable task with little initial concern for knowing what the music is supposed to sound like before he attempts to perform it. To a Western observer, his approach may appear random and chaotic, disruptive to the teacher, even counterproductive. This was indeed my first reaction. Yet closer study revealed that ‘playing before thinking’ is part of a systematic learning strategy that is characteristic of Balinese music-learning situations: simultaneous reception and attempted reproduction of the music performance model are part of standard practice (1999, 285).

By pushing the ensemble to just play, and to play fast, he is attempting to teach the most important part of gamelan music first: the feel. Accuracy will come.

In Western art music styles, students are taught to play as slow as possible until near perfection of the notes is acquired, and only then does one accelerate. As Bakan and my ethnographic work reveals, trust, and that it is okay to make mistakes, is the first thing our Balinese teachers are trying to teach us, and often one of the last things we learn. If there is such a thing as a Balinese style, I would like to suggest that it resides in the social dynamics of the community, rather than a formal pedagogical structure. As Suadin put it while rebuking a student for having their head stuck looking down, “The song will come to you. You do not come to the song.”
Chapter Three: Circulation

As mentioned earlier, Ylitalo does a lot to build community within the often transient Chandra Kanchana group. One of the ways in which he does this is by connecting with students about other music, often punk, metal, electronic, and hip-hop. Ylitalo will where his Run D.M.C. jacket to rehearsal, and bring in old vinyl from his punk bands, where he went under the moniker Otto Kontrol. And on breaks at rehearsals, Ylitalo proves his cool on the gamelan, performing different licks by musicians like Slayer and Jimi Hendrix on the gangsa. The first time I saw Ylitalo play Hendrix on the gangsa, he called out “Wanna see something cool?” Then he proceeded to play a main melody from the song “Voodoo Child,” and followed it up with “Wild Thing” by The Troggs. He went on to explain how he figured this out; not by ear, but by studying the tuning of a gangsa and a piano. He talked about intervals, using terminology like “cents,” common to jazz theory. After he was done, some students applauded and remarked “That was sweet.” Suadin, watching the scene in amusement, cried “Good job, Bill!”

Ylitalo is bridging numerous gaps between Balinese gamelan performance and student lives in this short example. He is connecting to gamelan to music students know well, bringing their musical interests together with gamelan. He’s also connecting with many of the students on Western theory. By talking about intervals, cents and tunings, he is bringing the gamelan into the world of music playing that many of the students have a background in. Ylitalo often encourages students to do more with the gamelan, offering students keys to the closets that hold the instruments so they can use them in experimental and electronic music groups outside of rehearsal. In doing this, gamelan becomes less of a foreigner to students, and suddenly has a universal appeal. It becomes less of an ensemble, and more of an instrument, a tool.
On a different occasion, Ylitalo and I bonded over a shared interest in Milwaukee-based band, the Violent Femmes. Ylitalo and I are both from Wisconsin and regularly culturally connect over this. He showed me how to play their hit “Blister in the Sun” on the gangsa, then we recorded it to show my friends. For me, this was another way for me to connect gamelan to my greater musical life. Most of my friends, and especially family do not know what Balinese gamelan is, and have never encountered it. I can show them videos and pictures, but connecting the gamelan to music more common to them helps bridge the gap. I sent the video to my mom, who then shared it on social media for her friends. Much like the students reactions to Ylitalo, there was an overwhelming reaction of “cool.” It felt good to be recognized as a musician and for people to gain a wider understanding of what it is I do.

The past chapters have explored ways in which gamelan has transformed and adapted as it circulated from Bali to the United States. This chapter explores newer loops of circulations between gamelan music and American rock, pop, and experimental music. As it travels, the gamelan morphs from traditional ensemble into many new and different forms: rock instrument, pop ensemble, and hybrid machine. Because of the newness and inaccessibility of a lot of these musics, I would like to widen the scope of this chapter from Bali to Indonesia, to include music from Java and Sunda. Both Javanese and Sundanese gamelan have institutional histories within the United States much like the Balinese practice, although Javanese gamelan is more prevalent than the Sundanese variety. These gamelan practices sound more delicate than their Balinese counterpart, yet have still experienced the same level of circulation and experimentation. Bringing the gamelan into the Western world has not just changed its religious and pedagogical
identity, but seriously altered the gamelan’s usage, begging the question: What is gamelan music in a modern global landscape?

I would like to situate this chapter within the framework of Steven Feld’s essay “A Sweet Lullaby For World Music.” The article addresses the advent of a global “world music” industry in the 1990’s, which changed the way music was produced, consumed, and circulated through many parts of the world. He looks at various ways in which this process complicated musical authenticity and commodified musical traditions, and most importantly for this chapter, explored these thoughts via two lenses: the celebratory and the anxious. Feld submits that a celebratory view of world music may focus “on the production of hybrid musics. They place a positive emphasis on fluid identities, sometimes edging towards romantic equations of hybridity with overt resistance” (2000, 152). The anxious view of world music is then described as questioning “whether world music is used more to incite or erase musical diversity, asking why and how musical loss is countered by the proliferation of new musics” (2000: 152). I will engage these two poles of discourse--the anxious and celebratory--to consider the circulation of new gamelan musics, both in Indonesia and in America.

In this chapter, I will first explore the celebratory lens in dialogue with new gamelan creation in Indonesia, specifically through the lens of the fusion of gamelan and rock music. I will see how Indonesians navigate the complicated waters of a traditional, indigenous music, meeting with a more cosmopolitan, younger practice, and how these very different practices influence and change each other. Then, I will introduce the anxious lens to create a dialogue about the ways in which Americans are reinventing the gamelan instrument, and to question how far transformations can go before they problematize a cultural tradition. In the end, I hope to
provide more questions than answers, ending with a neutral view of how gamelan circulations between America and Indonesia effects the music as a whole, allowing the reader to come to their own celebratory or anxious conclusions.

**Gamelan Meets Rock and Pop**

The marriage between indigenous musics and rock n’ roll is storied, with many cultures exhibiting fusion music as early as the 50’s and 60’s. Feld writes in “A Sweet Lullaby to World Music” about the resurgence of Western awareness of these fusions via the world music global industry boom of the 1990’s (2000, 150). Since Feld’s writing, the idea of a global music dialogue, often fueled by pop music, has become even more common, especially with the advent of the internet making music of all sorts widely accessible. Thus it is no surprise to see American rock and pop music embraced in the Indonesian culture, and transformed into their own music.

In Indonesia in the 1990’s the most popular incarnation of this was *dangdut*. *Dangdut* is a popular music genre that pulls from many sources, including Bollywood singing, Middle Eastern pop Western rock, R&B, and others. *Dangdut* uses the gamelan drum, the sitar, and synthesizers among many more instruments, but does not traditionally incorporate the rest of the gamelan instruments, including *gangsas, gongs*, etc. All of this is to help situate the music I will address in the section, and to highlight Indonesia’s rich history conversing between traditional music and music of the world (Sen and Hill, 76).

This brings me to the case of gamelan in this history. My experience with Ylitalo, watching him perform rock hits on the gamelan, got me interested in what was possible with the instruments. A google search revealed more examples than I expected, all of which can be found
on Youtube as of April 28th, 2016: large groups of gamelan players perform songs like “Thriller” by Michael Jackson, or “The Final Countdown” by Europe. It is equal parts eerie, exhilarating, and fascinating to see both the pop songs and the gamelan transformed into something very different. For me, one of the most interesting examples was seeing gamelan paired with rock ensembles, similar to the hybrid example of d ang d ut. One such group was the Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern, a group of young Javanese musicians invested in incorporating gamelan instruments into ensembles that also feature drum sets, rock guitars, synthesizers, and more. This section will focus mainly on their 2013 video mash-up, which can be found on Youtube as of April 28th, 2016, of “Mawar Bodas” and “We Found Love,” examining how Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern unites multiple musical influences to reclaim gamelan back from the provincialism the Western academy tends to box it into, turning it into something worldly, modern, Indonesian, and fun.

The word kolaborasi in Indonesian means collaborative, and that is inherently what Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern (KGM) are. The makeup of KGM themselves speak to this: young musicians of all genders, already breaking with traditional gamelan rules that encourage gamelans to be all male. They are performing at what seems to be a small music festival, with other rock groups and more traditional groups in attendance. They have matching outfits, dark slacks with a loud red print shirt, a call out both to rock n’ roll of the 50’s and 60’s, as well as traditional gamelan performance which also uses matching loud prints to accentuate dark attire. They perform mainly on stage, with three Javanese gangsas set up in front, and the back row consisting of the gamelan drum, two electric guitars, and electric bass, and a drum kit. The two
singers, one male, one female, jump down from the stage before the song starts, as the stage is fairly cramped.

KGM are performing a mash-up of “Mawar Bodas” by *dangdut* star Detty Kurnia and “We Found Love” by American pop star Rihanna. This in itself speaks volumes. Kurnia was a huge *dangdut* star, and “Mawar Bodas” was one of her most popular songs. This is a song that most Indonesians would be familiar with. On the flip side, “We Found Love” by Rihanna was a massive global hit, by a massive global pop star. KGM’s mash-up situates themselves within a global frame, as well as an Indonesian frame. By performing global pop music, they break gamelan away from being a traditional instrument, and separates the music from the mystical, Western gaze. At the same time, KGM engages their prime audience, Indonesians, by presenting music that is also more locally relevant. In fact, by unifying these two musics in a hybrid musical setting, I believe that KGM are doing extensive work to claim Indonesian pop music as just as important as Western-based pop.

Another aspect of performance that unites but also fuses Indonesia, gamelan, and the wider global pop phenomenon together is the length of the piece. “We Found Love” clocks in around 3:30 minutes, the standard for Western pop music. “Mawar Bodas” is a longer song, around five minutes total. Yet, KGM’s total track is nearly eleven minutes long. They have spent time composing how they will perform their rendition of this track, and how they wish to mix the songs together. Thus, KGM asserts a preference for longer music, an idea that they follow up in other videos they have posted online, as well as many other groups posting pop and rock songs on the gamelan. Many of the groups have a tendency to extend the song into the ten minute range. This is a preference that I think harkens back to the gamelan music that this music is being
performed on. Most gamelan music across Indonesia is short at eight minutes, and some pieces can play for twenty minutes or longer. By choosing to extend the music, and allow musical passages to grow, swell, and build, KGM are invoking the gamelan music they are borrowing their instruments from. This is another way in which this group, and many others, injects gamelan concepts into modern hybrid gamelan performance.

KGM reflects the gamelan roots in other ways in their arrangement as well. The piece starts, just as the gong kebyar at Bard does, with a short hit of the Indonesian drum. The performance then starts with a slow, explorative section on the gangsa, reminiscent of traditional gamelan performance. This is only interrupted slightly by the electric guitar joining in and lightly playing the melody that the gangsa have set up. As this section concludes, and the piece is ready to kick into full gear, it is the Indonesian drum player, not the drum kit player who shouts “Hey!” as the opening cue. All of these are critical artistic choices linking KGM’s music with traditional gamelan music. The group has a drum kit, and could start the song with a count in from the kit drummer, much like Western rock music does. Instead, the Indonesian drum player is the leader at both opportunities, and even starts the piece like a traditional gamelan piece would be started. To add to this, by highlighting the gangsa at the beginning of the piece, KGM asserts the gangsa importance in the group. Furthermore, by adding the electric guitar into the mix, KGM cues the listener early on that although this may seem traditional, what will follow will be more modern.

About halfway through the performance, the video pans to show a handful of people, roughly ten or so, come in front of the stage and begin to dance. In the background, we can see others, shop owners and other festival goers, watching KGM perform. The focus is mainly on
these dancing individuals, of all ages, mainly men. (One of them, dressed in uniform, seems to be a police officer joining in on the fun). They are dancing freely to the music, but they are also mimicking the traditional dancing style of Indonesian dance. They move their hands as if they are costumed and performing with a traditional gamelan ensemble. These audience members are marking this as something Indonesian.

Soon, more dancers run over to join in the crowd. The song transitions here to the Rihanna section of the song. Upon first listen, I figured the focus would be on the female vocalist. Instead, the gangsa players get a prominent section before the singer comes in. This emphasis is then reinforced by the dancers themselves, as they begin to play “air gangsa.” They mimic the rhythm of what the gangsas are playing, and also mimic dampening in their other hand. While they do this, the singer begins singing the Rihanna lyrics. The remaining audience continues to dance as the song transitions back to “Mawar Bodas” and concludes. I believe that the audience members in this example are recognizing the Indonesian element of KGM’s performance by dancing in a way that is relevant to the culture.

So who is this music for? An anxious view might suppose that this “world pop” ensemble is a way of manufacturing Indonesian music for Western tourists, appealing to their pop sensibilities, as well as the possible kitschiness of inserting gamelan into the mix. However, the video of this performance, along with many others, suggests the opposite: all of these Indonesian pop/gamelan hybrids are for Indonesians. The videos are all written in the Indonesian language, the festivals at which these songs are performed are not large tourist attractions, and the audience consists of Indonesians, as exhibited by the dancers in the KGM video. The audience’s style of
engagement and presence, as well as a lack of tourist presence, solidifies the idea that KGM is creating and performing mixed genre music for Indonesians, and not as a marketing ploy.

Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern is only one example of a gamelan rock/pop hybrid, but there are many others out there, and they align with what this particular video shows. These Indonesian based experimentations with mixing Indonesian music, like gamelan and dangdut with primarily American pop and rock music push gamelan music outside of its normal context. These artists engage with widely circulated material, taking in American influences and recycling them into something marked as Indonesian. This is why I view this practice through a celebratory viewpoint: there is a reclamation of the gamelan, an Indonesian music circulated out of Indonesia, while simultaneously reimagining a global American pop hit as their own. It is also important for Americans to view this music, to view how other cultures change and adapt American music, and to view musical cultures outside of their traditional narratives. While writing on the celebratory pole of discourse, Feld quotes David Rothenberg, “...diverse musical strains need not fade away into one global monotone. If there is such a thing as development, it will include a joyful and chaotic mix of many sounds, a music that plays on while no one knows how it is going to end (2000, 153). The sort of experimentation that KGM and others do with the gamelan removes the instruments from the hands of Colin McPhee-esque mysticism, and returns it to modern Indonesia, creating new “diverse musical strains” that keeps gamelan relevant moving forward as a cultural music.

It remains to state the obvious, that with the introduction of gamelan into the United States, and particular with its institutionalization in the academy as this project has outlined, Americans have also taken many liberties with the gamelan instruments, experimenting with the
boundaries of what is traditional. However, this is often accomplished in a way that attempts to freeze the music instead of allowing it to evolve. In other contexts, such as art projects that attempt to fuse gamelan with cutting edge technology, a revived discourse of exoticism can be observed. The next section will examine, via the example of the Gamelatron, how Americans have mixed gamelan with the mechanical, and how this may suggest a more “anxious” interpretation of this experiment in hybridity.

**Gamelan Meets Machine**

I first came across the Gamelatron through my mom. There was a video about the project in its incarnation at the Maker Faire in San Francisco, and she thought it would be a cool share. The video showed me a gamelan gong suspended in air via a metal frame, with six *reyong* gongs under it in a row, also suspended within the metal frame. The metal skeleton had *reyong* mallets rigged up to it, that hit the gongs at different times depending on its programming. Around the Gamelatron were cushions and a plush sitting area, inviting the festival goers to sit and listen. I was immediately struck by how different this was then the gamelan I knew. The “tron” portion of the instrument felt more apt a description than anything else; this was not gamelan, this was a machine.

The creator of the Gamelatron is Aaron Taylor Kuffner, and his Maker Faire installation of the Gamelatron is one of many. He recently set up multiple such instruments in an abandoned warehouse in Brooklyn, has appeared at the Burning Man festival, and installs Gamelatron exhibits in numerous museums around the world. This section will consider the discourse of anxiety to work through the ways in which I believe Kuffner’s Gamelatron hinders the forward
motion of the gamelan tradition. Both the Gamelatron and KGM are fusing Indonesian traditions with more modern, Western musics, and both are re-examining how gamelan instruments can be used in new music. Yet unlike KGM, Kuffner separates the gamelan further from Indonesian culture, and closer to a mystical, inaccurate view of the practice.

I would like to start with Kuffner’s own mission statement for the Gamelatron. As of April 28th, 2016, the Gamelation Mission page of his website states:

The artworks' mission is to expand the legacy and creative cultural power of gamelan through innovation. The Gamelatron Project exposes us to the rich and profound nature of resonance and its effect on the psyche. It strives to create a harmony in the tension of fusing the East and the West, the Modern and the Ancient. The Gamelatron's contrasting materials and mechanisms tell us a story of globalization and modernization. The Gamelatron Project re-contextualizes tradition and grants artistic license to creatively re-engineer its potential role in a changing society. Artist Aaron Taylor Kuffner uses exhibitions of the Gamelatrons to create sanctuaries both in public and private spaces. He views the body of the work as an offering to the observer.

Kuffner’s mention of resonance and “its effect on the psyche” harkens back to the New Age spirituality ideas of the first chapter. Unlike the Woodstock New Age practitioners, Kuffner is not engaging with any Balinese Hindu rituals, and this creates a problem for how he is inserting a spiritual narrative into his project.

Take for example the spaces in which Kuffner exhibits the Gamelatron: festivals, art galleries, and museums. These are secular, and predominantly American spaces. Kuffner’s mission statement asserts that there is something inherent about the sounds the instruments make that will reveal a spiritual nature behind these typically secular spaces. This narrative exoticizes the gamelan gongs as having some sort of power unto themselves. Kuffner, in an interview with online publication Hyperallergic said: “I think people’s bodies can perceive these sounds not just as an audio experience but as something more physical, and I think that’s why [gongs] have had
an association with spirituality and the divine” (Voon, 2015). Kuffner is marking the religious ideas that are historically associated with gamelan instruments in Bali, without noting that there is an entire history and practice surrounding the idea. He goes on to imprint his own ideas about spirituality onto this practice, ignoring the fact that the Indonesians themselves already have historical reasons why instruments are associated with religious identity.

This is further complicated by Kuffner’s statement that “he views the body of work as an offering to the observer.” This flies in the face of Balinese hinduism as it relates to gamelan music, where even the most secular of music is still an offering to the Gods. What does it mean when Kuffner reasserts that the listener is the focus of the supposed spiritual power of the instruments, instead of the Gods? This feels very much like an appropriation and mystification of what religion within the practice of gamelan means, in a way that is unfair to those practitioners who do believe all gamelan performance is for the Gods. Kuffner’s own language is appropriating Balinese Hinduism, as the term “offering” is very religiously charged. Many Balinese use the phrase offering to talk about gamelan performance in relation to the Gods, and the ritual practice of offering is very prevalent in Balinese Hinduism. Kuffner is then subverting this language for his own use, while disregarding its power within the tradition he is appropriating.

Another line I would like to further investigate from Kuffner’s mission statement is: “The Gamelatron's contrasting materials and mechanisms tell us a story of globalization and modernization.” What are these contrasting materials and mechanisms, and what story do they tell? First, it is important to note that Kuffner’s use of the gamelan is stunted; he uses the gong and gong-like instruments from the *reyong*. In other renditions of the Gamelatron, Kuffner uses
gangsas and ceng-cengs. What Kuffner does not utilize is the whole ensemble at once. To be fair, neither does Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern, yet their use of gamelan instruments is integrated into a larger ensemble, whereas the Gamelatron stands alone, at times even multiplying to have more gongs than would ever be present in a traditional setting. This divorces the instruments from their crucial cultural presence as ensemble, even furthered when one finds out that Kuffner does not create these instruments themselves, instead commissioning them from Indonesian gamelan makers.

This hints at one of the largest problems with the Gamelatron project, namely Kuffner’s erasure of people. By using robotics and programming, Kuffner removes the gamelan from a communal context, something which I think this project has extensively shown is intrinsic to gamelan practice. There are no performers, or creators, only Kuffner’s programming. When I asked Nyoman Suadin about the Gamelatron, he was equally perplexed by the piece, saying “I wonder if this can be gamelan even? There is no one playing.” Suadin hints that one of the defining aspects of the gamelan tradition is community, and without it, what Kuffner is creating may no longer resemble its source material.

The problem with Kuffner divorcing Gamelatron from the gamelan practice comes back to Kuffner’s intention. In his mission statement, Kuffner writes “the Gamelatron Project re-contextualizes tradition and grants artistic license to creatively re-engineer its potential role in a changing society.” Yet, if Indonesian natives no longer see their tradition in his work, Kuffner fails in his mission. The instruments, the lack of players, the spirituality, all of these important aspects of the tradition are changed such that the tradition is not re-contextualized, it is erased. In the Hyperallergic interview, Kuffner speaks on his polishing of the Gamelatron, saying: I’m
trying to create this other context for the gamelan to be relevant even in modern Jakarta, so by making these instruments, which are kind of folksy, into these bright objects, it’s taking something that is seen as kind of backwards and turning it into something that’s really valuable and shiny and new and flashy.” The interviewer goes on to write after this: “An old ensemble that’s seldom played in Indonesia today outside of formal ceremonies, the gamelan, according to Kuffner, has little cultural context, especially to young generations” (Voon 2005). Kuffner’s own words speak volumes towards erasing gamelan culture within his project.

First, Kuffner wishes to make gamelan “relevant even in modern [Indonesia],” while at the same time clearly misunderstanding how very relevant it is. Gamelan is not, as the interviewer writes, “seldom played outside of formal ceremonies.” Kuffner disregards the numerous gamelan festivals and schools popular across Indonesia. Furthermore, Kuffner assumes that he must “create this other context” for the gamelan to be relevant, while Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern clearly shows that they, and other Indonesian groups are already doing this in their own space. Kuffner is stepping over their efforts, in a way that smacks of neo-colonial privilege.

The quote above continues with strong colonial overtones. Kuffner calls the gamelan instruments “folksy,” and “seen as kind of backwards.” Backwards by whom? Kuffner seems to be viewing the gamelan through an exoticizing lens, and is projecting his own interpretation of gamelan culture onto his project. In this way, the Gamelatron does less work “create a harmony in the tension of fusing the East and the West,” as it does further divide these two conceptual spaces. Kolaborasi works to incorporate American circulated material to create something uniquely new and Indonesian. Kuffner and the Gamelatron, on the other hand, work within a
warped view of the gamelan. He creates his project to liberate the tradition from a mystical, ancient world that does not exist. He is an outsider trying to create something inside of a culture he is not a part of, creating a self-constructed narrative of the white savior, when in reality there is nothing for him to save.

To be fair to Kuffner, he is operating within a wider framework of modern Western exoticizing, especially within the world of electronic and experimental music. Famous electronic artist Bjork created her own hybrid gamelan machine called the “gamaleste,” although she seems to be more aware of her position in the tradition, stating: “It is like any influence or inspiration—it is a conversation you add to” (Curran, 2014). In a particularly tone deaf article on the notoriously trend-chasing online music outfit Pitchfork titled “Gamelan, Electronic Music’s Unexpected Indonesian Influence” (from which the above quote was pulled), the author spent more time being shocked by gamelan’s ability to influence Western music (and speaking to Western artists), then they did investigating modern gamelan as a whole. Kuffner’s Gamelatron exists within the broad trajectory of McPhee’s exotic image of gamelan tradition, now being propagated by young Western musicians and North American hipsters whose first, and perhaps only, interaction with the gamelan may have been in a setting similar to Bard’s own Chandra Kanchana.

Overall, the Gamelatron and Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern address the use of gamelan instruments in very different ways. Their re-contextualization of gamelan instruments poses interesting questions about what a gamelan is in modern music genres, how one can reinvent a cultural tradition, and the ways in which circulation prompts others to engage with music, be it Indonesian or American, that are not their own. To return to Steven Feld’s “anxious” and
“celebratory” discourses of world music, there is no universal conclusion as to whether these
circulatory practices should warrant anxiety or celebration. Behind each of these examples are a
myriad of others like them, each of which engages with this question in its own unique way.
Ultimately, it is left to the individuals who make, share, and listen to these hybrid forms of
gamelan music to decide where they, and the music, stands within a larger conversation of music
circulation.
Conclusion

The goal of this project was to investigate the numerous ways in which gamelan adapts, changes, and is affected when as the tradition moves back and forth between Bali and the United States, specifically within academia. This project used Bard College’s Gamelan Chandra Kanchana and Gamelan Giri Mekar as the prime ethnographic source, but also introduced ethnographic work from Indonesian Dance of Illinois. I addressed the institutional struggles of bringing gamelan to the United States, and the ways in which gamelan’s intrinsic relationship with Balinese Hinduism changes when it meets the numerous sacred and secular spaces and people in the United States. The final two chapters looked at multiple pedagogical styles shifting to create a hybrid identity between Western art style and Balinese style, as well as the complicated transmutations of gamelan when it becomes fused with Euro-American musical forms.

The introduction mapped how Balinese gamelan first arrived to the United States, and why the tradition in particular took hold in the U.S. academy. I provided a brief look at the history of gamelan in Bali, specifically of the gong kebyar. I then focused on the history of Bard College’s gamelan ensembles. After introducing the main biographies of the subjects of the project, I pivoted to use Bard’s gamelan to investigate the institutional complications of bringing a non-Western musical tradition into a predominantly Western music program. These complications included questions of competency in both Balinese and non-Balinese teachers and the value of non-Western music within these programs. Finally, I situated myself within the project to conclude the introduction.
The first chapter focused on the transmission of religion between the Balinese Hindu roots of Balinese gamelan and the distinctly different practices of its American players. This chapter opened with an ethnographic snippet from Chandra Kanchana about the ritual of removing shoes at rehearsal, which was complicated by the instructor Nyoman Suadin’s failure to perform this ritual. The chapter then dove into a conversation on religious space, starting with how Balinese Hinduism influences space in Bali. This section drew relationships between Balinese Hindu temples categorizing space and taxonomies of gamelan music. Then the chapter moved to Bard, to explore how a uniquely secular space became spiritualized by the gamelan’s presence and performance. The chapter then set up a parallel example with Indonesian Dance of Illinois, where a sacred space is more secularized by the gamelan’s presence. Both of these examples highlighted the complex natures of space and religion in relation to the gamelan.

The chapter went on to explore the ways in which American spirituality gets mapped onto Balinese gamelan performance and rituals. I retold the story of Richard Davis’ discomfort around being asked to perform a blessing ritual to explore the multiple perspectives of religious mapping present in Balinese gamelan practice in America. The section addressed New Age religion, and its interactions with “Eastern” religion. It also addressed Nyoman Suadin’s own relationship with religion at Bard’s gamelan, and put this in conversation with Bard’s musicians’ relationship. The chapter concluded by noting the ubiquity of Christianity’s presence in American daily life, positing that the inclusion of religion in a musical culture is not as foreign as we may believe.

The second chapter focused on pedagogical differences in America that arise from a student population unfamiliar with Balinese gamelan. The chapter opened by exploring Bard
students’ frustrations and joys in learning gamelan from Nyoman Suadin. It set up Balinese
gamelan groups in America within the framework of “experience ensembles,” as well as
problematizing an overarching framework of Western Art style and Balinese style. The section
on tempo explored Nyoman Suadin’s tendency to speed up Bard’s gamelan and avoid repetitive
practice more common in Western art style in comparison with Ngurah Kertayuda’s introduction
of these more Western art style techniques. The section brought up a recurring theme in the
chapter of teaching in an “authentic” style, and the compromises teachers must take to teach their
American students.

The chapter went on to address the highly contested place of notation in a traditionally
non-notated musical style. It addressed how notation can be both a useful tool and a distraction
for American students, and used both texts and ethnographic work to show this, again
highlighting the compromises teachers take. The next section took a look at a more concrete
notion of compromise presented by Bill Ylitalo’s teaching style, that is decidedly hybrid. The
chapter concluded by advancing a theory about what people consider to be “Balinese style” and
showed how despite many different pedagogical styles, all of the teachers in the chapter aimed to
create trust between teachers, students, and instruments.

The final chapter explores the circulation of both gamelan music and American rock and
pop music. It borrows Steven Feld’s observation that “world music” cross-fertilization was often
framed as discourses of the “anxious” and the “celebratory.” I opened the chapter with a
self-reflexive ethnographic snippet briefly exploring my relationship with seeing and performing
American rock music on Bard’s gamelan instruments, and the reasons this is appealing to
American students. It went on to the first exploration of the chapter, the Kolaborasi Gamelan
Modern, and the ways the group integrates Indonesian music with American pop to create something inherently Indonesian, yet new and in conversation with a global music industry. I argued for a celebratory view of this, and the liberating ways KGM, and other groups like it created and performed modern gamelan.

The counterexample to this followed in the next section on Aaron Taylor Kuffner and the Gamelatron. I interpreted Kuffner’s project in more “anxious” terms, highlighting concern about how the Gamelatron and other projects like it blur the Indonesian cultural identity of the gamelan in a way that is appropriative. I looked at how Kuffner and the Gamelatron tries to accomplish a goal similar to Kolaborasi Gamelan Modern, but fails due to a viewpoint clouded by exoticizing and mystifying discourses that might be interpreted as neo-colonial. The section used Kuffner’s own mission statement to problematize how the Gamelatron interacts with the concepts of religion and spirituality, community, and gamelan identity, while still framing Kuffner’s work within a larger conversation of modern Colin McPhee-esque exoticizing. The chapter concluded by remaining undecided on the future of modern gamelan circulations, allowing future groups to create new dialogues moving forward.

There are a lot of paths forward from this project, the most obvious being to study the institutionalization of the gamelan in Bali itself. How does Balinese Hinduism come into play in Balinese music festivals? What are the pedagogical hybrid styles used in the Balinese academy? Especially in the third chapter, there is important ethnography to be done about modern Indonesian music, and how the gamelan gets incorporated into it. This project also does not address the role of Javanese gamelan in the American academy, and it would be productive to follow the same lines of investigation through to that performative tradition. I did not address
gender in this project, and there is crucial work to be done on how American gender politics influenced Balinese gender politics in regard to gamelan, as well as how that has materialized in Bali and elsewhere as Bakan began to do in his study of female gamelan ensembles (Bakan, 1997). I would love to do more work in how gamelan is used in other cultures outside of the West and Indonesia, as there are other non-Western cultures studying, teaching, and experimenting with the gamelan with little written about it. Finally, this project only uses a handful of ethnographic sites, and exploring these topics within other Balinese gamelan groups within the academy, as well as outside of it would be important.

This project has sought to interrogate and complicate the various dichotomous approaches applied to the gamelan in various contexts: sacred and secular, Western and non-Western, anxious and celebratory forms of hybridity. My ethnographic work has shown that the realities behind these supposed dichotomies are far more complex. Instead of inhabiting one reality or the other, Balinese gamelan practice within the American academy simply embraces many options, including tensions and confusions. Balinese gamelan teachers, students and performers choose compromise, and in compromising, they create a cultural tradition onto their own. By performing gamelan in the United States, we are all, as Ylitalo put it, “getting gangsa up in here,” all contributing to and creating a musical tradition as uniquely American as it is Balinese.
Bibliography


