

# RELATIONSHIPS OF MUSICAL AND CULTURAL CONTRASTS IN JAVA AND BALI

FREDRIC LIEBERMAN

## Contrasts of Music Style

JAVA AND BALI SHARE MANY BASIC MUSIC-STYLE ELEMENTS. The predominant instruments in both traditions are struck metal idiophones and idiophone sets, large ensemble performance is the ideal, and solo instrument traditions are rare. The same kind of tuning systems are found in both areas. Musical form is delineated by colotomic or interpunctuating instruments (gongs) while agogic instruments (drums) control the kinetics of flow; and the prevailing texture is that created by several musical levels, or strata, elaborating or abstracting a basic melody.

Music is primarily an adjunct to ritual, dance-drama, or puppetry, the literature of which derives from the Hindu epics Mahabharata and Ramayana. Despite these shared characteristics, the two music styles give decidedly differing impressions. Javanese music is refined, controlled, serene, intellectual, “. . . each note is so soft, so tender, so vaguely thrilling, so changing—but ah! how compelling, how bitterly beautiful: that is no tinkling of glass, of copper, or wood; it is the voices of men’s souls that speak to me . . .” (Kartini 1964:50) Balinese music, on the other hand, is dynamic, lively, full of contrast and excitement, with “. . . a beauty that depends upon form and pattern and a vigour that springs from a rhythmic vitality both primitive and joyous.” (DeZoute 1939:6)

The Javanese *gender*, a set of thin bronze keys suspended over tuned bamboo resonators, is struck with a round padded beater, producing a mellow sound of long duration; by way of contrast, the Balinese *gender* is struck with a hard wood beater, and is played in pairs tuned so as to create audible beats, producing a bright and shimmering sound. The instrument used to give signals and underline dance rhythms in Java is a woodblock (*keprak*); the same function in Bali is realized by a pair of small cymbals (*tjeng-tjeng*); again the dull-bright contrast. The Javanese *bonang* family (like the Filipino *kulintang*) has two Balinese counterparts, the *trompong* and the *rejong*. The *trompong*, like the *bonang*, is played by one man, and is relatively soft. Recently, however, the *trompong* was used by the famous dancer Mario as a dance-prop in his popular *kebyar* dance, and has therefore declined sharply in musical significance. The *rejong*, however, is played by four men, and

has been developing towards brilliance: ". . . the range and volume of the instrument have tripled and taken on the added function of supplying rhythmic-harmonic 'shock-waves'." (Hood 1963:456-57)

Contrasting the large *gamelan* orchestras of Java and Bali, one finds that the soft-playing instruments *gambang* (xylophone), *tjelempung* (zither), *rebab* (bowed lute), *suling* (vertical flute), and human voice, all present in Java, are either totally absent or relatively little-used in Bali. There is a larger number of ensemble types in Bali. In Java a single type of large *gamelan*, a fine set of instruments perhaps preserved in a royal court, acts as an ideal upon which the surrounding villages model less perfect and less complete ensembles. Major variants such as *gamelan munggang* or *gamelan sekati* are reserved for rare ritual occasions. However, Covarrubias lists thirteen different kinds of ensemble in regular use in Bali (1937:218-19).

The tuning systems in both Java and Bali are *pelog* and *slendro*. *Pelog* is more popular than *slendro* in Bali, while in Java there does not seem to be any clear preference. The exact pitches of the scales in both areas vary considerably, as the tuning systems are general principles rather than definite rules. The concept of mode, known in Java as *patet*, appears to be one of the most important elements of nearly every developed music system in the world (Western church modes, later major-minor, Arabic *maqam*, Persian *dastgah*, Indian *raga*, and various systems in China and Japan). In Java there is a clear notion as to the musical significance and effect of mode, but this subconscious knowledge of the musicians has not yet been articulated in theory. The Balinese do not seem to know about modal types, but McPhee postulates the implied existence of modal practice in *slendro* (1936:21).

Improvisatory elaboration of the main melody is basic to Javanese *gamelan* music. The performers operate within the guidelines and restrictions of *patet*, instinctively knowing which figurations are typical, possible, or appropriate to each *patet*. In Bali, however, improvisation does not exist. Lacking the powerful organizing factor of a conscious feeling for mode, improvisation becomes difficult and aimless. Also, in Balinese *gamelan* music, the elaborating instruments play in interlocking parts. "Balinese musicians seem to operate on the principle that if two players play interlocking parts as fast as possible . . . the result will be a performance twice as fast as either of them can play." (Hood 1963:455) Balinese figuration performed in this manner are often driving ostinati. Thus Balinese figuration technique, stressing precise rhythmic control, precludes the use of improvisation, and is more direct and potentially more dynamic than Javanese.

Perhaps the best summary of the above outlined contrasts is that of McPhee:

Javanese gamelans have an incredibly soft, legato, velvet sound; the hammers and mallets that are used to strike the metallophones and gongs are padded so thickly as to eliminate all shock. Tempos are slow and stately, and there is little change in dynamics; the prevailing mood is one of untroubled calm and mystic serenity. Balinese music, on the other hand, is vigorous, rhythmic, explosive in quality; the gamelans sound bright and percussive; hard hammers of wood or horn are used for many instruments, and the thin clash of cymbals underlies every tone; only the great gongs are gently struck. While the classic calm of Javanese music and dance is never disturbed, music and dance in Bali is turbulent and dramatic, filled with contrast and bold effects. Javanese musicians find the music of Bali barbaric. Balinese complain that the music of Java "sends them to sleep." (1949:251)

### Patterns of Cultural Variation

*Wayang*, the puppet theater, is a major element in both Javanese and Balinese society, important both as an integral part of many rituals and as a repository of tradition with overtones of ancestor-worship. In Bali, *wayang* is performed exclusively with flat leather puppets (*kulit*). Javanese variants exist with puppets of flat wood (*klitik*), round wood (*golek*), and with no puppets at all, in an extremely rare moribund tradition (*beber*) in which the scenes are painted on a long scroll which unrolls as the story is recited. The major Javanese form, however, is *wayang kulit*. *Wayang* is accompanied by a full *gamelan*, in Bali by four *gender*. The literature is largely drawn from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, less popular being the indigenous culture-hero epics. In addition on special occasions (in Bali only), the story of Tjalarong is performed. Balinese puppets are more realistic than the Javanese, which have become highly stylized. In fact, the Balinese puppets closely resemble the figures carved in bas-relief on old Hindu temples of East Java (McPhee 1936:3). The Javanese *wayang* performance is more formal than that of Bali, lasting through the night, which is divided into three periods, each period having a corresponding type of action and musical mode. The Balinese *wayang* performance differs greatly in length and structure from night to night because it is ". . . determined by the *dalang*, according to wages, enthusiasm of the audience, or the wish of the person who has engaged him." (McPhee 1936:3)

It seems clear that one can contrast dance movement in Java and Bali with the same terms as were found applicable for music, because in both societies dance movement and music are in close cooperation. Hence Javanese dance movement is controlled, deliberate, refined; Balinese, dynamic, angular, intensely expressive. There is a greater richness of dance forms and styles in Bali; and particularly notable are those ritualistic dance dramas which involve Rangda, the witch and the great beast Barong. These are of major import in Bali but do not exist in Java. Rangda is the queen of

witches (*leyak*), the personification of virulent evil, continually scheming to harm mankind. Barong is also a leader of demons, but of the *kala*, who are a mischievous and uncouth lot, but susceptible of propitiation. Thus Barong, having power over Rangda, is seen as a representative of "good" forces countering Rangda's "evil," and their ritual confrontation is a symbolic reenactment of the precarious balance of good and evil forces in this world. The continual ritual-dramatic defeat of Rangda is perhaps meant as sympathetic magic. In any event, it reinforces in the community conscience the sense of real need for the multitude of propitiatory rituals which characterize Balinese religious practice.

The masks used masked play genres in Java and Bali are compared by Wagner as follows: "Javanese art often displays a finesse, and at the same time a serene composure which . . . is elevated far above everything mundane. But the Balinese artist draws directly upon his own experience; his masks often represent changing human moods." (1959:204)

In Bali the social order is largely communal, stressing traditional law (*adat*) supervised by the entire adult male population of a community, a committee of the whole. This pattern encompasses other aspects of Balinese life, and there is thus a committee on rice paddies, a committee on ritual, etc. The social class structure superficially resembles that of traditional Hindu culture, with *brahmanas*, *ksatriyas*, *vaisyas*, and *sudras*. However, the *sudras*, or common people (about 95 per cent of the population), control their own affairs at the village level with little or no attempt at control by the hereditary nobility (*ksatriya*, *vaisya*). Balinese religion is an integration of Hindu-Buddhist and shamanist beliefs, characterized by a regular cycle of temple festivals featuring elaborate food-offerings and other ceremonies as needed for rites of passage, healing, or crisis situations. Music and dance play a major role in Balinese religion, as does trance. (See following discussion on trance.) Most temple business is conducted by a *sudra* lay-priest who doubles as temple janitor, while the learned *brahmana* priests are called upon only for occasional rites of major import, or nobility-sponsored ceremonies (e.g. consecrating a new house). Many of the finest *dalangs* are priests, but there is no prohibition against *dalangs* of other profession or caste. Persons of high caste receive the respect and courtesy of accepted social usage. These courtesies are dropped in the context of artistic activity (music or dance-drama), and in general the high castes would seem to have few prerogatives in Bali's peasant-dominated society.

Javanese society is tripartite, divided by the Javanese themselves into *abangan* (peasantry), *santri* (Islamic, usually merchants), and *prijaji* (nobility and cultural elite). *Abangan* religion is similar to Balinese religion, though not nearly so elaborate, stressing community and built around the communal

offering of propitiation, the *slametan* feast. As in Balinese temple festivals, the *slametan* consists of the presentation (to the spirits) of specially-prepared ritual foods. Because the communal feeling does not spontaneously exist to any great extent in Java, *slametan* is typically given by private individuals rather than by villages or communities. The *abangan* who gives a *slametan*, therefore, will create an artificial community-by-proximity, inviting his immediate neighbors to the ritual feast, regardless of his normal social relationships with them: they are witnesses, not co-celebrants.

The *santri* stresses the unity of the islamic community, and all attendant ritual trappings of islamic law. The *santri* is not wholly isolated from the Hindu-Javanese tradition, however, as he acknowledges the (limited) import of the *wayang*, and admits the ancient *gamelan sekati* to the celebration of the holy week.

The *prijaji* element is the gentry of Java, today composed largely of white-collar workers and other educated professional people. *Prijaji* religion is an intellectualization of the basic elements of Hindu-Javanese tradition, giving elaborate symbolic and mystic interpretations to *wayang*, *gamelan*, etc. Certain elements of islamic practice are also congenial to *prijaji* mysticism, such as fasting, which fits in nicely with the *prijaji* stress on meditation and abstinence as a means towards acquisition of personal spiritual power. The *prijaji* element remains the repository of Javanese culture, despite its confrontation with (and acceptance of) western values: "The current (1954) *prijaji* culture-hero is the Sultan of Djokjakarta, who, it is said, behaves exactly like a conservative, mystic, traditional king within his palace and like a progressive, modern, Dutch-educated political leader outside of it." (Geertz 1960:237)

A custom which may help to preserve the concept of class distinction (and which certainly serves to articulate it) in Java and Bali is that of varying levels of language. Courtesy demands that one speak with a language of refinement equal to that of the person one is addressing. Thus a servant will address his master in the elaborate high Javanese (or Balinese), and will be answered in the low tongue. Though this principle operates similarly in Java and Bali, it seems that there are more levels in Java, capable of expressing subtler distinctions of rank than possible in Bali. Also current is the lingua franca Indonesian, which is increasingly more common in large urbanized areas. The classical languages, sanskrit, and kawi, are mastered only by the elite *prijaji* in Java, who thus maintain a measure of control over the classical literature and other cultural elements. In Bali knowledge of kawi is also limited. When dramas are presented in kawi, they must receive a running translation by comic characters (usually servants). A similar but more limited situation is found in the Japanese *no* drama, in which the story is explained during the "intermission" by a *kyogen*

(comic servant). In Bali the comic characters often tend to monopolize the stage; in Java, though favorites, they are more clearly secondary. Another language in Java is Arabic, used—but not necessarily understood—by the *santri* in chanting the prayers of the islamic office.

Trance in Bali is a common phenomenon and an essential part of religion. Trance is believed to indicate possession by a spirit, and the entranced medium speaks with the spirit's voice, giving instructions for proper offerings or ceremonies, helping to heal or find lost objects. Entranced dancers are basic elements of several temple festivals, and *dalangs* giving particularly efficacious *wayangs*, may become entranced in the normal course of events. Trance, then, is a culturally valuable trait in Bali, and is an important shamanistic virtue, allowing communication with the spirits.

In Java, trance is the exception rather than the rule. In the *djaranan*, for instance, itinerant street-dancers become entranced while imitating a horse, providing some entertainment value, but little or no cultural or religious significance. There is no Javanese counterpart to the Balinese entranced temple dancers such as the *sanghyang*. The *abangan* folk-healer (*dukun*) does not normally use trance, but rather has definite training in traditional healing practice. On rare occasions an untrained person may become possessed by a spirit (*dukun tiban*) and may exhibit strong healing powers for a limited time, but will eventually lose these powers permanently. Even rarer is the possessed *dalang* (*dalang tiban*). Thus in Java trance is not a culturally valuable trait, indicating a lack of stress on traditional shamanistic practice.

In the foregoing sections, several elements of Javanese and Balinese culture have been compared and contrasted, and a basic pattern of order or contrast may be seen. Balinese culture appears less sophisticated than Javanese, more folk-like, primitive, direct. Javanese culture, on the other hand, stresses refinement, subtlety, and indirection.

#### Factors Leading to Patterns of Cultural Variation

The indigenous cultures of Java and Bali were brought under influence from India in the early centuries A.D., and we have no historical records from periods preceding the advent of Indian influence. Java and Bali were joined by politics and political marriages under various Hindu-Buddhist dynasties up to the eleventh century. Later the Madjapahit dynasty in Java renewed control over Bali. Madjapahit in Java was beset by the influence of Islam, and perhaps in reaction to this intellectual foreign importation the *prijaji* developed their highly nationalistic brand of mysticism. Islam did not extend its influence to any appreciable extent in Bali, however, and with the fall of Madjapahit in the fifteenth century, the Madjapahit nobility moved en

masse to Bali, bringing with them the traditions of Hindu-Buddhist culture. Certain elements of this tradition have been preserved in Bali. After Madjapahit, the cultures of Java and Bali, up to then more or less homogeneous, evolved along different lines. Western influence in Java dates from the seventeenth century; Bali, however, resisted complete Dutch control until early in the twentieth century. The Dutch in Java worked through the *prijaji*, thus reinforcing the power of the traditional government. In Bali the nobility gradually lost its power and influence.

In Java the advent of Islam resulted in the formation of a tripartite society, Dutch control strengthening the leadership prerogatives of the traditional nobility. Thus in Java cultural patterns originating with the nobility filtered down to the peasantry and mixed with an influenced *abangan* values, the peasantry attempting to emulate the gentry, considering elite cultural values the national ideal, the quintessence of Javanism. This is the reason for the air of refinement permeating Javanese culture.

In Bali the imported nobility was less important; the nobleman was a power to be tolerated, not an ideal figure to be emulated. The basic cultural values originated with the community, hence their more popular character.

#### **The Relationships Between Cultural Patterns and Music Style**

The nature of the contrasting gentry-peasantry relationships in Java and Bali would seem to explain the differences of musical style. ". . . traditionally, the musicians in service of the Royal Courts of Central Java were palace servants. The music they composed and performed . . . enjoyed the highest evaluation not only by the elite for whom they performed, but also by all levels of society who emulated the same repertoire through the communal efforts of the village musicians performing on instruments of relatively poor quality." (Hood 1963a:3) By contrast, "one of the most famous orchestras in Bali is to be found in the remote mountain village of Selat, and the finest dancers of *legong* were in Saba, an unimportant little village hidden among the ricefields . . . The Balinese did not permit the centralization of the artistic knowledge in a special intellectual class."<sup>12</sup> (Covarrubias 1937:160-62)

The factors of preservation and change are present in Balinese and Javanese music history. The *rejong*, for instance, evolved from the shared proto-type (known from East Java temple reliefs) in different directions in Java toward the improvisatory *bonang*, in Bali toward the volatile four-man *rejong*. *Wayang* puppets were probably preserved better in Bali because of the realism and direct appeal of the traditional figures. In Java the urge towards refinement, and perhaps the influence of Islam, contributed to the evolution of more abstract and stylized figures. The reverse situation ap-

pears in relation to traditional tunes, which have probably been preserved better in the Royal Court manuscripts of Java than in the mercurial oral tradition of Bali.

Thus we see that differences of musical style in Java and Bali may be attributed to and justified by factors of preservation and change acting through time in the context of cultural patterns congenial to the individual spirits of each island society.

### Bibliography

- BELO, JANE. *Bali: Rangda and Barong*. New York, 1949.
- COVARRUBIAS, MIGUEL. *Island of Bali*. New York, 1937.
- DE ZOUTE, BERYL and WALTER SPIES. *Dance and Drama in Bali*. New York, 1939.
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD. *The Religion of Java*. London, 1960.
- HOOD, MANTLE. "The Enduring Tradition: Music and Theater in Java and Bali" in McVey, ed. *Indonesia*. New Haven, 1963.
- . "The Quest for Norms in Ethnomusicology," *Inter-American Music Bulletin*, 35 (May 1963), pp. 1-5.
- KARTINI, RADEN ADJENG. *Letters of a Javanese Princess*. New York, 1964.
- MCPHEE, COLIN. "The Balinese Wajang Koelit and its Music," *Djawa*, 16 (1936), pp. 1-34.
- . "The Five-Toned Gamelan Music of Bali," *Musical Quarterly*, 35 (1949), pp. 250-281.
- WAGNER, FRITS A. *The Art of Indonesia*. New York, 1959.