



Balinese Experimental Music and the Ideology of Intonation

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In this paper I present an analysis of Balinese (Indonesian) experimental music, *musik kontemporer*, from the perspective of the intonational transformations that have occurred on the island over the past quarter century. The development of *musik kontemporer* is connected to broader long-term changes in instrument making, tuning and conceptualizations of intonation. The contemporary Balinese soundscape reverberates with a polyphony of differing tuning schemes, probably more than have ever existed on the island at any single time. These varying systems, and the intonational rhetorics surrounding them, collide, compete and collaborate in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. In this paper I am concerned with the modern expansionist trend of Balinese tuning systems and instrument making and the general discourse surrounding pitch. I consider the ways in which Balinese and Western “ideologies of intonation” (Perlman 1994) are manifested in the bronze and bamboo instruments employed by *musik kontemporer* composers today. I read intonation—tunings and ideas of in-tune-ness—as a metaphor for cultural interaction, preservation and change. The traces of globalization can be read in the palimpsest of tuning scratches left underneath *gamelan* keys. Like rings in a tree-stump, these scorings reveal the life of a key as it was tuned a few cents up, then back, then up again, adjusting to constantly shifting tastes. In these etches we can read the flow of Balinese ideologies of intonation as they interact with local, national and global forces.

In this paper I first introduce and contextualize traditional Balinese concepts and nomenclature concerning scale, pitch and tuning. I then outline a series of instrumental and intonational developments over the past quarter century that I characterize as ‘introspective.’ That is, they are concerned primarily with developing indigenous repertoires and systems of intonation. This is followed by a discussion of more recent innovations in which composers and instrument makers have sought to incorporate foreign (primarily Western) tuning systems in the effort to interface with non-Balinese repertoires and instruments. Here I include a discussion of the emergence of Balinese-Western hybrid ensembles sometimes called *campur sari*. I term these ‘extrospective experiments.’ I then consider Balinese discourses of intonation, how these discourses have changed over the past quarter century and the ways in which they differ from Western discourses. In conclusion, I demonstrate the concrete ways in which new intonations exert influence upon new compositional forms and I speculate on the future of culturally specific tunings in Bali.

A central argument of this paper is that the influence of Western intonations is ascendant in Bali. Western tuning models and their application to the *gamelan* is referred to locally as “*diatonis*.” Rather than arguing that *diatonis* represents a straightforward example of Westernization or cultural grey-out, I suggest that it represents a more complex negotiation, one in which stretched octaves, paired tuning and individual variety continue be valued. As such, *diatonis* represents a uniquely Balinese hybrid that responds primarily to local intonational logics.

This paper is based upon extensive research in Indonesia and is related to a current monograph project concerned with musical experimentalism in Indonesia.

Some Sample Examples:

I present several examples demonstrating varieties in local nomenclatures:

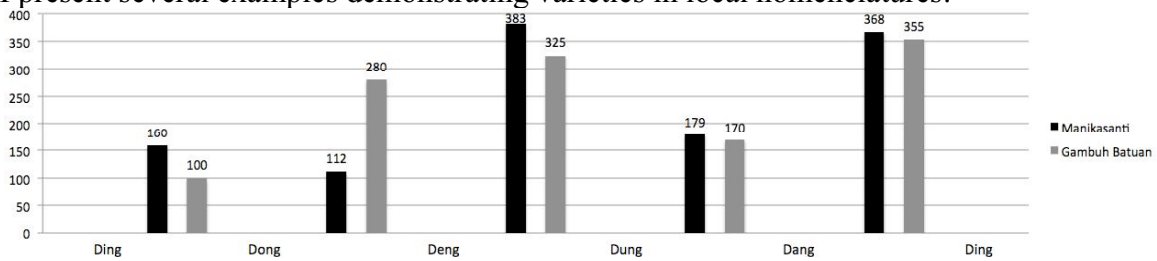


Chart 1. Comparison of varying intervals in the *selisir* mode between the Manikasanti and Batuan Gambuh ensemble.

The intonation of several new forms of *gamelan* and their relationship to Western intonation is discussed:

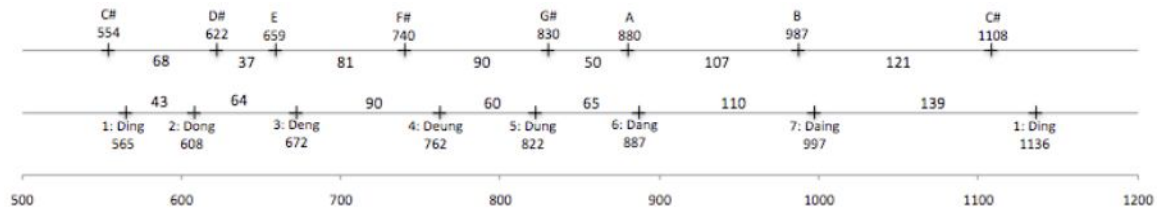


Chart 2. *Semara dana* tuned by Wayan Beratha (1989). Five-tone stdev=37.47. Seven-tone stdev=60.10.

The expansionist development of instrument design is illustrated through several images and performance videos recorded in July, 2009:



Illustration 1. Agus Teja Santosa’s chromatic *rindik*.

I chart the relationship over time between Balinese *pelog* tunings and equal temperament:

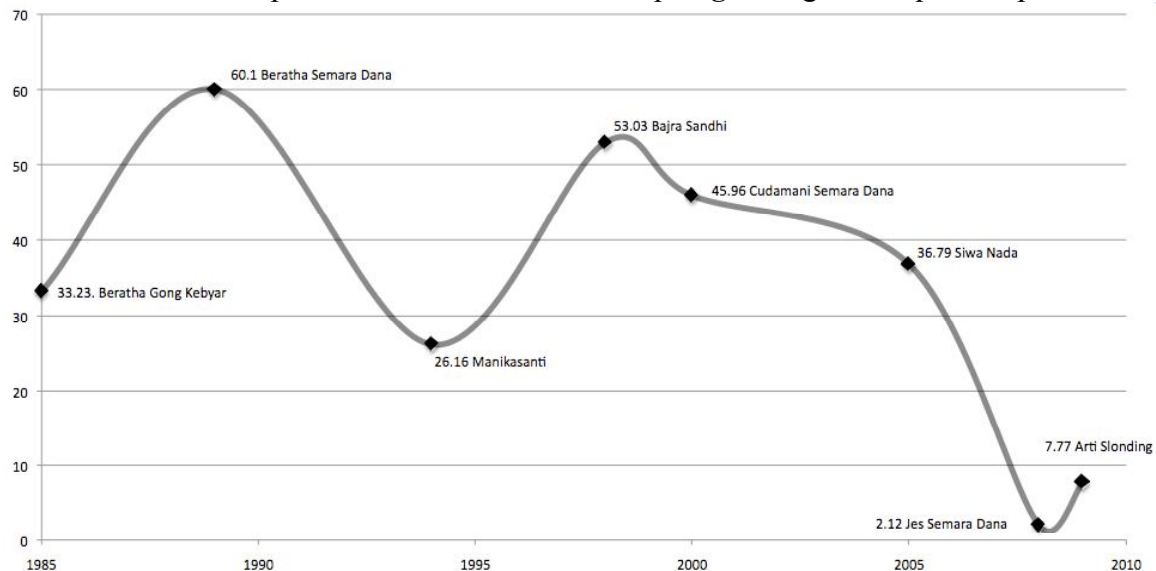


Chart 3. Chronological arrangement of standard deviations between five-tone *selisir* subsets and closest equal tempered tuning. Lower position on Y-axis indicates closer adherence to Western intonation.

Author Biography:

Andrew Clay McGraw, Ph.D. is an ethnomusicologist, composer, performer and Assistant Professor of music at the University of Richmond. He has published extensively on traditional and experimental music in Southeast Asia in various volumes including: *Ethnomusicology*, *Asian Music*, *Asian Cinema*, *The Yearbook for Traditional Music*, *Empirical Musicology*, and *Indonesia and the Malay World* among others. He received his Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University in 2005. He directs two gamelan ensembles: *Gamelan Dharma Swara*, in residence at the Consulate of the Republic of Indonesia in New York City, and *Gamelan Raga Kusuma*, in Richmond, Virginia. As a student and performer of Indonesian musics he has studied with the leading traditional performers of Bali and Central Java during over five years of research in Indonesia with funding from the Indonesian government, the Fulbright-Hayes program, the VFIC foundation, Arts International and grants from the University of Richmond. As an educator he has taught at: Emerson College, University of Massachusetts, Simon's Rock and Bard Colleges, University of Missouri, William and Mary and the University of Richmond. As a performer and composer he has appeared on Tzadik and Porter record labels, has collaborated with Indonesia's leading composers and performers and leading American artists including: Eighth Blackbird, Billy Martin, Ches Smith, Cyro Baptista, Wu Fei, Shahzad Ismaily, Eyvind Kang, Vivian Fung, and Matthew Welch, among others.