

Earlham College Gamelan Ensemble Fall Concert

Lingle Auditorium, November 20, 2024

Program

Lancaran “Kebogiro,” laras pélog pathet barang

Ladrang “Wilujeng,” laras sléndro pathet manyurá

Bâwâ sekar ageng “Surâretnâ” dhawah gendhing santiswaran “Pakumpulan,”
laras sléndro pathet sângâ

Lancaran “Tropongan Rinenggâ,” laras pélog pathet nem

Ladrang “Kaki-Kaki Tunggu Jagung,” laras pélog pathet nem

Lagu “Swârâ Suling,” laras pélog nem

Glossary

bâwâ – an extended, unmetered solo vocal introduction to a gamelan or santiswaran piece

dhawah – “falling” or leading into

gendhing santiswaran – a piece (gendhing) performed on the santiswaran ensemble

kenong – a set of large, nearly spherical pot gongs that mark off major subdivisions of a time cycle

ladrang – a gamelan piece with a 32-beat time cycle, marked by the big gong at the end of the cycle and by the kenong every 8 beats (4 times per cycle)

lagu – “melody” in general; also, a modern piece for gamelan with a short time cycle and a tuneful, sometimes Western-sounding melody, and with lyrics written especially for that tune (in contrast, most traditional lyrics are free floating, composed separately from the tunes)

lancaran – a gamelan piece with a time cycle of 8 or 16 beats for each stroke of the large gong, subdivided into four kenong units (cf. ladrang)

laras pélog – one of two uniquely Javanese tuning systems, with seven tones in an octave, and within which most adjacent intervals are between a half-step and a whole-step

laras sléndro – one of two specifically Javanese tuning systems, with five tones to the octave,

which are close to equidistant (that is, the intervals between adjacent notes are about 1/5 of an octave wide—larger than a whole step but smaller than a minor third, in Western terminology)

pathet barang – the highest of the three melodic modes in the pélog tuning

pathet manyurá – the highest of the three melodic modes in the sléndro tuning

pathet nem – in the pélog tuning, the medium-ranged melodic mode, of variable character

pathet sângâ – the medium-ranged melodic mode in the sléndro tuning

santiswaran – a portable ensemble consisting of unison mixed chorus, frame drums, double-headed barrel drum, and a pair of tubular bells (kemanak); the music is always paired with overtly Islamic lyrics (unlike its twin, *larasmadyâ*, which uses the same instrumentation but whose lyrics are typically taken from didactic poetic texts in literary Javanese, which may or may not contain Islamic teachings)

sekar ageng – a category of classical Javanese verse, couched in archaic literary language, and in poetic meters of Sanskrit origin (4-line stanzas)

Program Notes

Geography, History, Language

Indonesia is an island nation that stretches between Thailand to the northeast and Australia to the southeast. Java is just one of some 3000 inhabited islands in the country; about the size of North Carolina, it has a population of roughly 150 million (out of Indonesia's total of 278 million).

The region has long been at the crossroads of transcultural influences: Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and Europeans have all left their marks over the centuries. Indigenous religions were overlaid first with Buddhism and Hinduism during the first millennium C.E., then, gradually, with Islam (primarily Sufi), starting in earnest in the fifteenth century C.E. In 1945 Indonesia declared independence from the Netherlands, which had gradually gained control over the archipelago over a period of 350 years. Java's centralized kingdoms, which had been built on an Indian concentric model since ancient times, were maintained under Dutch rule. Since Independence, the royal courts have continued to exist but are much diminished in their opulence and influence.

The island of Java has many distinct cultural areas, but three main cultural and ethnic regions: Betawi (the area around Jakarta), where a Chinese-influenced variant of Indonesian is spoken; Sunda (western Java), where Sundanese is spoken; and central and east Java, where various dialects of Javanese are spoken. (Most of the music we perform is from the city of Surakarta, also called Solo, in central Java.) Nowadays, everyone in Java also speaks the national language, Indonesian, and young people are increasingly proficient in English (almost no one speaks Dutch anymore). Javanese was not adopted as the national language in 1945 partly because of its embodying feudal relations: every utterance in Javanese entails choices based on relative social status. It is analogous to the tu/vous, tu/Usted, du/Sie distinctions in French, Spanish, and

German, respectively, but extending to entire vocabulary sets and, in some cases, entailing more than two choices. The most basic distinction is between low Javanese (Ngoko) and high Javanese (Kramã or Bãsa), but linguists count a minimum of nine speech levels, formed by various mixtures of the five or six vocabulary sets.

Javanese was for many centuries written in Javanese script, a derivative of Devanagari (the alphabet devised for Sanskrit). It is now far more common to use the Roman alphabet, but because transliteration is not uniform, variant spellings are common. Here are some tips on pronouncing some key sounds in the spelling system we're using:

â: "aw," as in American English *law*

e: schwa, as in *relevant*

é: as in *fiancé*

è: as in *bed*

c: "ch"

dh, th: retroflex (tongue curled back)

d, t: dental (tip of tongue touching front teeth)

r: rolled

Stress is almost always on the final syllable of a word or a sentence (just like the music, which is also end-stressed).

The Gamelan, and Gamelan at Earlham

Gamelan music belongs at once to the royal courts and to the villages. It defies classification according to the European categories of "classical" and "folk" music, since it has elements of both: musicians may be highly trained—or not; notation may be a means of transmission—or not; composers of pieces are often known, but not usually named; some performance styles have a wide distribution, but others are highly localized; the music may stand on its own as concert music, or may accompany other activities; and audiences may be drawn from urban or rural areas, from high or low social classes.

Like all of the world's musical traditions, gamelan music has been adjusted to fit changing conditions. While it is considered Java's traditional music par excellence (among many others), it continues to evolve in unpredictable ways, and is currently being overtaken by genres that feature guitars and keyboards.

The gamelan is not an instrument, but a whole set of instruments that are tuned to each other and played together by a group of musicians. It is indigenous to Java, having spread to Bali several centuries ago, but it is now to be found in many parts of the world, even in places where there are few Indonesians: in the U.S. alone there are around 200 gamelans of various types. The gamelan can accommodate a wide range of musical skill, which is one of the reasons for its global popularity as an amateur ensemble. The ensemble is made up primarily of tuned, bronze percussion, but includes other instruments—and voices—as well. A standard modern ensemble is actually a double set, each half tuned to a different string of intervals, none of which correspond to the basic building blocks of Western music (there are no minor or major seconds, no minor or major thirds, though it may sound like there are, to ears used to those intervals). The two tunings are called *pélog* and *sléndro*, and within each tuning there are officially three melodic modes, which emphasize certain pitches over others.

The many simultaneous melodies played on the gamelan do not form chords. In fact, except for rare exceptions, the music is not based on any harmonic system at all. Rather, everyone follows the same basic reference melody (called the *balungan*), which is the tune that is written down if notation is used. By referring to this melody, experienced musicians can derive their respective parts according to the distinctive musical language of each instrument. The result

of this layering of multiple interpretations of the same melody is highly structured, albeit with a strong element of serendipity, since there is leeway on some of the parts, and, with highly experienced musicians, one never knows in advance what the overall combination will yield.

This is music that says “all is well” in its presence—it is a comforting sound, and one that may be said to reflect ideal forms of human interaction. There are leaders, both rhythmic and melodic, but, true to traditional Javanese ideals of leadership, they lead by suggestion, not by coercion, and all parts are ultimately considered to be equally important—and this applies, as well, to the singers, although in current practice the solo vocalists are miked.

Earlham's gamelan, which weighs several tons (you are seeing only part of it!), was purchased in Java in 2006 and shipped over by ocean freight. The original set, which dates from the 1960s, belonged to a Chinese-Indonesian family from Surakarta, and was used for many years by a professional troupe of *wayang wong* (“people puppets”—a theatrical genre that tells the same stories as the *wayang* or shadow theater). A number of new *sarons* (metallophones with trough resonators) and other instruments have been added after the initial purchase. The older set was retuned twice in Java and tried out each time with a full complement of musicians before shipping. The new *sarons* had to be painstakingly retuned here in Richmond, by grinding off metal from the backs of the bronze keys, since new instruments quickly go out of tune (this is one reason why older gamelans are highly prized).

Tonight's Program:

Kebogiro

As the quintessential welcoming piece, this is often used to greet honored guests while they are arriving at a wedding reception or other formal event. In fact, the title—which, curiously, means “angry water-buffalo”—can be made into a verb, *ngebogironi* ‘to welcome guests by playing the piece Kebo Giro’. According to the Solonese court musician Warsadiningrat (1987 [1943]: 51), through a rather complex process of synonymy, homonymy, and metonymy, one can arrive at a more logical meaning for the title: “a powerful, influential ornament used in a ceremony.” (*kebo* = ‘water buffalo’ in low Javanese = *maéså* in high Javanese; but *maès* = ‘to decorate a bride’s brow for the wedding ceremony’, which serves here to evoke any important ceremonial event.)

Wilujeng

Wilujeng (or *slamet* in low Javanese) means ‘safe’, ‘out of harm’s way’. The piece is often the first “soft-style” piece that a beginning group will learn (a “soft-style piece” is one that utilizes all the instruments and vocal parts of the full gamelan). It is undoubtedly the most often-played traditional piece in the repertoire, if one includes amateur groups, perhaps because it serves as a blessing piece, keeping those within earshot safe. According to Warsadiningrat (1987 [1943]: 166), it was composed at the prime minister’s palace in Surakarta under the reign of Paku Buwana X (r. 1893-1939 C.E.). When performed in the shadow theater, it is used in scenes involving kings, owing to its serene, unhurried character.

In most traditional pieces such as this, singers can choose whichever texts they know, as long as they conform to the right poetic meter. There are a few handfuls of lyrics that everyone knows and which are used with much greater frequency than others. (As a corollary to the untethering of text from tune, the music cannot in any way be said to express the words in such pieces.) Most *ladrangs* (see glossary) call for lyrics set in the Salisir meter, which consists of four lines of eight syllables each per stanza. We are singing the same Salisir poem for both this piece and Pakumpulan (see translation, below). When the *gérong* (unison male chorus) is not singing, the *pesindhèn* (female solo vocalist) sings unrelated lyrics of her choosing, and the *gérong* adds *alok* (“yells” that enliven the piece and emphasize important points in the time cycle).

Pakumpulan

This is most often performed as a gamelan piece. We have chosen, however, to present it using the *santiswaran* ensemble, consisting of a unison choir, deep frame drums called *terbang*, a double-headed hand drum called *ciblon*, and a pair of tubular bells called *kemanak*. This is primarily participatory music, performed by amateurs who gather for the joy of singing together, rather than polished concert music. The situation may have been different in the nineteenth century, when this music was extremely popular throughout Java and seems to have been a primary means of spreading the Islamic faith.

Because lyrics in the *santiswaran* repertoire typically end with the Shahada (the Muslim declaration of faith), and because we wanted to avoid misusing those words, we have chosen lyrics that would normally be used in a gamelan performance of the piece. In addition to six verses of the *salisir* poem “Parabé Sang” (see notes to Wilujeng and translation), we will be interpolating *senggakan*—lighthearted melodic interjections. The ones we’re using can be translated as follows: “The melody carries away and delights” and “The rhythm is tight and unified.” In the gamelan version, the instruments play these *senggakan*, and it is worth noting that in the original lyrics for the Santiswaran version, it is precisely this lively passage where the Shahada is intoned. In both versions there is a lengthy syncopated passage that equally adds a touch of levity.

Kaki-Kaki Tunggu Jagung

Like Kebogiro, this is a *gendhing soran*: a forceful piece that only uses the louder bronze instruments and drums (it has no vocals, no strings, no flute, nor any of the softer-sounding percussion instruments).

According to Warsadiningrat (1987 [1943]: 61), this is a very old piece whose title was chosen to send a message to the king, as a subtle form of protest. Unfortunately, he does not specify how, when combined with the titles of other compositions by the same composer, it achieved that goal. Various translations are possible, but the most satisfactory one is probably “Old Men Wait for Corn.” While most cannot, some titles can be related to the musical content of the piece in question. Perhaps the way this one repeats a distinctive eight-note phrase many times before moving on to something else represents waiting for corn to grow or to arrive? A closely

related piece, *ladrang* “Thingthing Mo,” which consists entirely of that eight-note phrase, is used in the shadow theater for the *tayungan* ‘victory dance’ performed at the very end of many different stories by the character named Bima (the elder brother of Arjuna), who at that point in the play would have just finished off his enemy using his magic thumbnail to eviscerate him.

We are performing this in the style of the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta, some 65 km from Surakarta (also called Solo), which is where most of our repertoire comes from. Among the many distinctive features are the more ponderous tempo and the more varied part played on the *bonang* (see illustration).

Rather than resisting all of the repetition you hear, consider savoring its drone-like quality as well as the satisfying sound of the large gong whose periodic strokes organize the repetitions into regular cycles. The monotony of this part is broken, however, when the tempo slows down, and, soon after that, two *demungs* (large *sarons*—see illustration) break into fast *imbal* (hocketing, in which they alternate rapidly, playing on each other’s rests to create a combined melody). This, along with the simultaneous *gemakan*, is also characteristic of gamelan music in the style of Yogyakarta. *Gemakan* (literally, “quail-like movements”) is a way of playing the *slenthem* (the lowest melodic instrument—see illustration) in which it anticipates an upcoming strong note by repeating its pitch, ahead of time, but then leaving out the strong beat itself. It gives the music a delicious, slightly off-kilter feel.

The section of the piece that breaks away from the repeated eight-beat phrase features a string of syncopated notes that, coincidentally, resembles a similar passage in “Pakumpulan,” and temporarily injects a bit of gamelan humor into this otherwise forceful, virile piece.

Tropongan Rinenggã

In the context of the shadow theater, *tropong* means ‘crown’, especially of a kind worn by a young king (*tropongan* could thus mean ‘wearing a crown’). *Rinenggã* means “decorated,” or “added to.” The piece is said to have been composed in the twelfth century, at which time it was “played for the

king when he went about the courtyard of the [palace] on horseback” (Warsadiningrat 1987 [1943]: 45). Accordingly, within living memory, it has been used within the shadow theater to accompany scenes featuring a knight on horseback.

This version of “Tropongan” utilizes vocal parts composed by the late puppet master Nartosabdho, which, unusually for his time, feature high-voice and low-voice choral parts that create harmony (the more usual procedure was to compose or improvise melodies that were related only in that they converged on important pitches of the melody and were otherwise independent). The lyrics of the two vocal parts are unrelated to each other (in fact, those of the high-voice part are variable, as long as they use 24-syllable couplets called *wangsalan*, with the interpolation of the words *kusumané* ‘the flower’ and *dhuh gustiné* ‘oh, lord!’ to create 32-syllable stanzas). The low voices, aside from singing countermelodies, also provide *senggakans* (enlivening interjections), and their lyrics describe the movements of a graceful female dancer.

Swãrã Suling

This tune, like the vocals for “Tropongan,” was composed (or perhaps only arranged) by the prolific composer Nartosabdho, probably in the 1960s, when it was a huge hit not only in Java but also in neighboring Bali. The title means “The Sound of the Bamboo Flute,” and the lyrics describe the sounds of various instruments: how they resound into the distance, and how moving or lively they can be.

Reference:

Warsadiningrat. 1987. *Wédha Pradangga*. Translated by Susan Pratt Walton. In *Karawitan: Source Readings in Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music*, vol. 2, edited by Judith Becker and Alan Feinstein. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies. Originally written in 1943.

Notes and translations by Marc Benamou

Salisir “Parabé Sang”¹

This poem, which we have chosen to use with both “Wilujeng” and “Pakumpulan,” was composed in the mid nineteenth century by Prince Mangkunegara IV. Consisting entirely of double or triple *wangsalans* (riddles), it will make no sense until one understands that the first half of each stanza has no meaning other than to set up the riddle. Indeed, in a *wangsalan*, the message comes in the latter half, and the first two lines function something like crossword-puzzle clues. Another set of clues is embedded in the second half of the *wangsalan*, consisting of words that sound like the unspoken solutions to the crossword-puzzle-like clues. We have used underlining to link the solutions (given in parentheses) to their sound-alikes embedded in the poem. Salisir is a *sekar ageng* poetic meter (see glossary) with eight syllables per line.

1. Parabé sang Måråbangun,
Sepat dombå kali Oyå;
Åjå dolan lan wong priyå,
Geramèh² nora prasåjå.
1. The nickname of Måråbangun, (=Priyambådå)
A large *sepat* fish [in] the river Oyå; (=geramèh ‘a large cousin of the
sepat fish’)
Don’t play around with men,
[They are] dissolute, not to be believed.
2. Garwå sang Sindurå prabu,
Wicårå mårå karånå;
Åjå dolan lan wanitå,
Tan nyåtå asring katarkå.
2. The wife of Sindurå the king, (=Wahitå)
Speaking with a purpose; (=nglantarké ‘to convey a message’)
Don’t play around with women,
Without proof you’ll often be blamed.
3. Sembung langu munggwèng gunung,
Kunir wismå kembang retå;
Åjå nggugu ujarirå,
Wong lanang sok asring cidrå.
3. Rank-smelling, montane camphor bush, (=segunggu)
Red-flowered cottage turmeric; (=puspanyidrå)
Don’t trust his words:
A man, too often, is perfidious.
4. Genthå geng kang munggwèng
panggung,
Jawåtå pindhå Arjunå;
Jaman mengko kawruhånå,
Wong wadon ‘kèh ngamandåkå.
4. A bell on a raised platform, (=jam ‘clock’)
A deity who resembles Arjunå; (=Kåmåjåyå, a character from the
shadow theater)
In these times, you had best know this:
A woman, too, often deceives.
5. Kramané sawålèng kayun,
Ayam kuncung sårèng wånå;
Paduné cuwå ing karså,
Wuwusé tan merak driyå.
5. The conduct of those who argue face to face, (=padu ‘to quarrel’)
A forest-browsing, tufted chicken; (=merak ‘peacock’)
The fact is, his³ plans are thwarted,
His words failed to charm [her].
6. Burat pådå brekutut gung,
Sujanmå misåyå minå;
Bok iku dèn turutånå,
Dhokohé asor wong njålå.
6. Foot ointment (=bobok ‘liniment’) for a big zebra dove, (=derkuku)
People who trap fish; (=njålå, ‘to net fish’)
Do heed this:
His passion exceeds a fisherman’s.

¹ This translation was completed under the auspices of a Scholarly Editions and Translations grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. A fuller version of it will appear in a forthcoming anthology, edited by Marc Benamou and Nancy Florida, tentatively titled *Wisdom and Wit: The Lyrics of Central Javanese Gamelan Music*, to be published by E. J. Brill and made available for free online, thanks to a second NEH grant.

² Literally, this is a kind of fish, but more likely the reader is intended to plug in mentally one of its sound-alikes *nggramèh* ‘discourteous’ or *rèmèh* ‘trivial’.

³ The gender is grammatically ambiguous, but, given the context, it seems likely that the possessive is meant to be masculine, and that the object of the protagonist’s flirting is assumed to be a woman. Ditto for the last line of stanza 6.

The Ensemble:

Malik Barrett	Avin Newswanger
Marc Benamou, dir.	August Nord
Gaby Chacón	Duv Rice-Snow
Jesse Danels	Isao Saki
Jimmy Freiburger	Matthew Segvich
Logan Galliano	Asher Welk
René Gaudreau	Sarah Wilks
Arjun Lakshmipriya	Grace Wilson

Guest Artists:

Alex Yoffe, Chicago

Alex Yoffe is the artistic director of Friends of the Gamelan, a Javanese gamelan ensemble based in Chicago. Alex has taught gamelan music at Northern Illinois University since 2018. He has also worked closely with groups such as Nusantara Arts (Buffalo, NY), Gamelan Kusuma Laras (New York City, NY), and Gamelan Laras Tentrem (Boston, MA). He has studied gamelan music intensively in Surakarta, central Java, where he became proficient on all instruments of the ensemble; tonight he will be particularly featured on the drums and the *celempung* (plucked zither).

Claire Fassnacht, Chicago

Claire Fassnacht (she/her) is the artistic director and founder of Friends of the Gamelan's Balinese Ensemble in Chicago. She began learning and performing gamelan and dance in 2010 with I Dewa Ketut Alit Adnyana at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. In 2014-2015, she studied at the Institut Seni Indonesia music and dance conservatory in Denpasar, Bali, and took private lessons in Solo, Java. Claire is a former member of Gamelan Galak Tika in Boston. She and her husband Alex Yoffe perform Balinese and Javanese gamelan music and dance throughout the U.S.

Marc Benamou, professor of music (ethnomusicology), has taught at Earlham since 2001. For three years he conducted doctoral fieldwork in Surakarta, while studying and performing Javanese singing, and has returned multiple times since then. He is the author of *Rasa: Affect and Intuition in Javanese Musical Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press) and co-producer of a four-CD set he recorded in Java titled *Gamelan of Solo: A Garland of Moods* (Inédit, La Maison des Cultures du Monde, Paris).

In addition to our guest musicians, the ensemble wishes to thank the following:

All the extraordinary Javanese musicians, past and present, who have created such a vibrant, rich tradition, and who continue to maintain, extend, and share it

Knoll Bendsen and his A/V Crew

Jeff Templeton, for office support

The Earlham music department for cooperative use of space

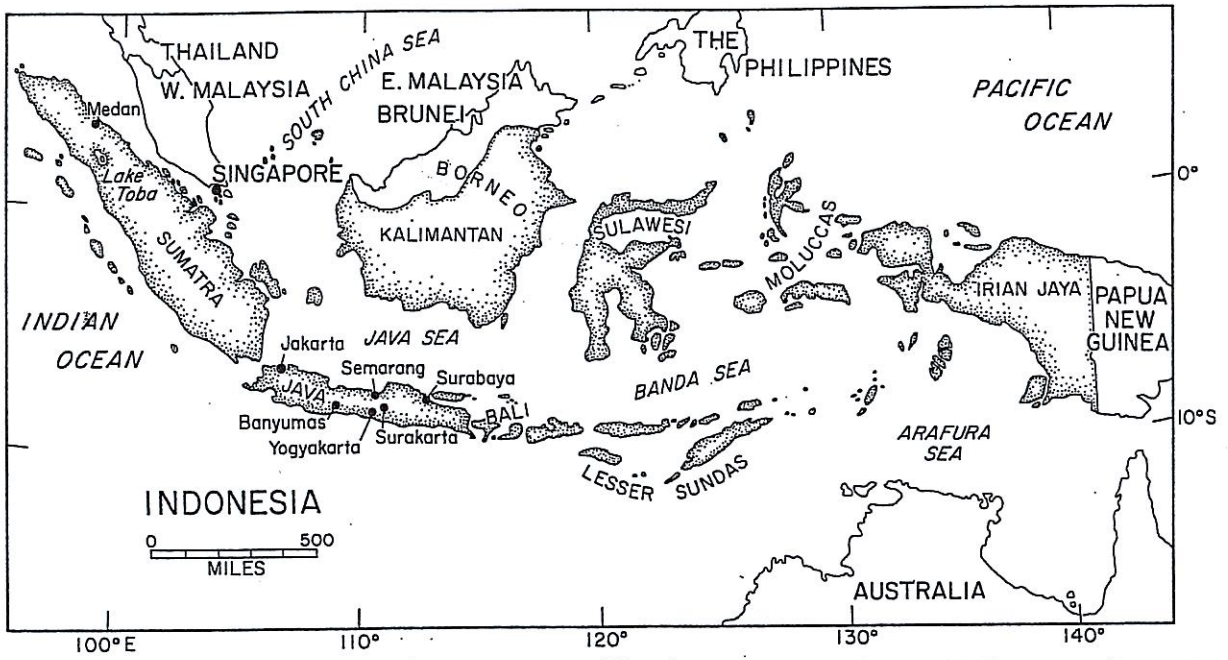
The NEH, Nancy Florida, and Heri Purwanto, for help with lyrics and translation

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Travis Brown for help with keycard access

Aaron Duffey for help with HVAC

Nicolás Quijano Franco for ushering



Source: Jeff Todd Titon, ed., *Worlds of Music*, 2d ed. (New York, Schirmer Books, 1992)

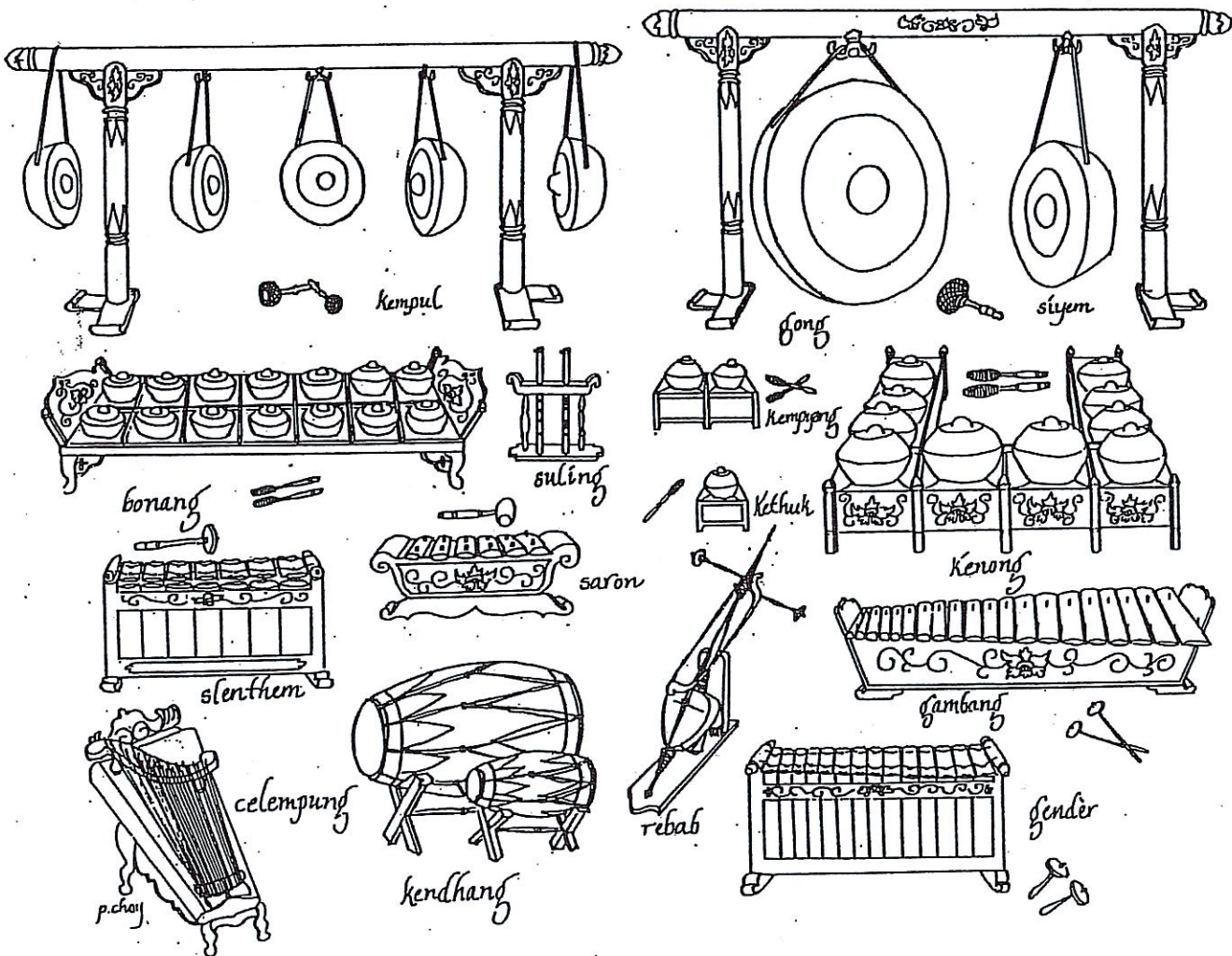


Illustration by Peggy Choy