

STRANGE FLOWERS: CULTIVATING NEW MUSIC FOR JAVANESE GAMELAN ON BRITISH SOIL

Dr. Ginevra House

Student of Indonesia Intitute of the Arts Surakarta

ginevra.house@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Contemporary composition has been a feature of gamelan performance in the UK since the establishment of the country's first regularly performing indigenous ensemble, the English Gamelan Orchestra, in 1980. Using the Indonesian Embassy's Javanese instruments, the group was primarily established to enable the study of traditional repertoire but new composition was, from the outset, a part of their concert programming. This set a strong precedent, and new composition has become an integral feature of many subsequent British gamelan groups. Over thirty years this has produced a significant body of work, some of which forms the subject matter of this paper.

This paper looks at British-born compositions for gamelan in terms of the degree to which composers draw on or avoid both musical structures and music-making practices typically associated with Javanese traditional *karawitan*. It also examines works which set out to deliberately create hybrid or synthesized forms arising from the confluence of disparate musical systems. To examine these aspects of composition, this study draws on interviews and works by several UK-based composers, looking at what motivates people to adopt or avoid a certain approach, and the advantages and pitfalls of each way of composing.

It's simple botanical fact: if you're going to transplant this tender plant from an alien climate and soils and tradition and expect it to survive, then its got to take root. And its got to take root with new nutrients, new soils. So there's got to be new growth. It's the only way its going to take root properly. And I really believe that passionately.

(Alec Roth, interview transcript 2012: 16)

We're not Javanese or Balinese, we're feeling it differently [so] it's going to be different. You know, you take *Ricik-ricik* and play it here, it becomes something different. It has its roots in Java but it becomes something different. So for me it was just an extension to then write pieces for gamelan. I felt that gamelan was something that we were kind of planting in English soil and new flowers were growing.

(Andy Channing, interview transcript 2011: 11)

An English Garden is anything but English.... A lot of plants come from America; lots of plants come from China and Japan and India. You know the rose, we think of as an English plant. Well there might be an English rose, but it's been crossed with plant flowers from China.... So you get this crossing of plants, hybridising, and you have Henry Cowell talking about how a lot of the best music was hybridised, and is a mixture of several things.

(Clive Wilkinson, interview transcript 2011: 30)

Contemporary composition has been a feature of gamelan performance in the UK since the establishment of the country's first regularly-performing indigenous ensemble, the English

Gamelan Orchestra, in 1980. Using the Indonesian Embassy's Javanese instruments, the group was primarily established to enable the study of traditional repertoire but new composition was, from the outset, a part of their concert programming.

This set a strong precedent, and new composition has become an integral feature of many subsequent British gamelan groups. Over thirty years this has produced a significant body of work, some of which forms the subject matter of this paper.

One notable aspect of the British gamelan scene, which it has in common with certain other international gamelan communities, is that there is no substantial Indonesian expatriate community in the UK. As a result, local gamelan groups are dominated by participants with no direct geographical, ethnic or historical links to the regions from which gamelan originates.

This pattern of participation fits Turino's description of 'cosmopolitan formations':

communities whose members have adopted 'constellations of conceptions, ethics, aesthetics, practices, technologies, objects and social style' that do not relate directly to their own geographical, cultural or ethnic background but are defined, rather, by 'the absence of an original homeland as a key symbol, if not an actual ground for the formation' (Turino 2003: 63-64).

Slobin's coining of the term 'affinity groups' to describe non-commodified, face-to-face, small-scale networks, independent of industrial/commercial interests or ethnic/cultural background, sharing 'a jointly imagined world which arises from a set of separate strivings temporarily fused at a moment of common musical purpose' (1993: 60) is also useful here. Of particular interest is Slobin's allusion to a 'jointly imagined world', something which is key to understanding the success of gamelan outside Indonesia generally and in the UK specifically. As the quotes at the start of this chapter show, this imaginary landscape tends not to be characterised by a desire to emulate Indonesian practice in every last detail but to indigenise it, to cultivate new, localised forms, to imagine and then create a living, changing, growing tradition of gamelan suited to the context of these damp and distant Northern European islands.

A brief history of gamelan in the UK

The UK's gamelan scene first began to stir when Professor Eric Taylor of Durham University organised a series of Oriental Music Festivals (1976, 1979, 1981). The first of these featured live performances of Chinese, Japanese and Persian music, but given the logistical difficulties of shipping a gamelan to Britain, Indonesia was represented only through a lecture by E.L. Heins (Taylor 1976: 652), who took full advantage of the opportunity to pointedly remark upon the importance of hearing the music played live, to an audience that included the Indonesian Ambassador. The diplomat was so impressed by British enthusiasm for the gamelan that he acquired a set to be housed at the Indonesian Embassy in London (Sorrell 1985: 3).

This arrived in 1977, and was used for the second Oriental Music Festival, for which Taylor engaged an ensemble from the Jogyanese kraton (royal palace). Unfortunately, when the musicians heard the Embassy's gamelan was of Solonese make, they pulled out of the concert at short notice. A chance encounter in a hotel in Java between a distraught Taylor and S.D. Humardani, Director of ASKI Surakarta (now ISI Surakarta [Indonesian Institute of

the Arts]) saved the day: Humardani offered to bring a group of teachers and students from his conservatory to the UK to participate in the festival and subsequent tour. This was to have a profound effect on one of Taylor's students, Alec Roth, who helped facilitate the group's UK tour: noticing he had been smitten by the music, Humardani invited Roth to study for free at ASKI Solo (Roth, interview transcript 2012).

The acquisition of a gamelan to be permanently housed in Britain was no small cause of celebration to Neil Sorrell, a former student at Wesleyan University (1969-71) where he first encountered gamelan. Engaged to the faculty at the University of York from 1971, Sorrell spent many years agitating for a gamelan, even running a *wayang kulit* practical project in 1975 without any gamelan instruments (interview transcript 2011: 2-3). In 1979, Sorrell was asked to run a workshop by a former student, Jan Steele, who was teaching a World Music course at the University of Birmingham (Mendonca 2002: 101-2). Steele also invited several fellow-members of the Scratch Orchestra, and, according to Sorrell:

Being Jan, he was on the phone the next day, or straight after the thing, and he said 'I really want to carry this on. They're quite enthusiastic about this. I think we should ... get a regular group and come and rehearse here.' (Interview transcript 2012: 12)

More people became interested, including Alec Roth, established composers Michael Parsons and Dave Smith, and former York student Mark Lockett (who wrote the script for Sorrell's gamelan-less *wayang* in 1975), eventually leading to the founding of the English Gamelan Orchestra (EGO), the UK's first performing gamelan group which was ran from 1980-83. When an enthusiastic Jan Steele announced EGO's inaugural concert would be on 1 June 1980, two months after the group was founded, Sorrell realised that as complete beginners they would struggle to create a viable programme of gamelan music:

I remember sitting at home thinking we haven't got enough stuff for this concert, I'll have to think of something, have to come up with something, you know, I was desperate, I was thinking what is there? And then I thought I'll have to write something.... compose it or arrange it or whatever. And if that hadn't been the case, I'd have never have probably thought of it. (Interview transcript 2011: 13)

Alongside some basic *karawitan* pieces and a *gendhing bonang*, the concert programme included arrangements of (allegedly) gamelan-inspired music such as Debussy's *Pagodes* and a composition/arrangement by Sorrell called *Gendhing Campur* which he describes as a 'very basic Young Person's Guide to the Gamelan' (ibid.). The performance of Western compositions for gamelan was later included amongst the constitutional aims and objectives of EGO (Mendonça 2002: 105), and set a precedent for much of the gamelan activity which was to come.

The inclusion of new composition for gamelan right from the outset is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the British gamelan scene. Of course, it cannot be entirely attributed to desperation to fill a concert programme: the absence of a sizeable Indonesian expatriate/immigrant community in the UK, the lack of funds in UK universities (relative to the US) for bringing over visiting teachers, and the scene's relatively late start in the 1980s – when narratives of hybridity and interculturalism had largely superseded those of authenticity and 'tradition' – also played a role, as did influence of Indonesian musicians such as S. D. Humardani, who actively encouraged new composition for gamelan.

Gamelan in Britain today is a surprisingly well-established part of the local cultural scene. A recent count detailed at least 171 Central Javanese, Balinese and Sundanese gamelans in Britain, though not all currently in use. These are used by professional, community, university and school groups that meet regularly to play, as well as in community music projects in prisons, care homes, and with various special educational needs groups. Whilst some groups focus purely on Indonesian classical music, several, like York, encourage new composition as well, and group composition or improvisation is often the focus of activities in community projects.

Methodology – taxonomical spectra

Writing a musicological study of British gamelan compositions as a body of music poses a unique challenge, as it does not describe a single coherent body of work or encapsulate a unified style: there are as many (or more!) approaches as there are composers. It would be insane to set out writing a paper on a topic as broad as ‘the contemporary music scene in Britain’ yet, in a sense, that is what is faced in giving an account of British gamelan composition, which is created by academically trained composers, jazz improvisers, pop-song writers, amateur community-group members, sonic artists and school children. In order to gain some kind of insight into the broader themes that do underpin new music for gamelan, it is useful to identify certain threads that relate these works to one another and identify common tendencies in approach and aesthetics.

There are a number of ways in which composing for gamelan can be a very different kind of activity from composing for, say, a Western orchestral or chamber ensemble. Many of these differences arise from the context of the instruments themselves, and the knowledge of them held by performers and most composers. Almost all groups which perform new music will also be playing *karawitan*, so the musicians will usually have some degree of knowledge about how Javanese music is structured in terms of tuning, rhythm, tempo, orchestration and so on; therefore such knowledge may be manifest in compositions by members of the group. So, for example, whilst the concept of *irama* change might never occur to an experienced orchestral composer who has had no contact with Indonesian music, a fledgling gamelan player writing their first composition might use it confidently and naturally, relying on the knowledge of the musicians in their group to make it happen.

Then there is nature of ensemble when performing *karawitan*: no conductor, no visible leader (although there are certainly those who give audible cues), skeleton notation which necessitates players bringing varying degrees of personal knowledge to the performance. So, for example, even a composer choosing to avoid any musical references to *karawitan* structures might still find themselves writing large ensemble pieces designed to be performable without conductor, or consider leaving space in the score for performers to derive their own parts from a core idea, or leave structural decisions, such as how many times a section is repeated, up to the musicians.

There is also the relationship between the composer and ensemble to consider. In most contemporary Western art music performances, musicians expect to interact with the composer little if at all. If the work is a première, the composer may spend one or two rehearsals working with the musicians on interpretative aspects of the piece, but in essence it would be expected that the composer will produce a full score and parts for the first

rehearsal and make no more than minor modifications before the performance, and that the performers should, to the best of their ability, reproduce what is in the score.

While this fully scored “sit-down-and-play-your-part” approach to realising a composition does occur in gamelan, especially when composers are not members of the group, or where the composer has a very strong background in writing Western art music, a fair proportion of works arise from a more collaborative, rehearsal-based approach that is more familiar to rock bands or jazz ensembles. It is also an approach commonly found amongst Indonesian composers where pieces are worked out and committed to memory during rehearsals, perhaps with individual musicians responsible for deriving their own parts to an extent: a situation Sorrell describes as ‘more process than product’ (2007: 39). For example, a composer might bring a compositional idea in one week to try out with their group, go away and think about it, come back with a reworked version the next week and in this way gradually build their way up to a full work over a period of months. This luxury has no place in the world of professional classical music making, where every minute of rehearsal time must be paid for, and where musicians do not expect to learn a piece at the composer’s pace of writing it. So the amateur nature of the majority British gamelan ensembles is also a significant influence on compositional style: in a context where rehearsal time tends to be seen as a pleasurable hobby rather than a means to a financial end there is plenty of time to develop a work during rehearsals (though patchy attendance can lead to problems with this approach). Even for groups which perform semi-professionally (such as London-based AlphaBeta Gamelan) rehearsal time is usually unpaid and, much like being in a rock band, participants expect to meet regularly to rehearse and work on new material.

Whilst a huge range of approaches are found in writing for gamelan, there are a number of common recurring threads that relate specifically to the differences between creative processes in *karawitan* and Western art music. These threads represent the ranges of possibilities regarding compositional techniques, aesthetic choices, methods of transmission and degrees of collaboration, reflecting some of the defining questions composers face specifically when writing for gamelan. In attempting to contextualise works for gamelan, the following questions are useful to consider:

- To what extent did the composer draw on or avoid Javanese (or other Indonesian) forms?
- Was the piece the output of a single composer working alone or was it collaboratively realised?
- How much of the piece was devised before the rehearsal process began/ to what extent was it a rehearsal-based compositional process?
- To what extent was the work notated? What was the nature of the notation?
- To what extent were elements of the work improvised during performance?
- What was the approach to tonality and pitch?
- Was the composer an experienced gamelan player or someone who had never played?
- Was the composer an active member of the performing group/ were they present during the rehearsal process?

This paper focuses primarily on the first of these questions (the rest being covered in my doctoral thesis; House, 2014) although it inevitably draws in discussion of other aspects of composition.

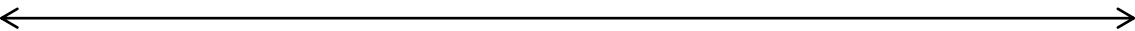
Karawitan or not karawitan: code-switching and code-mixing

One of the most obvious ways of exploring compositions for gamelan is by looking at the extent to which the composer drew on Javanese (or other gamelan-related) musical structures avoided them, or mixed them with influences from other musics. This is a particularly interesting area in terms of what it reveals about how composers negotiate a path between multiple musical worlds, how they choose to exploit their knowledge of different musical structures and systems to create the desired effect, and perhaps even what extra-musical meaning composers and audiences attach to the cultural markers employed.

In exploring these factors, it is helpful to follow Slobin's lead (1993: 85-6) in adopting the terminology of **codes** and **code-switching** from linguistics, to which I add **code-mixing** and **code-synthesis** as particularly pertinent terms for the pieces under discussion here; these will be explained further down.

Compositional responses to the use or avoidance of *karawitan* structures do not fall into neatly defined boxes, but rather lie along a continuum.

To what extent does the composer draw on structural elements from *karawitan*?

Fundamentally based on structural codes from <i>karawitan</i> (or other traditional gamelan forms)	Makes selective use of some aspects of <i>karawitan</i> /Deliberate fusion of Javanese and non-Javanese elements	Makes no reference to <i>karawitan</i>
		

On the left of this spectrum are works primarily derived from *karawitan*-based codes: typically such works might involve a *balungan* around which instruments and singers *garap* their parts (which may or may not be written down); phrases such as *cengkok* or *sekaran* which cadence onto *seleh* notes; cyclical melodic structures; gongs to mark structural points; *irama* changes and so on. None of the compositions I encountered in the UK occupied the farthest extreme of this axis, as none can be said to be exactly in the style of classical *gendhing*. None of the composers interviewed claimed any interest in attempting to write new *karawitan* pieces (although this might be attempted as a compositional or educational exercise): all the works examined in this thesis show some evidence of code-mixing, whether it be an adaptation to traditional *garap* rules, non-Javanese elements such as an English text or a non-gamelan instrument, or melodic ideas from a non-gamelan source, such as a local folk song. It is worth noting here that the composer's success in employing *karawitan* structures may depend to a great extent on his or her knowledge and understanding of gamelan: it is not unusual for the main difference between compositions by less knowledgeable composers and traditional repertoire to have its basis in that knowledge gap.

At the other extreme of this spectrum are works which make no reference at all to classical *gendhing* or other gamelan forms. The compositional techniques found in the set labelled 'not *karawitan*' are, of course, potentially limitless, but some of the approaches encountered

in the UK include works which are completely through-composed with every last note written out, chance procedure pieces, compositions which eschew cyclical sections in favour of a more linear structural arc, experiments with multiple tunings (for example combining *slendro*, *pelog* and equal temperament), the use of vertically conceived harmonies (chords), minimalist process pieces and works involving experimental sonic techniques such as hitting the rims of *pencon*, bowing *gender* or striking water-filled *bonang*.⁹¹

In between these are works in which *karawitan* and codes from other musical systems are mixed, for example using gongs to mark cadential points in a cyclical but otherwise un-Javanese piece, or borrowing techniques such as *imbal* to play rapid flurries of notes. Within this lies a tranche of works whose primary conceptual purpose is to seek out points of connection between gamelan and other musical styles, or those which seek rapprochement or resolution of contrasting musical structures from two or more styles. Terms to describe such endeavours, for example ‘fusion’ have become much maligned, along with descriptions such as ‘East meets West’, thanks to challenges to laid down by writers such as Said (1978), Feld (1994) and Hutnyk (2000) who question the validity of distinctions between ‘East’ and ‘West’ and ask whether musical encounters of this kind are on the even footing implied by the terminology, or whether such cheery, hand-holding rubric disguises and distracts from post-colonial power imbalances. Whilst ‘East meets West’ has probably had its day,⁹² there is some movement towards reclaiming the term ‘fusion’ by liberating it from its poisonous association with what is widely seen as exploitative forms such as worldbeat. Pete Steele, in his exploration of Balinese fusion musics around the world, argues that the commonly-used alternative ‘hybrid’ is a linguistically insufficient substitute which describes only the end product of mixed of musical systems, whilst ‘fusion’ refers to the deliberate act of ‘fusing’, the process of blending contrasting elements – in other words, fusion implies a consideration of creative practices as well as the resultant music (2013: 2-7).

Despite greater caution as to the use of politically-fraught terminology, there is no doubt that the exploration of connections between musical systems and cultures remains a valid and interesting approach for many composers, and there are many nuanced and carefully considered responses that have resulted. In fact, arguably all the pieces discussed in this thesis display elements of hybridity. Even works which conform the most tightly to *karawitan* structures do, as mentioned above, bear signs of other influences upon the composer from outside gamelan tradition, whilst on the other hand works which avoid all structural reference to *karawitan* are still performed on a gamelan, with all the inherent visual, timbral and physical implications of the instruments themselves and the cultural associations these carry for both audiences and performers.

For the sake of the following discussion, works in which the composer’s stated aim is to find connections between gamelan-based and other distinct musical systems will be referred to as employing **code-synthesis**, a distinct category within code-mixing referring to the composer’s intention to fuse elements of multiple systems into anew but coherent musical entity, as opposed to simply making use of compositional tools from multiple systems to suit the needs of the piece. This is a subtle distinction, the boundaries of which are open to

⁹¹ It is worth noting that while such techniques may not relate to traditional *karawitan*, many experimental, techniques for gamelan, such as water-filled *bonang*, were developed within the Indonesian *avant-garde* movement.

⁹² At least amongst postcolonially anxious academics – a quick Google search on ‘East meets West’ shows it is still a very active trope in the wider world, bring up over a million hits, including some high-profile uses, such as East Meets West Music Inc., the Ravi Shankar Foundation’s official recording label.

interpretation; whether code-synthesis is an applicable description may not be apparent simply from examining the work through recordings and scores, as it arises from the intentions of the composer more than the actual resulting traces.

The following sections explore some of the reasons composers have for adopting a particular approach, and the pitfalls that approach can present to the unwary. The discussion touches upon more than the directly musical aspects of *karawitan* influence, for as will be seen, the influence of Java is found not only in gong cycles and *garap*, *irama* and *pather*, but in a whole way of working, in the interaction between composer and musicians, in the processes of creation, transmission and performance.

Why draw on *karawitan* structures?

There are a number of reasons why basing works on Javanese forms might be appealing. To start with the obvious, when writing for a gamelan, drawing on traditional gamelan music is a logical starting point. As several composers (e.g. Symon Clarke, John Jacobs, and Nye Parry) pointed out, the *garap* rules and the instruments evolved together, making this a reliable approach to generating a rich, complex and sonically pleasing result, building on the foundations of generations of musicians experimenting with ways to create elaborate and aesthetically coherent music for the instruments. Rather than turn their backs on this in favour of creating something completely new, many composers choose to embrace existing musical practice, seeking out the possibilities that lie within or just beyond the boundaries of traditional *garap*, or simply drawing on it as a ready-made structure in which to explore compositional ideas.

For some, composing such works can itself be a way of reaching for a deeper understanding of *karawitan* and of how, as a musical system, it differs from Western or other forms. Jacobs, whose doctoral compositions explore the nature and implications of concepts not found in Western music such as *garapan* and *seleh*, describes

that kind of gradual getting to grips with the profound difference, really, that's wrapped up in understanding what a *seleh* note is ... and its ramifications; well, that just continues to be intriguing, and not just because I have some kind of need to understand all there is to understand about Javanese music, but because as soon as you come across ... music and concepts connected to it which are very different from all the music that you've grown up with ... it changes your perspective significantly, because there are things about the music you grew up with that of course you think are 'fundamentals of music', and they're not. And that's intriguing. (Interview transcript 2012: 7)

Exploring such differences through composition can, he explains, act as a 'proxy for formal study of *karawitan*, in place of using a theory text book, for example' (Jacobs, p.c. 29 November 2012). The composer comes face-to-face with musical questions, problems to solve or unexpected outcomes which highlight how certain elements in *karawitan* interact, in a way that he or she might not notice when simply performing.

Peter Moran describes a similar reason for using traditional *bonang* techniques such as *imbal* and *sekaran* when writing his otherwise non-*karawitan*-like *Bonang Quartets* whilst studying traditional Javanese gamelan:

So I got stuck into the *bonangs*, I learned all about *imbal*, *sekaran* ... And those textures, those rhythms, the interlocking patterns, that just really excited me ... But composing

them is doing something different, it's extracting from them their musical relationship to my life.... I wasn't quite imitating [*imbal* and *sekaran*]: ... to me those interlocking patterns and those rhythms suggested these patterns, these harmonic changes, how the rhythms fit together ... it's just kind of my brain's way of working out, of making sense of all that new information so I understood the *bonangs* better and I understood *imbal* and *sekaran* better for having written those pieces.

(2011 interview transcript: 12-13)

Another advantage of writing in a *karawitan*-like way lies in the nature of gamelan tuning. Each gamelan has a different *embat*, and it is embedded in the nature of Javanese polyphony (which involves numerous idiomatic instrumental phrases such as *cengkok* and *sekaran* converging on a *seleh* note) that pieces conceived of in this way should work on any gamelan, because they rely on contour rather than on absolute pitches or fixed intervallic relationships to work. A composer who thinks in terms of horizontal melodies culminating in a *seleh* note, rather than in terms of harmonies and chords, is more likely to come up with a piece that can be played on any gamelan. A cautionary tale in this respect is that of Dave Stewart, who wrote pieces with AlphaBeta Gamelan to be performed on the Southbank Gamelan at a time when its *slendro* pitches were very close to Western equal temperament notes and could therefore be used to create harmonies familiar to pop and rock music (which was Stewart's background). Stewart admits his pieces often sounded odd or wrong when the group played away-gigs on other gamelans, but more tragically, when the *slendro* instruments at the Southbank were retuned to a more 'typical' Javanese *slendro*, his pieces no longer 'worked' (Stewart 2012 interview transcript p12); in a certain respect, they ceased to exist.

As well as musical structures, there are aspects of Javanese performance practice which composers may wish to draw upon. Unlike orchestral players who are usually expected (and expect) to follow a part dictating every last note and even, to an extent, the manner of its articulation, gamelan musicians can draw on their pre-existing knowledge of *garap* to generate the fine details of their own parts, at least on the elaborating soft instruments. There are several advantages to this for a composer. At the most basic level, it offers the possibility of writing something fairly simple (a *balungan* line) which a group of experienced musicians can turn almost instantly into something much more rich and complex, using their knowledge of *garap* to elaborate and fill out the texture of the basic idea. In some cases, the expertise present in the group might be greater than that of the composer, allowing the possibility of creating something more sophisticated than the his or her personal knowledge of gamelan – or in some cases composition in general – could generate unaided. Perhaps for this reason, *karawitan*-based compositions are frequently, though certainly not exclusively, the starting point for composers writing their first piece for gamelan, especially those with little prior experience of composition.

For example, speaking of the process involved in creating music for her final undergraduate 'solo' project, a Welsh *wayang* called *Culhwch ac Olwen*, student Ellen Jordan describes working on *Mabon*, her first piece for gamelan (though not her first composition), which she initially brought to rehearsals as a simple *saron* melody:

EJ: there were a lot of times where I definitely benefited from being in a group who knew more than me about Javanese music.

GH: In what way?

EJ: Well by asking 'oh what would fit here?' So for example with *Mabon* [I'd ask] 'Oh what would fit here?' [And somebody would suggest,] 'Probably a

lancaran, let's try a *lancaran*', and then it was like, 'Are you happy with that?' and it was like, 'Yeah'. Or 'No', and then we'd try something different. But it was that type of relationship. (Interview transcript 2012: 5)

Jordan's comment touches upon a key aspect of the group dynamic which is rooted in the performance of classical *gendhing*, where players of elaborating instruments have a degree of freedom to derive their own parts from the *balungan*, and that although the *kendhang* and *rebab* might lead changes of *irama* or section, it is ultimately achieved through a shared group feel. In Indonesia, this group dynamic often translates to a collaborative approach when creating new works, where musicians in the group are involved in developing the basic ideas of the composer (or composers) into a fully formed piece (Roth 1986, Ch. 7: 68-83). Whether as a result of the influence of Indonesian teachers, or as an intuitive continuation of traditional performance practice (or some other influence entirely, such as playing in rock bands) this kind of group-based, rehearsal-led creativity crops up in several British ensembles, most notably Naga Mas (Glasgow) and Sekar Petak (University of York).

This type of group dynamic is, of course, not only useful for novice composers with limited knowledge of *karawitan*: it can be one of the fundamental appeals of working in a *karawitan*-based way for anyone, providing a refreshing alternative to the highly prescriptive compositional method common in Western art music. Roth, now an established composer, whose doctoral thesis described compositional practice in Central Java in the early 1980s, speaks of his fascination with collaborative creative practices at ISI Solo, which he contrasted with the 'hardcore modernist attitudes' prevalent when he was an undergraduate in the UK in the 1970s, which at the time prompted him to more-or-less give up composition (email to author, 13 February 2013). Speaking of the appeal of Javanese performance practice, he explains that:

It brings into focus the difference between things which are fixed and things which are created at the moment of performance.... [I]n gamelan there's a much more ... even balance between that which is fixed, like the *balungan* and the fixed form, ... the gong patterns and the drum patterns, and then the whole area of *garap*, the things which are left to the players themselves to develop, within the music, as it's happening. That's the sort of thing which in other forms of Western music still happens, especially in jazz and the performance of popular music or folk music: that has the balance. But it seems to me we've ... developed an extremely unhealthy preponderance towards what's fixed. You know, you only need to look at some contemporary scores and every minutest detail is written down on paper, and there's nothing left for the performers: they're just machines really. (Interview transcript 2012: 4)

In response, he explains that in his composition he tries 'to find ways ... of leaving space for the performers to add something to it. That's what interests me more' (ibid.: 5).

Roth's foregrounding of the performers in the creative process and their engagement with the music is not uncommon amongst composers writing *karawitan*-influenced works. John Jacobs's compositions rely very much upon the experience and skills of the players. For him, one of the main appeals of writing *karawitan*-based works lies in the possibilities for writing large-scale, complex works that can be generated from smaller units of material, simple enough or close enough to traditional *garap* to be orally learned, but which leave space for variation and interaction in performance. This leads to a sense of a shared 'feel' for the

music amongst the performers which he feels is often missing from performances of contemporary Western art music:

[I]t probably is related to some of the things that I find appealing playing jazz, and that's to do with the oral transmission, I suppose: the larger amount of it that's about listening to the people around you and the small amount of it that's about being able to read complicated notation in a very accurate way. (Interview transcript 2012a: 4-5)

Yet the kind of strong group feel that arises from such orally learnt music is only achievable 'with music where there's a much lower degree of complexity, or perhaps better to say a much lower degree of newness, smaller steps away from what came before' (ibid.: 12). For this reason, writing in a *karawitan*-based way allows Jacobs to generate music of greater complexity, asking players to extend their pre-existing knowledge rather than learn completely new material.

The group dynamic and relative freedom from prescriptive notation is not simply a useful tool for composers: for many who play gamelan (including myself) it can be a key part of the enjoyment of participating in the ensemble. The pleasing mental and creative challenge of deriving your own part and the opportunity to feel involved in the creative process can lead to a sense of shared ownership, which in turn might well make the group more eager to perform such pieces more often, or welcome subsequent compositions from that composer enthusiastically. For example, in the space of two years, Jordan's *Mabon* had more concert outings than any other Sekar Petak-born composition during the time I have been in the group, partly because it is catchy and fun to play, but also, perhaps, because we had all felt involved in creating it, something that was not entirely unintentional in Jordan's working methods:

I think ... what ... I probably excel at is ... getting the best out of the people I work with and ... using their skills to my advantage ... and hopefully trying to make everyone feel like they are a part of it as well, without them feeling like I'm some sort of like artistic director who's telling them what to do. (2012 interview transcript: 5)

One final reason some composers draw on *karawitan* is simply that it can sometimes be hard not to. Given the fact that the instruments and the music traditionally played on them evolved together, it can be difficult to avoid using classical structures and do something entirely new, when the whole ensemble seems so well suited to doing what it already does. Even composers such as Symon Clarke who consciously avoid using *karawitan*-like material acknowledge the importance of understanding what aspects of traditional music work well and why:

[T]he ... thing I recognised as a composer is that the instruments have specific functions in gamelan – I mean as they do in a Western symphony orchestra – but the range of the ensemble is about three octaves when it comes down to it ... everything overlaps, and it's about a dense texturing, and it becomes less and less effective if you try and think about it like a Western symphony orchestra ... the Javanese have got it right, the instruments have evolved to perform particular functions within Javanese

music and they do it beautifully, and you kind of dismantle that at your peril, really, as a composer. (Clarke, 2011 Interview transcript: 6)

For some, it can be hard for some to balance an understanding of traditional Javanese music with a truly fresh approach to writing for gamelan. Talking of compositions created for the English Gamelan Orchestra, Neil Sorrell describes how composers often fell into the trap of writing what could be described as pastiche Javanese music based on their knowledge of *karawitan*, as far as that went:

[T]he moment you play a few *lancarans* and *ladrangs* and stuff and people are talking about *balungans* and they get the hang of what these other instruments do, everything then falls into that mould, so all compositions have a *balungan*, punctuations from the *kenong* and *kempuls* and the *bonangs* tend to do sort of *mipils* and *gembyangs* and stuff like that.... I suppose you think yeah well [they did it] because they were quite interested in how gamelan music worked, and therefore you can quite understand people staying sort of fairly within its remit. (Interview transcript 2012: 2)

When writing my own piece, *Waterlily*, I certainly found that sometimes the weight of context could prove difficult to escape. The piece is in two contrasting sections: the first is not composed in a particularly Javanese way (although it has a cyclical structure and the *bonang* play Balinese *kotekan*-inspired patterns), but the second takes the approximate form of a *ladrang* with some novel adaptations to *garap* and an unusual number of *gatra*. It was not my intention to compose a *ladrang* when setting out to write it: the main compositional idea was to have two *gender*, one playing in triple time against duple in the other, generating a rippling, flowing effect evocative of a river, to suit certain programmatic requirements of the piece. I spent some time considering whether to use existing *cengkok* or write new material for the two *gender*. In the end, given the beauty of existing Javanese *cengkok*, the improbability of my writing anything better and the limited time available to Jacobs and myself as performers to learn completely new melodic material from scratch, I decided classical *cengkok* would serve adequately for the effect I wanted. Once this decision was made, I found myself locked into – or at least strongly gravitating towards – using end-weighted melodic structures with *seleh* (as these are an inextricable feature of *cengkok*) which swiftly led to adopting other Javanese structures such as *balungan*, *bentuk* and so on.

So the context of the instruments became difficult to escape for two reasons. Firstly, having adopted one aspect of *karawitan*, many others had to follow: from *cengkok* to *seleh* to *balungan* to *bentuk*. Secondly, the expertise of the musicians (including myself as performer) generated a certain inertia: given a limited amount of time available for rehearsal, using *cengkok* enabled me to obtain the desired effect with little time and relatively little energy required to make it work, and in a manner that was creatively satisfying to all involved.

In summary, there are many reasons composers draw on structures and ideas from *karawitan* in contemporary gamelan music. Some of these are based in the nature of how traditional music is organised. When writing for the gamelan, making use of musical ideas and orchestrations (structural codes) which evolved with the ensemble and are well adapted to produce a sonically pleasing effect is a logical step to take. The difference between the organising principals of gamelan music and other systems the composer may have encountered (such as Western art music or jazz) may itself be an intriguing area to explore: for example, the possibilities inherent in a different pitch set, or an unfamiliar kind

of approach to counterpoint. In some cases composing provides a way to learn about the musical implications of these different principals, bringing a deeper understanding of how classical Javanese music works in a way that merely playing or studying from a textbook cannot. Also, there is the fact that using *karawitan*-like principals of melodic writing, i.e. horizontally-conceived melodic counterpoint rather than vertically-conceived harmonies helps ensure pieces will be playable on any gamelan regardless of *embat*.

Then there are the processual codes: the social aspects of gamelan, the group dynamic, the communication and transmission of compositional ideas in ways which allow the composer to draw on the expertise of the players, to create richly complex music from a simple core idea. This is not only an advantage for relatively inexperienced composers: it can be a profoundly appealing way to make music at all levels, offering a pre-existing model for collaborative creative processes (explored more fully in Chapter 4). This can result in a shared 'feel' for the piece amongst the musicians and a flexibility in performance that might be hard to achieve in a through-composed, fully scored composition. In many (though not all) gamelan groups, this way of working may be appealing to the players as well, allowing them the opportunity to contribute to the compositional process and providing a pleasing but manageable challenge in interpreting their own parts based upon pre-existing knowledge.

Finally, some pieces draw on *karawitan* simply because it can be hard not to. The weight of context can be difficult to escape, whether because the ability to imagine what is possible becomes limited by pre-existing knowledge, because a decision to use one aspect of *karawitan* can cascade into using many, or because performers' knowledge of *karawitan* itself creates inertia, making it much easier to draw on this than ask people to master completely new techniques, especially if rehearsal time is limited.

The need to completely escape the context of the instruments and write something fresh is a significant factor behind many of the approaches discussed in the next section.

Why avoid *karawitan* structures?

There are many works for gamelan which make no reference to any of the aesthetic or organisational principals found in traditional Javanese music, and reasons for avoiding *karawitan* structures are also varied. In some cases, such as Michael Nyman's piece *Time's Up*, which was commissioned for an English Gamelan Orchestra tour in 1983, it may simply be that the composer has little prior knowledge of gamelan to draw upon in the first place. In other instances, the composer may be a knowledgeable enough player but choose to avoid *karawitan* references, perhaps out of a sense that the tradition is one they are not capable of adding anything worthwhile to, or simply because they are motivated by different kinds of compositional ideas. Speaking about his approach to writing, composer and director of the Cambridge Gamelan Society, Robert Campion, explains:

[M]y feeling was I can't possibly build on a tradition like this, so I'm going to really have to take this from a different perspective and ... just purely create ... a sound that I feel is me.... And also in the back of my mind, I suppose yes, this is such an amazing tradition and I'm not part of it, but I'm part of a different culture that's playing it, and I can't try and build on something, someone else's culture in that way. (Interview transcript 2012:7)

For many, consciousness of the need to avoid pastiche is an important reason for eschewing *karawitan* references. Neil Sorrell writes of this problem, which ties in with the aforementioned difficulty in escaping the context of the instruments:

Those who have both played in a gamelan for any length of time and tried to compose for it will probably share a feeling of being conditioned by the traditional uses of the ensemble, as instrumental functions are so clearly defined and constant from piece to piece. This stability is very easy to grasp at a surface level and extremely hard to escape from, with the result that composing for gamelan often results in what I would decry as little more than pale pastiche of the traditional repertoire.(Sorrell 2007: 11)

He goes on to suggest that composers with only a superficial understanding of *karawitan* exploit its forms at their peril, giving the well-documented example of Lou Harrison, whose Javanese compositions have been criticised (for example Sri Hastanto 1985:54) for compositional faults based on a limited understanding of *pathet*, or the interrelation between *padhang-ulihan* and *bentuk*. The fear of falling victim to their own ignorance is often a factor when composers choose to avoid all reference to *karawitan*.

Similarly to the way in which it a composer can be easily dragged into using multiple *karawitan*-based elements after borrowing just one, having decided to write a piece in a purely Western art music way can make certain Javanese concepts difficult to use, as described by Clarke:

The other thing that I experimented with that I found problematic is *irama*, which is an absolutely unique Javanese phenomenon, well a Balinese phenomenon too, but it's anathema in Western music ... and it's very difficult to bring off in a Western composition... I tried it in a couple of pieces and abandoned it, because in rehearsal people just play it like they play the Javanese stuff, and it works beautifully in Javanese traditional music, but as a device in Western music it just sounds like you're clunking through the gears,... [it] just doesn't work.... *irama* was something I found I just couldn't translate. (Interview transcript 2011: 9)

Whilst *karawitan* structures offer great possibilities for drawing on the expertise of the group but less influence over what is finally performed, conversely writing in a conventional Western art music manner, with every note specified in a score, offers the composer a great deal more control over the final output, and thus the opportunity to create something complex that does not rely on pre-existing, pre-learned structures. Daniel March describes how his approach to writing for gamelan changed over the course of three works as he found himself requiring a greater degree of control in order to realise his compositional ideas:

[I]n terms of a straight-forward trajectory, there's a move in these pieces from a more traditional gamelan-type way of working to a much more – similarly traditional, similarly conventional – new music way of composing: you know, here's the piece, you play it. Because I became more egotistical, you see! [laughs].... I think it's probably about the control. And I suppose it's just the sort of musician you are really, or even the sort of things that interest you compositionally.... At that time, I suppose, I was interested in doing those things where I had made the decision about the composition and wanted to specify all those things pretty exactly.(Interview transcript 2011: 11)

The kind of complexity that can be created through fully scored music is, of course, of a different nature to that arising from Javanesque *garap*. In the former, players are reproducing exactly the ideas of the composer as expressed through the notation and adding little – at least in terms of notes and rhythms – themselves, whereas in *karawitan* musicians of all but the simplest instruments will be playing something quite different from what is written in any notation they might (or might not) be using,⁹³ and are making small decisions all the time over which variation to play, when to change section and so on. Works such as March's *Pieces of Five and Three* (case study C), which uses a 21-note microtonal scale created from *slendro*, *pelog* and equal temperament pitches, rely upon a particular type of complexity and intricacy that absolutely requires the composer's control of every note to realise the compositional ideas.

However, this question of full scoring can arguably represent something of a pitfall in certain pieces, for example ones which are influenced by the sound of classical gamelan music but attempt to realise related ideas through fully scored parts. In many cases, such pieces beg the question of whether a similar effect could have been achieved in a more interesting (not least for the players) way by retaining the freer interpretative structures of *karawitan*. For example, an attempt by Gamelan Sekar Petak to play through de Leeuw's *Gending* from its highly prescriptive score, led some players to question whether a more interesting effect could be achieved through improvisations based upon – but not tied to – the score (Sorrell, p.c. 2011). Compared to the richness and variation generated by classical *garap*, it is easy for through-composed, fully-notated gamelan works to end up sounding somehow empty and stilted unless the composer puts a lot of effort into building an equally full orchestration. Of course, it could be argued that composers writing *karawitan*-based works can equally fall into the same difficulty if their knowledge of the idiom is not great enough: mistaking the *saron* line for the 'main' melody and thinking that gamelan music is based upon a some kind of heterophony is likely to lead to this problem, which is common amongst novice composers.

In many pieces, the reason traditional structures are not found is simply because the composer had other ideas to explore. Treated as an ensemble of (mainly) tuned percussion instruments, the gamelan has great sonic potential for composers to explore beyond the boundaries of the music traditionally played upon it. There is another potential pitfall here: there are pieces composed for gamelan which in essence could have been composed for any ensemble: Nyman's *Time's Up* is a typical example sounding, as Andy Channing put it, 'like a Michael Nyman piece that he just happened to write for gamelan' (interview transcript, 2011:7) and making no more use of the instruments than as a basic pitch set. This is a problem Alec Roth defines using the analogy of 'software' and 'hardware':

[Y]ou have Western composers writing pieces for gamelan who have just taken the hardware..., the instruments.... It's like trying to run a Windows programme on an Apple Mac machine: you can't do it because the operating system is just completely different. And unless you take that into account, you're going to be in trouble. (Interview transcript 2012: 9-10)

As Neil Sorrell often points out, particularly when looking at non-*karawitan* style works, it is often worth asking the question 'Well why use a gamelan then?' (p.c., *passim*). Whilst

⁹³ As well as interpolating idiomatic instrumental lines from the written *balungan*, players may make other decisions based on knowledge of what other parts – *rebab* or vocal lines, for example – are doing.

with Nyman's piece, it is tempting to respond 'Why indeed?' there are many perfectly valid compositional responses to this question: pieces that make original use of the instruments to produce music that could not be achieved on any other kind of ensemble, for example, works which combine *slendro*, *pelog* and equal temperament together, or works which draw on the unique sonic qualities of the instruments.

To summarise: some composers deliberately avoid reference to traditional gamelan music when writing for the ensemble, for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the composer's own lack of knowledge of *karawitan* may discourage him or her (often quite wisely) from exploiting it, as ignorance can easily lead to compositional mistakes and risks producing a substandard imitation of something only half-understood. Related to this, a desire to avoid what Sorrell describes as a 'pale pastiche' (2007) may drive even those composers with a deeper knowledge of *karawitan* to seek out other ways of organising the sounds of the gamelan instruments. Some find classical gamelan music so complete in itself they see no need to add compositionally to that body of work, preferring instead to approach the ensemble in a completely fresh way. In many cases, the composer is simply working in a manner familiar to him or her, for example, writing out a full score rather than working with ideas such as *balungan* and *garap*. Often it is driven by a compositional need to control more aspects of the piece more closely, to specify exactly what notes should be played when, and how they should be articulated. Or it might simply be that the composer wishes to exploit particular sonic aspects of the instruments, such as pitch or timbre, in a way that has nothing to do with Javanese music.

Why combine *karawitan* and other musical approaches?

As mentioned above, the pieces discussed in this chapter are not easily separable into distinct types, but exist on a spectrum, with all but the most rigorously anti-*karawitan* works bearing traces of some technical or structural ideas found in traditional gamelan music, and no works completely devoid of influences from elsewhere. As such, many of the arguments given above for both using and avoiding *karawitan*-based structures apply to compositional decisions made within pieces occupying the central ground: works which actively mix principals from *karawitan* with those from other musical systems.

Often the awareness of arguments for both approaches (for example, the desire to avoid 'pale' pastiche whilst retaining elements of *karawitan* that work elegantly on gamelan instruments) is the driving force behind such syntheses. For composer and academic, Nye Parry, trying to achieve this balance and avoid pastiche is a key concern. Despite being a composer who usually avoids too-obvious reference to *karawitan* in his works, his most revealing comments on the issue surround his deliberate use of pastiche in music for a film about Antonin Artaud, a French writer who was inspired by Balinese dance dramas in the 1930s to develop a new form of European physical theatre (see Cohen 2010: 142-7):

I do base it very much on gamelan structures in a way that I wouldn't in other pieces, because [Artaud] is discovering Balinese music. But even there I've sort of put the accents in the wrong places and things like that, in order not to pretend that I'm writing Balinese music, because if it gets judged alongside a Balinese piece as Balinese music it will fail dismally! ... I feel the wonkiness in my music for gamelan is a deliberate stepping away from the tradition and not trying to put myself in a place where I will be compared to the tradition. (Interview transcript 2011: 12)

In other words, Parry avoids the pitfalls of pastiche by deliberately tampering with traditional structures, introducing intentional oddities to distinguish his music from 'real' Balinese *gong kebyar*. By way of contrast, Sorrell speaks self-deprecatingly of disguising pastiche of one kind of music by combining it with various other kinds of pastiche, giving the example of his mass for choir and gamelan, *MissaGongso*:

The main thing was to get away from the ... pastiche *lancarans* and stuff: I thought there's no point in that, it's not adding anything, it's just manipulating something.... It was just that feeling of why bother, you know?... But if you do little bits of pastiche of all these other guys stitched altogether in a different package then you can get away with it as an original composition! (Interview transcript 2012: 4-5)

Whether it is fair to describe *MissaGongso* as a mere patchwork of pastiches from various sources is worth questioning. The opening 'Kyrie', for example, is in fact more of an exercise in meticulous code synthesis, where a choral fugue is integrated into a Javanese-style gong cycle (or perhaps a gong cycle is created around a choral fugue), forming a single unifying structure, each element supportive of the other. Even if both threads began life as pastiche, the act of bringing them together creates something new which is larger than the sum of its parts; in other words, Sorrel does indeed 'get away with it' but he does so because there is far more to the piece than a patchwork of generic elements.

Linguistic quibbles aside, the above quote hints at a deeper interest which characterises Sorrell's many gamelan compositions: integrating Javanese forms with structures from Western classical music. For many composers, this kind of deliberate code synthesis – the act of combining and finding points of connection between two distinct styles – is a creative process that can yield interesting and original results, and serves a wide variety of motivations.

American gamelan teacher and composer, Jody Diamond, suggests that composing can be a way to 'interpret the tradition' for audiences unfamiliar with it:

Familiar elements (such as Alec Roth's use of Shakespeare) or melody give the Western listener a point of reference: when the listener focuses on a familiar element, it is possible that its relationship to musical structures and embellishments in which it is set may become more apparent.

(Diamond 1992a: 122)

Sometimes the initial impetus to mix styles comes from a prior decision to combine gamelan with non-gamelan instruments, whilst retaining technically and musically idiomatic ideas from their associated systems. Interestingly, a disproportionate number of the most explicit fusions of musical style are in response to a commission or a specific performance opportunity. For example, *MissaGongso* was composed for Gamelan Sekar Petak's first formal invitation to perform in York Minster; John Jacobs's *Perkembangan Cinta* (Development of Love, which gave Messiaen's 'Développement de l'amour' theme a syrupy *kroncong*⁹⁴ treatment) was created in response to a request for a gamelan first-half of a concert featuring *Turangalila Symphony*;⁹⁵ whilst an Inverness-based promoter's request to produce a Scottish-themed gamelan concert prompted Naga Mas member Mags Smith to collaborate with highland piper Barnaby Brown in creating *Iron Pipes*.

⁹⁴Ais a Portuguese-influenced Indonesian folk style dating back to 16th century. Bands typically include ukuleles or mandolins, guitars, cello, flute, violin and singers.

⁹⁵A common request which mainly seems to be based upon Messiaen's naming of the percussion section as a *gamelang*, implying a vague, impressionistic inspiration.

Why there should so often be an outside agent or situation involved in the decision to set out upon these deliberate syntheses of musical styles is a question worth pondering further. I tentatively suggest that it may have at its source the increasingly cautious and self-conscious approach towards 'East meets West'-type fusions that was touched upon above. An awareness of these critiques has led musicians to increasingly adopt a wary, reflective approach to setting out on cross-cultural fusions, at the very least taking care over how they word the terms of engagement (i.e. probably avoiding contentious terms such as 'East', 'West' or 'fusion').

For example, when Mags Smith was informed of the commission for some Scottish gamelan music from Inverness, her initial reaction was one of disdain:

[T]he gamelan and bagpipe project ... was just suggested to me and I thought 'that's ridiculous'. I talked it over with Simon [van der Walt] first of all, about what the possibilities were.... [A]nd there was just this funny coincidence happened when the very next day this bagpipe player in the academy came up and started talking to Simon about gamelan and we thought 'this is the man'. And he was!

(Interview transcript 2012: 1)

With the right people in place, this initial wariness soon gave way to a rewarding collaboration which produced several works. However, combining different distinctive musical systems without resorting to cliché can provide a challenge. As well as bringing sufficiently deep knowledge of their respective systems of music, collaborating musicians must create a space for original ideas and expressions to arise from the confluence of both musics, rather than simply aping the obvious features of one or the other. One work that arose from this collaboration, *Iron Pipes*, manages to avoid setting itself firmly within either the *karawitan* or piping camp, seems to have achieved this particularly well, and all the main participants (Mags Smith, the piper Barnaby Brown, and Signy Jakobsdottir, the musical director of Naga Mas) spoke in glowing terms of the project. However, Brown expressed somewhat less enthusiasm for one of the other pieces created for the same Inverness concert, an arrangement of Bonny Anne and Berwick Bully for gamelan and pipes, explaining that

I really wanted to get away from the clichés of knocking out Scottish-sounding tunes on the gamelan. I suppose I was excited by new territory and new sounds' as well as the possibility of exploring the deeper-level confluences in the music, such as the cyclical nature of *pibroch* (highland art music) and *karawitan*. (Interview transcript 2013: 5)

For Smith, the collaboration had the unexpected outcome that she ended up connecting to local traditions as well as developing her understanding of *karawitan* forms. Although a healthy discomfort with obvious manipulation of cultural stereotypes remains evident, the statement below shows that through engaging in a well-considered musical collaboration she found a way to negotiate a synthesis of musical idioms in a way that was more meaningful than the mere parading of clichés:

My experience of playing gamelan has led me to have more of an interest in Scottish-ness: getting involved in another culture's music and related arts got me quite serious about some of my own.... When I was asked to do something Scottish with gamelan I thought what do I know about Scottish music? Very little. I learned a lot about bagpipes, exploring Celtic music alongside gamelan. I've

always found it slightly embarrassing to be Scottish – we have a joke: ‘don’t come back as a walking shortbread tin’, you know, what’s all this tartan about? So it’s actually helped me connect to something of my own culture.

(Interview transcript 2011b: 5)

This brings us to an interesting aspect of gamelan composition in Britain and its relation to ‘cultural identity’: as more people study in depth – including substantial periods of study in Indonesian conservatoires – and increasing numbers make a primary career out of teaching and performing gamelan, participants become less likely to consider themselves as engaged in the ‘music of the other’ but are simply doing what they know best. At least four of the musicians I spoke to – John Pawson, Nye Parry, John Jacobs and Charles Matthews – consider gamelan to be their primary musical activity, and in the case of Matthews, his only area of in-depth musical knowledge. As Parry explains, ‘I’ve now been playing gamelan for over half my life and I’m actually much more comfortable writing for gamelan than I am writing for western orchestra, for example’ (2011:14). It is perhaps this sense of having internalised Javanese or Balinese gamelan music and incorporated it into a personalised, multifaceted musical identity that has many musicians find terms like East meets West problematic or feel that it does not represent what they are trying to achieve. For example, Mark Lockett says:

As a composer I was never trying to do East meets West fusion, you know, I was just writing a piece using these instruments – I wasn’t consciously trying to make a point about global harmony. But I think possibly in the popular imagination that those issues are important. And it was, you know, East meets West was such a sort of marketing label wasn’t it? (Interview transcript 2012: 14)

The act of referencing various musical systems in compositions for gamelan can be seen as a normal expression of a bimusical or multimusical (Hood 1960) background: an unsurprising manifestation of a contemporary world in which is found an ever-increasing level of cultural diversity and knowledge across multiple musical systems: a state which Turino defines as ‘cosmopolitanism’ (2003:62). It might even be regarded as the first stirrings of ‘normalisation’, the process by which hybrid forms become an accepted norm and are even adopted as an original local form as their diverse, multi-ethnic origins are forgotten, as with reggae in Jamaica (Richard Lightman, by email 30 January 2013). Although gamelan may never acquire the truly ‘global music’ status held by pop music (a dubious honour at best), new, indigenous composition has an important role in the process of normalisation, which is exactly what Roth was driving at in the quote given at the start of this thesis:

It’s simple botanical fact: if you’re going to transplant this tender plant from an alien climate and soils and tradition and expect it to survive, then it’s got to take root. And it’s got to take root with new nutrients, new soils. So there’s got to be new growth. It’s the only way it’s going to take root properly. And I really believe that passionately.

(Interview transcript 2011: 16)

In summary, there are a number of motivations for engaging in deliberate code synthesis between disparate musical systems. In some cases, the composer wishes to draw on the best opportunities presented by both sets of musical codes, whilst for others it is a way of referencing karawitan whilst sidestepping accusations of pastiche or incompetence. It might be done to provide a way in to traditional gamelan music for audiences unfamiliar with its constructs. Sometimes the synthesis of structural codes occurs as a result of combining

instruments from different systems (examined further in Chapter 5). And in some cases, bringing together musical styles is an exercise in positioning the gamelan in relation to local contexts, whether in response to opportunities presented by an outside agent, such as an idea for a concert, or as an expression of the composer's own complex and multifaceted musical identity.

Conclusions

All pieces considered in this thesis involve some kind of code mixing. Some focus primarily upon *karawitan* (or other gamelan-related) musical structures and practices, whilst those at the opposite end of the spectrum treat the instruments as a sound source divorced from their historical musical context. Those in the centre seek a balance between all elements, highlighting points of connection or creating formats in which disparate styles can coexist. Some very deliberate centre-ground pieces, such as *Iron Pipes*, *MissaGongso* and *Perkembangan Cinta*, are undertaken to fulfil a particular external situation, a desire or need to recontextualise the gamelan in order to acknowledge local physical, temporal or cultural spaces (a venue, a commemorative event, a concert commission).

But in many ways, recontextualisation is a feature of *all* compositions for gamelan in Britain (and elsewhere). Whilst 'East meets West' may have fallen out of favour as a label, the fact remains that playing a Javanese gamelan in Britain, or anywhere else outside Central Java, is still considered a statement of a meeting of cultures (in the way that, say, a Chopin recital in Tokyo might not, because it has become the norm). Where the gamelan is presented only through performances of 'traditional' music, it does little to address the concerns of exoticism, beyond normalisation through exposure: average audiences in the UK are unlikely to bring the same appreciation of the finer nuances of the performance as audiences in Java, but will probably bring plenty of their own imaginings of a distant and mysterious Other. The cultures may occupy the same physical venue for the duration of the performance, but the opportunity for meaningful exchange of musical understanding is limited. As Andrew McGraw puts it:

By presenting images of 'tradition' free of the signs of modernity and hybridization, 'authentic' performances freeze the other in a past that appears to deny potential transformation. Contemporary spectacles of hybridity suggest that it may be the assumption of authenticity that is the truly distorting exotification. (2013)

New, localised composition represents, for some, a way to draw closer to a mutual understanding between musical cultures (although some might argue that it is more a muddying of both waters). Looked at another way, it can be seen as a way to force the issue, to draw attention to the juxtaposition, to demand the audience seek out familiar, recognisable elements amongst the exotic sonorous gongs and enchanting carvings. Works analysed in this thesis show how elements of Indonesian music can be combined with musical codes more familiar to audiences, offering a toe-hold, a pathway into the Javanese structures through their presentation alongside and in contrast to local idioms. This represents a classic example of code-mixing: combining disparate modes of musical communication to affirm something about the coexistence of multiple identities in a single setting, whether that setting is a country, a building or a *Turangalila* concert – or indeed within the composer.

However, it should be borne in mind that for many of the musicians interviewed, the act of composing for gamelan is not about a meeting of cultures or an expression of hybrid identities. Particularly amongst those who have made gamelan their main (or a very significant) musical focus, it may simply be a matter of drawing upon the musical tools and knowledge at their disposal to create the music they want to create.

In this, we see the manifestation of the musical garden described in separate quotes from Roth, Channing and Wilkinson at the start of this paper. Over three decades on from when the UK acquired its first usable gamelan, the seed of *karawitan* has taken root in this alien soil and flourished, becoming part of the cultural landscape and producing many strange and wonderful flowers.

Bibliography

Cohen, Matthew. *Performing Otherness: Java and Bali on International Stages, 1905-1952*. Palgrave McMillan, 2010.

Diamond, Jody. 'Interactions: New Music for Gamelan'. *Leonardo Music Journal*, 2/1 (1992a), 99 – 102.

Feld, Steven. 'Notes on World Beat', in *Music Grooves*, eds Feld & Keil. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Hood, Mantle. 'The Challenge of "Bi-Musicality"'. *Ethnomusicology*, 2/4 (1960), 55-59.

House, Ginevra. 'Strange Flowers: Cultivating new music for gamelan on British Soil'. PhD diss., University of York, 2014.

Hutnyk, John. *Critique of Exotica*. London: Pluto Press, 2000.

McGraw, Andrew Clay. 'The Gamelan and Indonesian Music in America'. Oxford University Press blog, 27 November 2013. Available online: <http://blog.oup.com/2013/11/gamelan-indonesian-music-america/>. Accessed 18 June 2014.

Mendonça, Maria. 'Javanese Gamelan in Britain: Communitas, Affinity and Other Stories'. PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2002.

Roth, A. R. 'New Composition for Javanese Gamelan'. PhD diss., University of Durham, 1986.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.

Slobin, Mark. 'Musical Multiplicity: Emerging Thoughts'. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 39 (2007), 108 – 116.

_____. *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993.

Sorrell, Neil. 'Issues of Pastiche and Illusions of Authenticity in Gamelan-inspired composition'. *Indonesia and the Malay World* 35/101 (2007), 31-48.

_____. 'Gamelan: Occident or Accident?'. *The Musical Times*, 133/1788 (1992), 66 – 68.

Sri Hastanto. 'The Concept of Pathet in Javanese Music'. PhD diss., University of Durham, 1985.

Steele, Pete. 'Balinese Hybridities: Balinese Music as Global Phenomena'. PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2013.

Taylor, Eric. 'The Durham Oriental Music Festival'. *The Musical Times*, Vol. 117, No. 1602 (Aug. 1976), p652.

Turino, Thomas. 'Are We Global Yet? Globalist Discourse, Cultural Formations and the Study of Zimbabwean Popular Music'. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 12/2 (2003), 51 – 79.

Interviews

Brown, Barnaby. Interview with author. 24 July 2013, by telephone. Private recording, wave format. Transcription by author.

Campion, Robert. Interview with author. 25 May 2012, Campion's home, Cambridgeshire. Private recording, wave format. Transcription by author.

Channing, Andy. Interview with author. 28 July 2011, City University, London. Private recording, wave format. Transcription by author.

Clarke, Symon. Interview with author. 29 July 2011, Kensington, London. Private recording, wave format. Transcription by author.

Ellen Jordan. Interview with author. 8 November 2012, author's house, York.

Jacobs, John. Interviews with author. 15 November 2012a, 31 October 2012b, 15 January 2013, author's house.

March, Daniel. Interview with author. 24 July 2011, March's office, University of York.

Moran, Peter. Interview with author. January 2011, authors house, York.

Parry, Nye. Interview with author. 29 July 2011, a café in Lewisham, London.

Roth, Alec. Interview with author. 27 February 2012, Roth's house, Malvern.

Signy Jakobsdottir. Interview with author. 9 July 2013, by telephone. Private recording, wave format. Transcription by author.

Smith, Margaret and Simon van der Walt. Interview with author. 17 May 2011 at Smith's house, Glasgow. P

Sorrell, Neil. Interviews with author. 7 July 2011 and 23 January 2012 in Sorrell's office.

Stewart, Dave. Interview with author. 6 October 2012, by telephone.

Wilkinson, Clive. Interview with author. 12 February 2011a in the gamelan room, University of York.