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Review: Bali 1928 I: Gamelan Gong Kebyar: Music from Belaluan, Pungkung, Busungbiu; The Oldest New Music of Bali

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Film, Video, and Multimedia Review

Bali 1928 I: Gamelan Gong Kebyar: Music from Belaluan, Pangkung, Busungbiu; The Oldest New Music of Bali. 2009. Notes by Edward Herbst. Arbiter Record Company, World Arbiter 2011. One multi-media compact disc. Booklet (15 pp.) including photographs. Expanded computer-accessible content includes essay (66 pp.) with bibliography, glossary, and silent films.

The 5-CD series *Bali: 1928* contains a complete compilation of the only commercially released recordings of Balinese music made before World War II. As such, the recordings capture the innovative artistic styles, such as the music of *gamelan gong kebyar* and its associated dance traditions, that emerged from the period of dramatic social and political upheaval in Bali at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, these musical styles are fundamental to the modern Balinese arts scene. Originally recorded by Odeon and Beka on a series of 78 rpm recordings in 1928, and released to audiences both in Bali and worldwide, the scattered copies of the 104 original recorded sides have been compiled and remastered in this set and presented on an enhanced CD with extensive notes, glossary, and supplemental films. The first installment of the series is reviewed here.

Bali: 1928 I: Gamelan Gong Kebyar is devoted entirely to early kebyar compositions, featuring works from three locations that were crucial to the development of modern kebyar style: Belaluan, Pangkung, and Bungbiu. The Belaluan recordings comprise five works including the popular “Kebyar Ding” (also found on the Arbiter release *The Roots of Gamelan—The First Recordings—Bali, 1928, New York 1941*), with expert drumming by I Madé Regog, as well as “Tabuh Telu Buaya Mangap,” which provided inspiration for Colin McPhee’s piano composition “Balinese Ceremonial Music.” The Pangkung excerpts include “Gending Sesulingan,” which became the central musical theme for Balinese dance icon I Marya’s *Igel Trompong*. Among other tracks, the excerpts from Busungbiu feature several fascinating *kebyar-legong* “hybrids,” such as “Tabuh Légod Bawa.” On the whole, Edward Herbst’s masterful compilation and restoration of this collection

allows a new generation of listeners to be entranced by the diverse sounds of these early experiments with the kebyar style.

The CD booklet features numerous early photographs of the featured groups, as well as a brief introduction to the recording process and the individual pieces. In addition, the disc contains computer-accessible content, including an extensive essay by Herbst on the history of Bali, modern gamelan styles, and the process of restoring and repatriating these recordings to elders and descendants of the original musicians. Listening guides to each track within the essay feature detailed stylistic analyses by numerous modern gamelan performers and scholars and are accompanied by a separate glossary. A crowning touch is the inclusion of three brief silent videos (recorded in 1938 by Rolf de Maré) of Marya playing *trompong* and instructing a child in kebyar dance.

This invaluable historical collection captures quintessential modern Balinese musical styles in their period of early development, exposing listeners to the sounds that inspired not just generations of Balinese musical innovators but also the likes of Colin McPhee, Walter Spies, and Benjamin Britten. In sum, this recording is a must-have for gamelan performers and scholars, as well as an important addition to any personal, archival, or library collection in the area of ethnomusicology.

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