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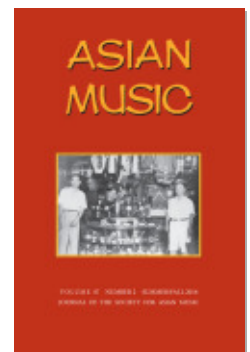
*Bali 1928, Volume 1: Gamelan Gong Kebyar Music from  
Belaluan, Pungkung, Busungbiu—the Oldest New Music from  
Bali* by Allan Evans and Edward Herbst (review)

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# Multimedia Review Essay

***Bali 1928, Volume 1: Gamelan Gong Kebyar Music from Belaluan, Pangkung, Busungbiu—the Oldest New Music from Bali.*** Produced by Allan Evans and Edward Herbst. World Arbiter, 2011. One CD-ROM (29:43). Essay, glossary, and bibliography by Edward Herbst on the CD in PDF, with MPEG-4 files of old silent-film footage and photographs by Jaap Kunst, Colin McPhee, Beryl de Zoete, and Walter Spies. \$15.29.

This CD, the first of an important series of five (with the possibility of a sixth), remastered from 78 rpm discs made by Beka and Odeon in 1928 *Bali* (released in 1929), is a musical time capsule.<sup>1</sup> It offers the listener a window into a former time and sonic world. It was the moment in which *gamelan gong kebyar*, the “explosive” twentieth-century style of composition, was first developing, after its estimated inception in around 1915 in North Bali. Beyond the experience of listening, we are treated to visual images (MPEG-4 files of early silent films and excellent photos from that era) and other informative materials, such as a PDF of an extensive, well-researched, 66-page booklet by ethnomusicologist and Bali specialist Edward Herbst that touches on the contents of all five CDs in the series. Thus, the concept of the compact disc is expanded to become a multidisciplinary ethnography and the basis for an ongoing repatriation and revival project, with Herbst at the helm, that has already produced results (instigating several Balinese groups to revive pieces heard on the recordings). This series began with a prior “sampler” CD, *The Roots of Gamelan* (World Arbiter, 2001, reviewed in *Asian Music* [Spring/Summer 33] and in *Ethnomusicology* 48[1]:149–50), containing some of the same recordings as those that appear on this CD. But the multimedia concept of this new series, its large-scale thematic organization as a series, and the technology developed by recording engineer Allan Evans offering a new sound quality have developed significantly since that CD was made.

In a paper presented at University of California, Berkeley, about this series, Herbst stated,

Allan Evans made his own transfers using custom-made styluses he had found to be especially suited to late 1920s Odeon and Beka 78s. In addition to commonly known digital software restoration, Allan has developed techniques in which he literally gets in the groove, weighing down the tone arm and angling the stylus

in unorthodox positions to fully expose sounds left buried in shellac discs. This enabled us to hear much more clearly, for instance, the drumming patterns, or an instrument, like the *klintong*, a small gong. Such audio information has been essential for my Balinese colleagues to re-conceptualize the elements that went into the creative evolution of music in the 1920s, offering surprising evidence of *légong* technique during the birth of *kebyar*. (Herbst 2012)

Making this CD series must have been no easy task. Herbst spent years tracking down the original recordings from archives and elsewhere (104 “matrices” or sides, some discovered with the help of Philip Yampolsky). One-third of the recordings originally appeared in Europe and America, with the rest intended to be sold in Bali. Due to poor sales in Bali and abroad at the time of issue, most copies were destroyed. The 78 rpm records were melted down, much as many of the early *gamelan palégongan* and *semar pagulingan* sets of instruments were melted down in the early twentieth century for the bronze to be reforged into *gamelan gong kebyar* sets of instruments that are featured on this CD.

In the accompanying PDF booklet, Herbst offers a quote from Béla Bartók’s *Essays* written in 1937 about the imperative to return recordings to the people from whence they came. Of the melting down of matrices (record sides) Bartók wrote, “This happened with one of the highly valuable Javanese record series of Odeon, as quoted in the bibliography of *Musique et chansons populaires* of the League of Nations. If matrices of this kind actually are destroyed, it represents vandalism of such nature that the different countries ought to enact laws to prevent it, just as there are laws in certain countries prohibiting destruction or marring of historic monuments” (Bartók 1992, 294, cited in Herbst 2011, 4). These are the first commercial recordings made in Bali and the only ones made prior to World War II. The PDF booklet also includes informative quotes about the original 78 recordings by the late Bali specialist and ethnomusicologist Andrew Toth (1980), who had access to only 98 of the matrices, noting that this collection was the first exposure to Indonesian music for many people. The collection influenced such scholars as Erich von Horbostel, who included five matrices of these recordings in his anthology of non-Western traditions, *Music of the Orient*. Herbst also pulls together reports by Walter Spies (who was directly involved in supervising the recordings), Beryl De Zoete (who, with Spies, wrote about Balinese dance and theater during that time), and Colin McPhee (who was drawn to Bali as a result of hearing these recordings and then later filmed the excerpts on the CD). Beyond remastering these recordings, Herbst has spent years researching the material (including an eight-year process to obtain permissions from the various archives). He has assembled a research team of numerous knowl-

edgeable Balinese performers and scholars and taken the recordings to the descendants and colleagues of musicians who played on the recordings or, in some rare instances, to the few remaining musicians who played on the recordings themselves (who range in age from their 80s to over 100 years old). Through lengthy discussions with these musicians about their recollections and responses to hearing the recordings today and discussions with current performers, Herbst has amassed a wealth of information that enriches the experience of listening to the CD through contextualization of a different and significant formative time in Balinese musical and political development.

There is much speculation about the contributing factors leading to the birth of *kebyar*, the dynamic twentieth-century style of Balinese music that remains the most prevalent form of music in Bali today. Several opinions are offered here, with anecdotal recollections of the “first” *kebyar* competition, festival, performance, composition, dance, version of a given piece, techniques, and so forth. It is clear that the spirit of competition dates back as far as people can remember and that *kebyar* was first created in the North Bali district of Buleleng, which is a distinct subculture from that of other areas of Bali due to its prior isolation and colonial Dutch presence and influence, pre-dating that in other areas by decades.

But *kebyar* quickly spread throughout Bali, and unearthing the minutiae of transmission paths and the personalities involved can be an exciting and endless journey with many convoluted twists and turns. This CD offers *kebyar* styles from three distinct areas of Bali: Belaluan in the capital city of Denpasar in the south, Pangkung village in the Tabanan district of southwestern Bali, and the village of Busungbiu in northwestern Bali. These three are significant for their contributions to *kebyar*, as well as interrelated in their transmission histories. The presentation style of notes in the PDF is jumbled at times, which is understandable to anyone who has conducted fieldwork in Bali and experienced the plethora of opinions and recollections of dates and facts (one encounters), but if the reader is willing to sift through it, many gems emerge. For instance, there are varying accounts of the “first” *kebyar* performance—which, while confusing, reinforces the fact that there is no clear-cut historical account of Balinese musical development, and it is clear that *kebyar*-like performances were occurring in many places simultaneously from the early twentieth century on. Rather than limit his discussion to the three gamelan groups appearing on this CD, Herbst includes as many accounts throughout Bali as he encountered. The accompanying PDF is not a listening guide for the novice listener, but the explanations for the tracks do contain much helpful information. The sheer number of names of people and places may confuse nonspecialists, yet the notes offer a detailed and rich array of interesting

comments and background histories informing each track and shedding new light, geared toward specialists.

North-south *kebyar* transmission paths began in the early twentieth century as *kebyar* was brought to Belaluan from musicians of the northern village of Ringdikit. In exchange, Belaluan musicians passed on knowledge of their courtly, “classical” *légong* styles of the south. Prior to this, notable *légong* masters came from the south to teach *légong* in the north. This influence led to the creation in the north of the dance piece *Kebyar Légong*, which spurred the creation of one of the most significant *kebyar* dances and compositions today—*Teruna Jaya* in the northern Balinese village of Jagaraga. This crossover between *palégongan* and *gong kebyar* is a fascinating one that can clearly be heard in some of the tracks on this CD. On certain tracks, such as track 16, “Tabuh Légod Bawa,” even within a single piece the music seems to vacillate between the two styles.

This *légong-kebyar* crossover is also seen in dance. Much discussion in the PDF booklet is devoted to renowned dancer I Ketut Marya (1897 or 1898–1968),<sup>2</sup> who is thought to have been the originator of the *kebyar* style of dancing in which the dancer is seated on his or her knees and in a low squat on the ground, moving the upper torso and arms. His merging of gender roles into the *bebanci* (androgynous) style appears to have been the first, as he was trained both in female *gandrung* style (a form of *légong* female dance danced by a male), as well as male styles. Interesting stories relate the circumstances under which this merging might have occurred. And the very relationship between musicians and dancer seems to have shifted radically as a result of Marya’s insistence on having the musicians follow the dance, which, in most cases, was improvisational. This flexibility and improvisatory dancing in *kebyar* is no longer evident, as most *kebyar* dances today have a fixed choreography set to its musical accompaniment (and vice versa). This highlights a significant change since the 1920s, about which I have heard musicians in other genres reminisce as well—a move away from flexibility toward standardization and *patokan* (fixed patterning). Marya was also described as playing a major role in transmitting *kebyar* from his home of Tabanan to other regions of Bali. This and changes in the spatial layout of the gamelan in relation to the dancer to promote music-dance interaction are brought to light in these notes through a remarkable collection of personal communications and comments of informants, writings, and the research team.

Nuances of the transmission and creation histories can shed light on a system allowing for the perpetuation of older forms, genres, and styles along with room for innovation (see also Gold 2013, forthcoming). For instance, Herbst reports that the great Gusti Gde Raka Badeng (better known as Anak Agung Raka Saba) reportedly taught the renowned Saba village style *légong*

to composer Wayan Lotring (from Kuta in the south), who then disseminated this version throughout Bali and later passed it on to the son of Anak Agung Raka Saba (by the same name), returning it to its place of origin. Other CDs in the series will feature some of Lotring's own compositions, which were influential to many subsequent composers. Musical borrowing and giving homage to fellow composers by quoting segments of their pieces are intrinsic to Balinese composition. A case in point is today's renowned composer Wayan Beratha (whose father, Made Regog, played on the Belaluan recordings on this CD), who recounts early connections between Busungbiu and Belaluan via the village of Peliatan as an explanation for his creation of his well-known *kebyar* composition "Jaya Semara," influenced by Peliatan's piece "Kapi Raja."

The CD consists of 18 tracks. Tracks 1–10 are from *Gamelan Gong Kebyar* of Belaluan, Denpasar, home to the composer Wayan Beratha, who contributed much information to the notes. Due to the three-minute limit of each track on the original records, the first piece, "Kebyar Ding" was divided into 6 tracks, and Pangkung's "Gending Longgor" (tracks 12–15) into 4. The producers chose to keep these tracks separate to preserve their original integrity. The listening guide includes various musicians' reactions to hearing the recording, commenting on such things as mallet technique, elaboration, and subtle grace notes that they hear as contrasting to those techniques today.

"Kebyar Ding" is significant in that it is considered to be one of the first *kebyar* instrumental compositions that does not accompany dance. Many of the hallmarks of today's *kebyar* are heard here, with all the contrasting sections, from *kebyar* passages (in which all the instruments play in unison with syncopated, jagged melodies without a regular pulse or heterophony) to lyrical cyclic passages with stratification and interlocking elaboration. What surprised many of the Balinese contemporary listeners was how modern the music sounded. They were surprised to hear that what they consider contemporary has been around almost one century. I personally was also surprised to hear the *kantilan* (high-register *gangsa* metallophones) interlocking on their own in the beginning of track 3 of "Kebyar Ding" ("Oncang-Oncangan"), a technique that seemed innovative when employed by composers in the 1980s.

Track 7, "Curik Ngaras" (Starlings kissing), demonstrates the power of these recordings to lead to reconstruction. When Herbst gave Wayan Beratha a copy of the recording, he immediately began reconstructing it to be played by his group today. "Kembang Lengkuas" (Turmeric flower, track 8) is derived from *gong gede lalambatan*, the venerated, slow, stately temple music, which reportedly gives it the feeling of *paling* (off-balance disorientation). This is followed by track 9, "Tabuh Telu" (named after the *lalambatan* form of the piece), a fast-paced rendition of a *gending gangsaran*, sharing its syncopated colotomic meter with the Javanese form of the same name. Herbst

notes, “This same composition is still performed in the North for tooth-filing ceremonies and *odalan* temple festivals and, at least in Tejakula, is called *Gending Belaluan*, clearly displaying its roots in the south” (2011, 44). Track 10, “Tabuh Telu Buaya Mangap” (Open-mouthed crocodile), is another *lalambatan*, which McPhee transcribed for two pianos and titled “Tabuh Telu” (named after the *tabuh telu* form, not to be confused with track 9, a different piece following that form).

Tracks 11–15 are from the *Gamelan Gong Kebyar* of Pangkung, Tabanan. Track 11, “Gending Sesulingan,” according to musician and friend of Marya’s, Wayan Begeg, is actually a form of the dance in which the dancer plays the *trompong*, a gong-chime instrument developed by Marya, subsequently spawning the now well-known *Kebyar Trompong*. It is interesting to hear the connections between this early version and the newer ones. The timbre of this particular gamelan is delicate and light, with a tuning that contrasts to the Belaluan gamelan. Despite the hiss on the recording it is surprisingly clear and easy to hear the *gangs*a (metallophones) and *reyong* (the gong-chime instrument played by four players playing interlocking parts) interlocking. Tracks 12–15, “Gending Longgor I–IV” (another piece named after its colotomic form), exhibit a number of *kebyar* techniques while retaining a *légong* feel, which Herbst notes exhibits mutual influences between Belaluan and Pangkung.

Moving to the northwest of Bali, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar* of Busungbiu contains many more of the hallmarks of today’s *kebyar*, although with fewer wild flourishes than used by today’s groups. Herbst notes that one reason is that the *gangs*a of the north were the *pacek* type in which the keys, held in place by nails, rest directly on the cases, causing the timbre to be less open and sustaining in contrast to those of the south, which are suspended over the bamboo resonators. It is easy to hear the delicate timbre and crisp articulation of these *gangs*a in contrast to those of the south. Some notable features heard are sections where the *reyong* is featured on its own in a dynamic, virtuosic and rapid solo; the low register of the *reyong*, in contrast to those of the south that tend to be higher; and the sudden stops and starts of the entire ensemble together. Other tracks, such as track 16, “Tabuh Légod Bawa,” clearly demonstrate *palégongan* crossovers and are reminiscent of compositions by the composer Lotring that combine *palégongan* with spirited *kebyar* juxtapositions. The beginning of this track also contains elements that were later incorporated into Wayan Beratha’s “Jaya Semara.”

Occasionally some of the explanations contain misleading information, such as the mention in notes to track 17, “Tabuh Caelantungan,” of the use of a type of interlocking known as *kotekan telu*, translated as “three-part inter-

locking,” which Herbst states is characteristic of *légong*. In fact, the *telu* (three) in *kotekan telu* refers to a kind of patterning that spans three adjacent pitches with the two parts sharing the middle pitch, resulting in a single-line composite melody. The *kotekan* characteristic of *légong* is known as *empat*, meaning “four,” in which the two parts together span four pitches with the outer pitches being struck simultaneously, resulting in a layer of syncopated thickening of the texture at those points in the pattern. It is *empat* that is characteristic of *légong* and that is heard here (although both *telu* and *empat* are used in pieces played on *gamelan palégongan*). I found this piece to be an extremely interesting string of different types of *kotekan* (and unusual, perhaps more in line with the cerebral kinds of contemporary composition today)—like a sampler that develops, taking us further and further from its *palégongan* roots and winding up resembling *kebyar* more and more, but without the structural framework of either. Tracks 18, a wild, modern-sounding *kebyar*; 19, “Tabuh Panyelah,” a good example of *palégongan* combined with *kebyar* elements; and 20, “Tabuh Gari,” named for a type of closing piece to any concert, round off this CD nicely. This “Tabuh Gari” is unlike other pieces by that name that are commonly played in *gambuh* and *semar pagulingan* and even *gong kebyar* styles today. This one contains several contrasting sections, including a *batel* segment of drums, cymbals, and gongs, harkening to an earlier time and dramatic function with which the form is associated, but then bringing us back to the *kebyar* world with a flourish, to be followed by delicate *palégongan*-like interlocking. These pieces clearly demonstrate the early experimentations that linked disparate sections to one another, unlike the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century compositions that became more structurally developed. They also confirm that the *palégongan* sound world was a grounding force in most of these compositions.

At the time of this review, I was fortunate to hear some previews of coming attractions from the next few CDs in the series. While the entire series is now completed and available, this review addresses only the first installment as it was written before the others were available (see note 1). They include some stunningly nuanced vocal music, along with a variety of other Balinese ensembles (*gender wayang*, *palégongan*, works by the composer Lotring, *Palawakia*, among others), all of which reveal more pieces to the transmission puzzle and aspects of historical development of these forms. Many performers today in Bali are nostalgic for this nuance, which they feel to be slipping away, and hence they are making efforts to reclaim the past. As Herbst states, “The unprecedented interest in these old recordings amongst musicians, dancers and singers young and old has encouraged our persistence in implementing, over many years and continents, a repatriation project, searching



far-flung archives to assist contemporary Balinese in reclaiming their aural history” (2011, 11). I recommend this CD as an example of a way to participate in this worthy project. While the static and hissing heard on the recordings can be difficult to listen to (something that Herbst notes may be reduced by adjusting dials and filters when listening, although at the cost of some loss of music), the decision to leave it in the digitized recordings was made in order to enhance our ability to hear the musical nuances that would also have disappeared had the hiss been removed. The hissing reminds us of the fact that we are listening into a different era in Bali. Thanks to the devotion of Edward Herbst, the research team, and World Arbiter Records, recordings that would otherwise be left to sit in inaccessible archives have been made accessible to all. Hopefully this will inspire others to make their recordings available to interested scholars and musicians, especially to the people whose ancestors have been recorded.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As this review goes to press, the complete five volumes, comprising 111 tracks of solo vocal music, *semar pagulingan*, *palégongan*, *gender wayang*, *angklung*, *janger*, *gambang*, *arja*, *gambuh*, and *topeng*, have already been published by STIKOM in Bali as CD/DVD sets (see [www.Bali1928.net](http://www.Bali1928.net)) and as enhanced CDs by World Arbiter in New York (see [www.arbiterrecords.org/catalog/](http://www.arbiterrecords.org/catalog/)). All include PDFs of extensive notes and translations by Edward Herbst and over one hundred archival photographs. Over four hours of 1930s films by Colin McPhee and Miguel Covarrubias are on YouTube channel Bali1928.net, with more films by Rolf de Maré and Claire Holt included on the Balinese DVDs.

<sup>2</sup> This is an alternative spelling for the renowned dancer, known by many as I Ketut Mario.

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