

**The Hammer is the Teacher: Taking World Music Instruction to a Higher Level as Experienced through Balinese Gamelan**

John Eros

*University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, U.S.A.*

---

**Abstract**

*World music has become a source o09*





*M*

*M*

of the beating tones in multiple octaves and the sheer volume generated by a group of metallophones. The net result was an intense physical experience which I quickly concluded could only be produced with a true Balinese gamelan. I summarized my thoughts by writing "Gamelan is very atmospheric in a sense in that when you're in the middle of it I think there's a real sense of something other than music because there are so many sound waves, so many beats in different octaves hammering at a high dynamic."

Next, my writing turned to the difficulties that I was encountering. I had previous experience with the dampening technique described above and did not encounter difficulties with technique. My main problem was similar to what Judith described: memorization. I found the term "intensity" coming up in my thoughts frequently and in my journal, "I think the intensity came largely from memorization, even more than the musical demands, which were certainly substantial." As I mentioned, gamelan music was not written down and even when it was transcribed into Western notation it was still somehow incomplete. I had studied other oral traditional musics and had at times written out passages approximated in my Western notation. This however, seemed different. I wrote "In the case of the Balinese gamelan, however, that's more complicated because each part depends so much on the other parts. The interlocking rhythms are extremely dependent, such that writing one rhythm down by itself theoretically works but, I believe actually makes it harder to learn."

Chris had observed that it was critical in gamelan to build awareness of all of the parts rather than creating a tunnel vision for one's own part. Taking his advice, I attempted to open my ears to the other parts. I was not trying to isolate them completely but to simply build an awareness

of the gamelan as a whole. Chris told me that he played enough Balinese gamelan music to usually predict the next part of a song even if he had never played the song

### **Rationale for Relationships with Ethnomusicologists**

Ethnomusicologists and music educators benefit greatly by collaboration. Before continuing further, however, a brief definition of ethnomusicology by Miller (1999), in this case in comparison to the study of world musics, would be helpful.

I wish to make a distinction between “world musics” and “ethnomusicology.” Survey type courses are primarily descriptive of non-Western, non-classical traditions, rarely raising epistemological and methodological issues; this I call “world musics.” Ethnomusicology ... is a research discipline concerned with the philosophical, methodological, and technical issues of designing research projects, doing fieldwork, and communicating the results. (p. 2)

School music educators and teacher educators do not usually teach world music survey courses as part of their primary music education classes. Still, as what we teach is often described as “world mus

*Mus*



*Music E*

