

KARL A. SEGLETES, host:

This is Karl Segletes reporting for 91.1 WZBT, Gettysburg College radio. This summer, a group of music students, faculty, and alumni travelled to Bali, Indonesia to conduct research on the musical and cultural practices found on the island. My topic explores music education in Bali, specifically how one learns and becomes a teacher of music.

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According to Meriam-Webster, a musician is “a composer, conductor, or performer of music; especially [an] instrumentalist” (Musician). So how does one become a musician – how do you learn to compose, conduct and/or perform music? This is a huge question that our gamelan ensemble at Gettysburg College explores. Gamelan is an Indonesian percussion ensemble, consisting of gongs, cymbals, drums, and flutes as well as metallic barred instruments you strike with a hammer. This art form is a popular one on Bali and plays a vital role in religious and social culture. Our gamelan ensemble is composed primarily of music education majors from Gettysburg College who desire to learn about this different style of music. Our knowledge of gamelan – limited though it may be – was provided to us in a formal classroom setting at our college by individuals with advanced degrees who were deemed experts in their field. Many of us similarly were taught our performance medium by a teacher who our parents hired privately or through our schools’ music programs or a combination of both. Typically, we were also taught our performance medium and how to be a musician through written notation. However, our expectations for how one becomes a musician would soon be challenged.

In the beginning of July, we arrived in Kedewatan – a village outside of Ubud on the island of Bali, Indonesia. Here it was arranged for our group to learn a new style of Balinese gamelan – gong kebyar – which is a specific type of gamelan that is utilized in popular arts culture as well as religiously and ceremonially. Kebyar differs from the gamelan anklung, the four pitched gamelan ensemble we play at the college that is traditionally used for cremation ceremonies, in that it has five pitches and spans multiple octaves in the melodic instruments. Our host, Wayan Dedik Rachman teaches gamelan in the Ubud area and is a respected musician and teacher in this field. However, Rachman had never formally studied gamelan music like we might expect him to have in the United States.

Like many musicians on the island Rachman grew up around gamelan, his father played and in turn he would also learn to play. Rachman said that his first and primary gamelan teacher was his father. He would sit with him during rehearsals and performances and observe how it is done. Gamelan is taught aurally – meaning that no notation is used. This is similar to how when we go to a birthday party and sing happy birthday, no one takes out music and passes it around to those who are qualified. Instead, everyone sings the song from memory and younger children hear the song and learn and memorize it. They are taught by the more experienced musicians. Gamelan is no different in Bali, younger children grow up around it and then begin to be curious and aurally learn songs through listening with the older musicians helping to teach them. In place of words, students are taught how to hold the panggul and the technique for playing and

muting instruments. Rachman describes how his teaching of Balinese gamelan students differs from how he teaches a group from outside of Bali, like ours:

The Balinese they pretty much even if they don't understand why, but because they listen to it every day, so I don't need to explain the process from the very beginning I basically just go right to the composition itself so I would start with the gangsha and the rest follow after that.

Rachman goes on to talk about how, as an expert in his field of gamelan music, he is able to truly know the music:

For you know master Balinese musician you need to know the melody and basically much you can pretty much guess what the interlocking would be, and when you have that like pre-concept then it's much easier for you to learn. Specifically if I just listen to the on beat I can figure out automatically the offbeat because I have trained for it.

Rachman is considered an expert musician and teacher in his field, however unlike in the United States, Rachman's qualifications are not based on schooling or a degree. He was able to become qualified through his hard work, perseverance, and practice of both music and teaching.

Rachman describes the first time he was asked to teach:

“Instead of staying on [campus] in school, I was staying in a village close by the school and then somehow the members of the community found out that I was from Ubud, which is known for musicians and dancer, and just asked me out of nowhere, I didn't know them, just asked me, “Can you teach us?” So I was in high school then, and I said yes of course. Then I started teaching when I was in high school and then you know just on and on and new got around and then more people coming later asking if I could teach.

Rachman was able to teach gamelan because of his experience and technical skill he acquired through playing in gamelan ensembles. This experience would have been much different had it occurred in the United States.

In the United States we are much more tied to schooling and degrees in all fields, and music is not an exception. To become a teacher in the United States you almost certainly will need a degree from a college or university. What this piece of paper says is that you enrolled in and passed classes that the institution deemed necessary for you to receive a credential in this field. It does not necessarily mean you are an expert in that field or an expert teacher, for that matter. In just about every case it means you are good enough to probably be a contributor in your field of study. Studying in Bali confirmed for me that the best teachers are the ones that work hard excel in their art and care about their students and teaching. I was able to see this in Rachman and all my teachers in Bali – great musicians who work hard to teach their students – which is more important than any piece of paper.

Reporting for 91.1 WZBT Gettysburg College Radio, this is Karl Segletes.

## Works Cited

Musician. 2011. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved August 9, 2016, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/musician>