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Dr. Talbot

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Beleganjur in Bali

This is Chelsea Ferraro 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 beleganjur, a type of Indonesian percussion ensemble, consisting of gongs, cymbals, drums, and pitched bossed pots made of bronze. This art form is a popular one on the island and several groups were featured at the Bali Arts Festival during our time there.

****TRAFFIC SOUNDS**** Like a snail, our car creeps through the traffic. Constantly stopping and going, the driver handles the clutch car as smoothly as though it were an automatic. We stop in the middle of an intersection for what seems a full 7 or 8 minutes as street *polisi* try to direct all of the cars into the next jalan or street that led to the Arts Festival.

****WHISTLE**** Despite the traffic cops' whistling and waving arms, the cars continued to push slowly toward the street, jockeying to get there first. ****MOPED SOUND**** Meanwhile, mopeds and motor bikes with giant kites, various cargo in tow, and with families of up to four people crammed on, weaved in and out between the cars inching along the road. It seemed as though we would never reach the festival grounds in time to see the first group perform, let alone get seats. Beleganjur, it seemed, was a very popular type of gamelan music, as no other night had presented this many traffic delays on our journey to the Arts Center. ****CAR HORN****

Finally we arrived at the Arts Center and made our way toward the main stage amphitheater. We knew it would be more difficult to find seats together as a big group that night, and in anticipation of that, we had split into groups of 3 and 4 ahead of time. However, as we reached the final step to the top of the amphitheater, it seemed none of us would be finding seats, as the standing room around the top had already begun to fill up. My small group of four decided to head towards the far left wall of the theatre, hoping to find space on the wall to sit, or stand near. By a stroke of good luck, we ended up finding a small section of bleachers open in the midst of the sea of spectators. We slowly made our way to the section and, though it was a tight squeeze, it was a place to sit with a view of the stage.

Since we had spent so much time in traffic, we didn't have long to wait before the announcers came out to announce the event for the night and the groups from the different regencies that would be performing: Bangli, Tabanan, Badung, Jembrana, and Buleleng. The crowd, full of energy and chatter moments earlier, hushed to listen to the announcers. Full of anticipation, the crowd waited impatiently as the announcers spoke and finally after 15 minutes, the announcers left the stage. The first group was about to come out. From our seats, we could see trees, brown furry things on tall sticks, and equally tall red and gold parasols being carried beyond the wall towards the entrance to the stage. ***UNDERLAY BANGLI BEGINNING*** There was a great clamor of percussive sounds following a shout by the group. The gongs and drums then began, and the first group slowly processed onto the stage.

First was a woman dressed in a blood red sarong (which is a tied skirt). It had black pattern weaving down the front folds and she wore a red and gold blouse. She carried a top-heavy sign that announced the regency Bangli and she was followed by two female dancers in gold sarongs, red sashes, and gold shirts, carrying offerings on trays. All three women wore golden head-dresses that looked extremely heavy and difficult to maneuver with. They were

then followed by the rest of the ensemble, dressed in gold sarongs and black shirts. Some were holding drums ***UNDERLAY DRUMS***, others were holding ceng ceng kopyak ***UNDERLAY CENG CENG***, which looked like small crash cymbals. Others held the reong pots ***UNDERLAY REONG***, which looked like cooking pots upside down with a raised boss in the center. The reong pots would provide much of the melodic line within each beleganjur piece along with the underlying tone ostinato provided by the gongs. The gongs were held by two people each, while being played by a third person ***UNDERLAY GONGS***. I watched as all of the performers' bare feet were in step, some walking in half-time and others in regular time, but all in sync with the beat and one another.

Suddenly, the second part of the piece was faster and more intense. ***UNDERLAY FASTER PART*** The performers suddenly sprung into motion, moving about the stage in various formations and patterns, much like a marching band would move through drill movements during a show. Different instrumental sections would move toward the front of the stage if they had a particularly complex part. The performance was riddled with visuals, waving of ceng ceng, and dancing.

The second group from Tabanon had an equally as exciting introduction beyond the wall before processing in, entering to gongs and rhythms tapped on the edge of the reong pots. Their costumes were based in similar colors to the first group, with the woman holding the sign in a white and gold dress. The women with the offerings wore black and red dresses and the instrumentalists that followed had black shirts with black and gold sarongs. They too, had parasols that were red, white, black, and gold, along with furry things on sticks that were red, white, and black. Instead of pine trees, Tabanon had a giant prop that looked like a triple throne with black parasols over the seats. Later in the piece, towards the end, performers pulled red, black, and white ribbons from each seat and sparklers on top of the parasols began to spin as

the rest of the performers gestured towards the throne prop and sang “Aahhhh”. ***TABANON EXERPT W/ AAHHHH*** Eventually, the crowd would thin out halfway through the evening due to rain, but the groups continued to perform as though nothing was happening.

The next day, I had the opportunity to speak with I Ketut Gede Asnawa, our teacher as we prepared to perform in the arts festival ourselves. He told me that beleganjur was not always competitive. The first contest took place in 1986. Following that first competition, it became extremely popular to have contests and competitions all around the island. Soon groups were finding new ways to set themselves apart from other competitors and kreasi beleganjur, or new creation beleganjur, was born. I Ketut Gede Asnawa had written and arranged pieces for beleganjur, some of which were performed at the festival. However, he no longer does so because he feels that beleganjur groups and other writers have moved too far away from the original art in their eagerness to bring something new to each competition.¹

Beleganjur is one of many types of gamelan music on the island. According to *Music of Death and New Creation* by Michael Bakan, it is part of the *krawang* family. This means that it is made of bronze instruments rather than steel, bamboo, or wood, thus belonging to the same family as Gamelan Anklung, which is the type of ensemble we have at Gettysburg College². Traditional beleganjur has been part of Balinese culture for a great deal of time. It is normally involved in ceremonies that require a procession of some sort, and it is still a common occurrence. My friends and I were able to witness and be part of one such procession, meant to invite the gods and spirits to a newly built house temple during our stay in Banjar Wani. Unlike the ensembles in the festival who had reong pots, this procession only had a gong, drums, ceng

¹ Asnawa, I Ketut Gedé, Interview, June 27, 2016.

² Bakan, Michael, *Music of Death and New Creation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 9-10

ceng kopyak, and a ketuk (which is shaped similarly to reong pots) keeping the beat. There were village members carrying offerings and parasols, others that were singing, and others who, like us, were just walking alongside of everything. It was amazing to see the traditional form, the original roots, of beleganjur after seeing the competitive side of it all at the festival and to see it in everyday life. ***TRADITIONAL BELEGANJUR FADES OUT***

Reporting for 91.1 WZBT Gettysburg College Radio, this is Chelsea Ferraro.