

## The Shortest Distance Between Gamelan and Electronics: Creating a “nexus of understanding” at Martin Bartlett’s Summer Intensives (Vancouver, 1986–1992)

Laurent Bellemare

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### Résumé de l'article

Lors de l'Expo 86, le compositeur Martin Bartlett a démontré son sa détermination à instaurer une culture de musique javanaise à Vancouver. En organisant un atelier d'un mois sur les arts de la scène indonésiens, il a obtenu le don d'un gamelan javanais complet à l'Université Simon Fraser de la part du gouvernement de l'Indonésie. Le succès de ce premier atelier a ensuite encouragé Bartlett à renouveler l'expérience pendant plusieurs années. À l'été 1988, l'événement a pris une tournure inattendue en mettant en parallèle des ateliers de gamelan et de musique électronique. Baptisé « Dance and Music of Two Worlds », il offrait un lieu de rencontre unique où les traditions musicales javanaises coexistaient avec les arts électroniques. Bien que les deux ne s'entremêlèrent guère, les années 1980 et 1990 ont vu émerger de nombreuses productions interdisciplinaires mêlant gamelan et électronique par des étudiants participants. À l'époque, cette rencontre relativement inexplorée entre ces univers sonores a marqué l'identité régionale de la scène de gamelan à Vancouver, un héritage qui résonne encore aujourd'hui.

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## THE SHORTEST DISTANCE BETWEEN GAMELAN AND ELECTRONICS: CREATING A “NEXUS OF UNDERSTANDING”<sup>1</sup> AT MARTIN BARTLETT’S SUMMER INTENSIVES (VANCOUVER, 1986–1992)

*Laurent Bellemare*

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We put these areas of study side by side, of equal value, with no particular attempt to force a relationship between them. Some participants just work in one field or the other, though more find ways to divide their time between the two activities. No computer music acolyte worshipping his monitor can ignore the austere strains of Ladrang Kuwung coming from the gamelan rehearsal room, nor can the gamelan musician avoid encountering muttering, hairy people festooned with Midi cables and computer manuals.

—Martin Bartlett, 1991

The practice of Indonesian gamelan<sup>2</sup> has been present in Canada for nearly four decades, particularly in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. These traditions have developed according to specific cultural ecosystems, political environments, and available resources. They have shaped the way in which gamelan enthusiasts pursue their interest in Indonesian performing arts in the West. In Vancouver, a set of circumstances has driven the city’s first ensemble, Gamelan Madu Sari, towards a rather exploratory approach to gamelan composition. Often combining alien instrumentation or musical aesthetics to the Javanese orchestra, the projects of Gamelan Madu Sari tend to combine art forms and feature novel mixtures of music traditions. While gamelan is inherently interdisciplinary, given the many theatrical and dance performances it usually accompanies, Gamelan Madu Sari has followed an

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<sup>1</sup> “Nexus of understanding” is Hank Bull’s interpretation of the atmosphere prevalent during the “Dance and Music of Two Worlds” workshops, which are discussed here. Although not directly involved in the workshop, Bull was and still is a resident of the Western Front. Interdisciplinary artist and a close friend of Martin Bartlett, he was always close by during the Music Intensive components happening at the Front.

<sup>2</sup> The term *gamelan* is equivalent to “orchestra” across Indonesian languages, although it can be used to describe the instruments, the ensemble of musicians, or the musical culture as a whole, depending on the context. This flexibility is reflected in the article, although I tend to use *gamelan* in a broader cultural sense. Further precision such as “gamelan ensemble” or “gamelan orchestra” is used when relevant.

idiosyncratic trajectory that other ensembles in the country have not. In this article, I will argue that such a development is highly indebted to the circumstances in which gamelan was first institutionalized in Vancouver. Brought to the city through Expo 86 and finding hosts at Simon Fraser University and the Western Front, the Javanese instruments named *Kyai Madu Sari* (venerable essence of honey)<sup>3</sup> were acquired through electroacoustic composer Martin Bartlett. It was under his guidance that the first community group and workshops were organized. Here, I will focus on a series of summer workshops dubbed “Dance and Music of Two Worlds,” which Bartlett founded at Simon Fraser University’s Summer Institute program. Offering intensive courses in both gamelan and computer music, these events showcase the unique artistic ecosystem in which Indonesian arts found themselves once landing in Vancouver.

First I will explain the contribution of the Western Front and Simon Fraser University in turning Vancouver’s art scene into a hub of interdisciplinary practice. Then I will cover the circumstances surrounding Expo 86, where daily Indonesian arts performances were held and a major gamelan festival was organized. Martin Bartlett, who was involved in all these institutions and events, had strong ideas about and precise motivations in making gamelan available in Vancouver. Exploring these ideological aspects will help understand how and why the “Music and Dance of Two Worlds” workshops were conceptualized in the first place. Afterward I will cover the structure and content of the music workshops to help clarify the extent to which the streams of gamelan and computer music were in contact. Subsequent discussion will demonstrate that although the tools used in computer music were not directly applied to gamelan in search of a hybridized language, the coexistence between the two traditions proved influential for the subsequent development of *Gamelan Madu Sari*’s activities in Vancouver.<sup>4</sup>

## INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND EXPERIMENTALISM IN VANCOUVER

Before discussing the circumstances of the Summer Institute itself, the two institutions at the heart of gamelan’s development in Vancouver must be presented. The community surrounding *Gamelan Madu Sari* has been supported by both Simon Fraser University and the Western Front since its earliest activities. As will be explained, Simon Fraser University is the higher education

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<sup>3</sup> In Indonesian arts, it is customary to name a set of gamelan instruments. As a gamelan has spiritual and sometimes religious significance in Balinese and Javanese cultures, marks of respect such as offerings are common.

<sup>4</sup> The bulk of this discussion is based on the archival material kindly provided by the Simon Fraser University Archives and Records Management Department (F-109 School for the Contemporary Arts fonds) and the Simon Fraser University Special Collections and Rare Books (MsC-24 Martin Bartlett fonds). Pages of material were digitized and sent to this author by both divisions between 2020 and 2022, at a time when travelling to Vancouver to physically consult the archives was not possible. Moreover, I made extensive use of the data found on the Western Front legacy website (<https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/>). Other significant sources are the many interviews conducted with members of the Vancouver gamelan community, as well as various press articles.

**Figure 1.** Gamelan Madu Sari in rehearsal at Simon Fraser University ca. 1988. Photo courtesy of Kenneth Newby.



institution that formerly acquired the Javanese gamelan from the Indonesian government following the events of Expo 86. Meanwhile, the Western Front, already sympathetic to Indonesian arts,<sup>5</sup> hosted a night of Javanese shadow puppetry, which would be instrumental in SFU's acquisition of the instruments. Although the two differ greatly in nature, a crucial link between both institutions is their dedication to the interdisciplinary arts.<sup>6</sup>

As an institution with a higher-education program in music, Simon Fraser University stands out from other colleges, universities, and conservatories across North America. Notably, it does not require its students to be trained in a particular instrument prior to enrolling. Instead of offering courses centred on performance, its music program is oriented towards composition and experimentation.<sup>7</sup> This philosophy is in line with SFU's Art Department in

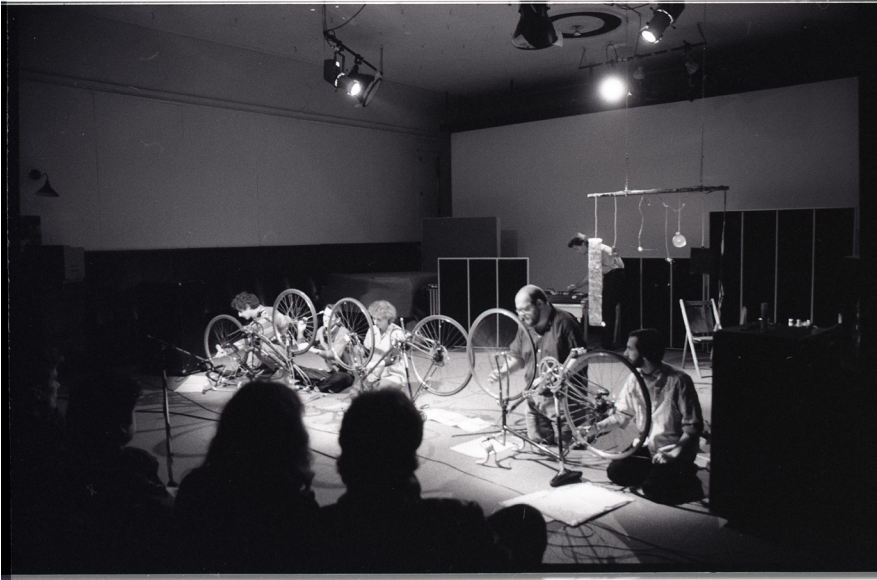
<sup>5</sup> For example, a 1978 performance at the Front featured the Berklee Gamelan in collaboration with Nancy Karp and Dancers for an evening of contemporary works. See <https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/events/the-berkeley-gamelan/>. Another such example is the 1983 performance by Canada Shadows, a collective featuring Martin Bartlett, who freely borrowed elements from Indonesian *wayang kulit* (shadow play). See <https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/events/canada-shadows/>.

<sup>6</sup> To better understand the meaning and nuance of the words "interdisciplinary" and "interdisciplinarity," Hank Bull suggests three categories: (1) transdisciplinarity—a synergistic event that can happen only from particular artistic encounters and circumstances; (2) interdisciplinarity—elements from at least two artistic disciplines combined; (3) multidisciplinarity—different art forms put side-by-side without synergy. For the sake of simplicity, the term "interdisciplinarity" will be favoured. Because it represents any attempt to combine at least two art forms, it is satisfying for the purposes of this article. Discussing the subjective and perhaps idealistic definition of transdisciplinarity is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>7</sup> A famous project that has emerged from Simon Fraser University is the World Soundscape Project led by composer Raymond Murray Schafer. This preservationist project encouraged people to record and archive soundscapes of the world that would eventually be threatened by the sound pollution brought about by modernity and urban noise.

general, which values artistic creation and the development of one's own artistic voice over technique or the reproduction of canonical works of art. The Centre for the Arts, now called School for the Contemporary Arts also prides itself on its interdisciplinary curriculum, where students are encouraged to learn different art forms in addition to their primary focus. A testimony of this approach is the Interdisciplinary Master of Fine Arts program opened by the school in 1990.

**Figure 2.** A performance dubbed “Travelon Gamelan” at the Western Front in 1987. Photo courtesy of Western Front.



In contrast, the Western Front is an independent art centre managed and curated collectively by artists of different fields.<sup>8</sup> Both a place for private exploration and for public performances or exhibits, its mandate is to create and promote new and interdisciplinary art forms. The Front is notably opposed to conservative notions of what art is or should be and its primary aim has been to “break the silos” between the different art practices since its foundation in 1973.<sup>9</sup> As an independent initiative, the Western Front timely filled the void left by earlier artistic collectives such as Intermedia (Wallace 1993, 2).<sup>10</sup> However, the Western Front distinguishes itself by the ownership of its building, which allows substantial organizational freedom. A three-storied building,

<sup>8</sup> Some of those artists lived at the Front, as is still the case today.

<sup>9</sup> “Breaking the silos” is an expression used by Hank Bull in a phone conversation with the author on 29 March 2022. Bull’s term describes the ideology behind the Western Front as an art space. An ideological comparison with the earlier Fluxus movement is often made by people gravitating around the Front.

<sup>10</sup> Other contemporaries of Intermedia are A Space (Toronto), Open Space (Victoria), Véhicule (Montréal), and Plug-In (Winnipeg). For a more complete list, see Wallace (1993).

the Western Front has been able to host music events and art openings and to accommodate local and visiting artists. In addition to its concert space and gallery, it has several rooms acting as art studios, a dining room, and a kitchen which have all helped foster “an atmosphere of constant artistic experience.”<sup>11</sup> Although the Western Front has historically favoured film and visual arts over music, its New Musica series has consistently brought innovative and avant-garde musicians to Vancouver.<sup>12</sup> Although new music at the Western Front has been expressed especially from streams rooted in jazz and electronic music, its curators have tried to showcase non-Western and Indigenous music forms as equally important works of art (Varty 1993, 202).

Not unlike Simon Fraser University, the Western Front has built its artistic program on experimental and interdisciplinary practice. Whereas Simon Fraser University remains a school required to fulfil certain academic criteria and goals, Hank Bull describes the Western Front as “the experimental playing field.” If gamelan came to be associated with both institutions, it was primarily because of the involvement of contemporary artist and composer Martin Bartlett with the two. A founder of the Western Front and its primary music curator until 1979, Bartlett had great influence on cementing the centre’s vision. Mainly an electronic music artist experimenting with home-made computers, he had a fascination with musical traditions from Asia, including Indonesian gamelan. In 1982, he became professor of composition at Simon Fraser University and greatly contributed to the development of the Centre for the Art’s music program. With a foot in both institutions, Bartlett would later have the necessary influence to push gamelan activities there. The Western Front even came to house a private gamelan set, a gamelan *gadhon*, purchased by Bartlett in 1990 to allow more independence from the instruments belonging to Simon Fraser University.

As such, the cultural ecosystem surrounding those institutions was experimental by default. When gamelan found a place within this network, it was surrounded by artists of all disciplines. Although technically rooted at Simon Fraser University, Gamelan Madu Sari adopted the Western Front as its true headquarters. More broadly, the independent approach fomented by the Western Front raised Vancouver’s profile in the production of interdisciplinary and experimental art (Lewis 2007). The bottom-up nature of the events and workshops curated by the Front is also the expression of the continuous disengagement of British Columbia governments in funding art with little tangible economic value or heritage significance (Murray and Beale 2011, 463). The resulting self-determination in Vancouver-based art projects—both a necessity and an official government encouragement—has contributed to the rise of artist-run initiatives such as the Western Front. This “do-it-yourself” environment has also affected the practice of gamelan in the city. With the Western Front as its home, Gamelan Madu Sari gained substantial independence from

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<sup>11</sup> Phone conversation between the author and Hank Bull, 29 March 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Among them, Anthony Braxton, John Adams, Donald Buchla, and Alvin Lucier are notable figures in experimental and contemporary music.

its affiliated university, as seldom occurs with fellow university-based gamelan ensembles across North America.<sup>13</sup>

### EXPO 86: GAMELAN SETTLES IN VANCOUVER

Until the 1980s, there had been little representation of Indonesian arts in Vancouver, and Canada more broadly. Balinese troupes of musicians and dancers performed a few times around the country in the late 1950s and early 1960s, events which dovetailed with Indonesian then-president Sukarno's cultural agenda neatly (Cohen 2019). However, political changes in Indonesia affected the representation of national arts abroad with the ascent of General Suharto as Indonesia's second president. His authoritarian regime saw the rise of "cultural diplomacy" as a political tool to attract foreign investors and economic allies. In a climate of growing capitalism, Suharto's government instrumentalized the arts as a way to push Indonesia as a culturally rich country bent on modernity. This paradigm peaked in the 1980s, a decade during which Indonesian arts were featured in two mega-events in Vancouver. The 1985 Asia Pacific Festival (7 June), an initiative with explicitly economic motives (Devries 2021), featured shadow puppetry by Balinese *dhalang*<sup>14</sup> I Wayan Wija and his musicians from the village of Sukawati. Musician and dancer I Nyoman Wenten was also present as a dancer and conducted a successful dance workshop at Simon Fraser University (SFU) during his stay. Although this brief encounter with Balinese arts sowed the seeds of a partnership between Wenten and SFU, the Asia Pacific Festival had little impact on the city's cultural scene in comparison to the world exhibition held in Vancouver the next year.

In the summer of 1986, a convergence of elements created a momentum for Indonesian music and dance. As part of the 1986 World Exhibition, a large group of Indonesian artists came to Vancouver and performed daily at the Indonesian pavilion located in False Creek as part of the Plaza of Nations. As was customary, it used gamelan sets shipped for the occasion by the Indonesian government. Thus, from 2 May to 13 October, Expo visitors were treated with an amalgam of dance and music from Bali, Central Java, and West Java performed by a full Javanese orchestra and two large Balinese orchestras (*gong kebyar* and *angklung*). The very presence of gamelan, large and expensive instruments to export, was in line with the cultural diplomacy promoted by the Suharto regime and served as a major capital for Indonesia's self-promotion in an event focused mainly on transportation technologies.

Bartlett, who was already pushing for gamelan's pedagogic virtues to his university, had begun making arrangements to organize a workshop at SFU

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<sup>13</sup> Typically, a university offers a gamelan course to its students and potentially allows a more advanced community group to rehearse and perform on these instruments, on the basis of extra-curricular involvement. Gamelan Madu Sari became a community group even before a permanent course was secured. The ensemble no longer depends on the premises of Simon Fraser University, nor does it need the instruments to be located there. By contrast, Montreal community group Gamelan Giri Kedaton depends on the space and instruments owned by Université de Montréal for its regular Balinese music courses.

<sup>14</sup> Puppeteer.

in late 1985. His connection with I Nyoman Wenten allowed him to secure the participation of Wenten, his wife Nanik Wenten, and his father-in-law K.R.T. Wasitodipuro (Pak Cokro). The last, a court musician of the Yogyakarta Paku Alaman sultanate, was revered around the world as a leading authority in Javanese music. Together, this trio taught dance and music from the Javanese and Balinese idioms, which they were already doing extensively across American universities. Thus, from 20 May to 13 June, at the expo's onset, the first edition of SFU's summer program in Javanese and Balinese music and dance was inaugurated at the university's Centre for the Arts.<sup>15</sup> The gamelan used for the workshops was the Indonesian Consulate's newly acquired *slendro* Javanese set,<sup>16</sup> loaned to SFU and used for the first time as part of the Summer Intensive. Attendees had the option to study music or dance four days a week, or to study music two evenings a week. Although SFU students could take the workshop as a credited course, members from the general public could also register. Thirty students joined—twenty musicians and ten dancers—for a successful first iteration of SFU's Javanese and Balinese Music and Dance Summer Intensives.

The decision to hold SFU's program concurrently with Expo was strategic. As Martin Bartlett contemplated purchasing one of the Expo's gamelans upon its conclusion, he counted on the stature of his guest artists to help him negotiate with Indonesian officials.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the prolonged presence of a large group of Indonesian artists in Vancouver had practical benefits for workshop attendees, with Expo musicians occasionally participating in the workshops. A perhaps more significant contribution by the Expo group was their lengthy *wayang kulit*<sup>18</sup> performance at the Western Front on 13 June, the workshop's closing evening. *Dhalang* Blacius Subono thus led the piece "Dewa Ruci" for hours, with full gamelan and chorus, in front of an audience of students freshly acquainted with Javanese arts.

Yet another development reinforced the exceptional place held by gamelan during Expo 86. Javanese choreographer Sardono Waluyo Kusumo, who was leading the Expo group, spearheaded the organization of a four-day international gamelan festival at the Indonesian Pavilion from 18 to 21 August, just after the Indonesian Independence day, which brought groups and scholars from all corners of the world together. Although the majority of the gamelan

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<sup>15</sup> These workshops were included in SFU's larger Summer Institute, conceptualized by choreographer Grant Strate and launched in 1986. The Summer Institutes encompassed intensive workshops in fields such as visual arts, film, music, dance, and vocal performance. As these intensives were not designed specifically for students, they attracted professional or semi-professional artists as well as serious students. Furthermore, the workshops aimed "to bridge the gap between academic study and practical experience." (1989 brochure, F-109-13-3-0-9, School for the Contemporary Arts fonds,).

<sup>16</sup> *Slendro* is one of two main melodic scales used in Javanese music's modal system. It is widely used across Indonesian music. In the context of a full Javanese orchestra, most instruments are paired, with one tuned in *slendro* and the other tuned in *pelog*. This allows musicians to switch from one pitch range to another to cover a larger repertoire or to modulate within pieces. Sometimes owners of Javanese instruments will have only the *pelog* or *slendro* portion of the instruments.

<sup>17</sup> Bartlett to Bruce Clayman, dean of Graduate Studies (MsC-24, Martin Bartlett fonds).

<sup>18</sup> *Wayang kulit* (skin puppetry) refers to shadow puppetry involving puppets made of animal skin. This art form is present across Indonesia but is especially important in Balinese and Javanese cultures.



ensembles who presented were from the nearby United States, Gamelan Dharma Budaya from Tokyo and Banjar Grupe Berlin from Germany were also invited. Kusumo intended to showcase especially new and experimental pieces by Indonesian composers. His rationale was that the world needed to hear the music being made today by Indonesians, which would challenge the trope of the uncredited “traditional” gamelan piece (Diamond 2021).<sup>19</sup> As such, performances by the Kusuwo-led Indonesian group at the festival mainly comprised new pieces. Other ensembles similarly presented their own contemporary compositions, adding up to a large representation of new gamelan music at the festival.

“The First International Gamelan Festival and Symposium” was the first occasion for gamelan practitioners and enthusiasts across the world to meet and interact on such a large scale. By cementing and creating new liaisons, the festival paved the way for a global gamelan network that persists today.<sup>20</sup> It is perhaps paradoxical that although it occurred on Canadian soil, the festival hosted very few Canadian participants. The Evergreen Club Gamelan from Toronto, the sole Canadian gamelan ensemble at the time, was notably absent as the result of funding restrictions. Nevertheless, two Canadian scholars participated as lecturers: composer José Evangelista from the University of Montreal, and Martin Bartlett, who presented a critical reflection on gamelan practice in the West (Bartlett 1986). The participation of both composers was crucial to gamelan’s future in Canada. As it was known that the Indonesian government frequently gifted gamelans to host countries of international events, both Bartlett and Evangelista strove to acquire a gamelan for their respective universities. Although both hoped to acquire the Javanese orchestra, it was Martin Bartlett who managed to secure it. Undoubtedly, the commitment to learning Javanese music displayed during the SFU workshops convinced the Indonesian embassy to answer Bartlett’s wish. After Expo, Indonesian ambassador H.E. Adiwoyo Abubakar announced the donation of a full Javanese gamelan, bearing the name *Kyai Madu Sari* (venerable essence of honey), to Simon Fraser University.

If the two Balinese sets gifted to the University of Montreal immediately led to the opening of “Atelier de gamelan,” an introductory course taught by guest Balinese teachers, Javanese music instruction had a rougher beginning at SFU following Expo. In the fall of 1987, a first gamelan course was taught by Bartlett himself, aided by student Kenneth Newby, who had experience playing Balinese *gender wayang*.<sup>21</sup> It then took until the 1989 spring semester for regular gamelan courses to be integrated into SFU’s curriculum. In the meantime, Bartlett had been leading a community group rehearsing on *Kyai Madu Sari*, an ensemble later known alternatively as *Gamelan Madu Sari* and *Vancouver Community Gamelan*. Although the academic year did not initially guarantee

<sup>19</sup> For a deeper understanding of Sardono Waluyo Kusumo’s artistic vision, see Diamond (1987b).

<sup>20</sup> The most striking example of such a global network is perhaps the Dartmouth-based e-mail list created by Jody Diamond (GAMELAN@listserv.dartmouth.edu). Although it serves as a community outreach of the American Gamelan Institute website, it connects people from across the world and has allowed innumerable debates and information exchanges to take place internationally.

<sup>21</sup> *Gender wayang* is a style of Balinese music that accompanies shadow puppetry. “Gender” refers to the metallophones themselves, and “wayang” to puppetry.

a solid program for SFU students, the university did renew its gamelan workshops as part of its annual Summer Institute. The success of the 1986 workshops established a tradition that lasted almost a decade, in which a team of Indonesian musicians and dancers led intensive weeks of rehearsals leading to public performances of Indonesian arts. During the formative years of gamelan practice in Vancouver, these infrequent workshops became the framework within which students could access direct knowledge from Indonesian masters.

## MARTIN BARTLETT AND JAVANESE MUSIC

Why was gamelan so dear to Martin Bartlett? More specifically, what connection did he make between Indonesian orchestras and his field of electronic music and micro-computers? Prior to his direct involvement with gamelan during Expo 86, Bartlett had travelled to Bali and Java between December 1980 and March 1981. This research trip, during which he took some music lessons, cemented his love for gamelan. However, according to artist and close friend Hank Bull, this encounter may have stemmed from his curiosity about musical traditions from Asia in general. This double interest is at least as old as Bartlett's studies at Mills College in California in the late 1960s. It was there that he studied with northern Indian singer Pandit Pran Nath, who influenced several American minimalist composers.<sup>22</sup> At that time he was focusing on non-Western music and scales, and electronic music composition. This pursuit was similar to that of like-minded students and musicians who applied the concepts of the former to their exploration of the latter. Although Bartlett was mainly busy developing home-made synthesizers, he "brought that energy" to the Western Front when it opened in 1973.<sup>23</sup> Notably, he organized a concert and workshops with south Indian singer Balbir Singh Banghu as one of the Front's first music events.

In his practice as a composer, Bartlett was constantly searching for new ways of constructing modes based on alternative pitch ratios. To him, the synthesizer could free artists from equal tempered pitches, because any fundamental frequency could be used. His interest in just intonation led him to work with Pythagorean ratios, which he compiled into a table and used to generate novel harmonic and melodic relationships outside of equal temperament.<sup>24</sup> Bartlett also saw gamelan as an alternative to equal temperament and its music struck a chord similar to that of electronic music. As Bartlett explains his approach to intonation, "This music is not microtonal in the sense of dividing a semi-tone into smaller parts, but rather a just intonation system in which some pitches deviate more than others from equal temperament. The concept is similar to the Javanese idea of mirroring, in which the rebab ornamentally plays between the fixed pitches of the metal instruments of the gamelan."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Among them, Terry Riley was also one of Martin Bartlett's teachers at Mills College.

<sup>23</sup> Hank Bull interview with the author, 29 March 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Martin composed and performed a series of pieces titled "Pythagoras' Ghost" at the Western Front, which were recorded and released as a CD in 1993. See <https://western-front.myshopify.com/products/pythagoras-ghost>.

<sup>25</sup> Film by Luke Fowler, *Electro-Pythagoras: A Portrait of Martin Bartlett*. The rebab is a bowed string instrument common in Indonesian musics.

**Figure 3.** Martin Bartlett performing at the Western Front in 1980. Photo courtesy of Western Front.



Such a statement corroborates the common focus on timbre and tuning among composers invested in gamelan.<sup>26</sup> It is tempting to make a parallel between Bartlett's interest in just intonation and that of the many composers and instrument-builders in the United States who used gamelan to experiment with just intonation in the seventies and eighties (Perlman 1994). However, Bartlett had a different approach, distancing himself from direct manipulation or appropriation of Javanese music in his own works:

Like other Westerners, I “use” gamelan to criticize aspects of my own culture that I find undesirable. I do not find much urge to imitate the outer features of gamelan style in my own compositions, nor to compose for gamelan, at least not at this point. But I do think there is a great need in Western music for the kind of ensemble concept that gamelan represents, the way in which individuals work together, the way material is invented and varied, the giving up of the vulgar egoism of the composer, the ability to play with the ears [rather] than with the eyes. (Bartlett 1986)

Indeed, Bartlett composed his sole piece for gamelan “Lines from Chuang Tzu” in 1993, shortly before his untimely death. In fact, he became rather critical of his own fascination with Indonesian music at around that time.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Mark Parlett, interviewed by the author, 31 March 2022. Parlett has been a long-time Gamelan Madu Sari musician and collaborator as well as former Music Intensive student.

<sup>27</sup> This sentiment is best exemplified in a 1991 public note about that year's Summer Institute: “Twenty years later the love remains though the hallucinations have faded somewhat. My interest in the gamelan has survived serious questions about why a supposedly contemporary western artist,

Nonetheless, he saw an intrinsic value in engaging with Javanese music, one that ideologically aligned with his interest in computer music. For example, Bartlett made a parallel between the craftsmanship of early synthesizer-building culture and that of gamelan-making, in which each set of instruments differs from one village to another, according to the taste of its makers.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, he saw both traditions as ways to interact directly with sounds rather than through the theoretical framework of Western music theory and notation. Just as an electronic music artist must manipulate hardware to produce and tweak sounds, a player sitting at the gamelan must manipulate the mallet and experience the instruments physically to follow along. Both musical worlds also eschewed the uncompromising technical abilities required of musicians who engage with Western orchestral music. Javanese orchestras indeed feature several metallophones whose role is to play the nuclear melody of a piece (*balungan*), a skill almost immediately accessible to any new student.

## MUSIC AND DANCE OF TWO WORLDS

“A four to five week Music Intensive offering practical experience in two musical worlds: Indonesian gamelan and contemporary electronics. The Intensive is designed for composers, professional musicians and serious students, offering an intensive and memorable immersion which will be the source of reflection and ideas for years to come.”

This was the description of Simon Fraser University’s third edition of its Music Intensive in 1988, the first to offer both Indonesian and electronic music courses. The four-week workshop was but one of the many components of the university’s annual Summer Institute program, often described as a creative “hot-house” attempting to “bridge the gap between academic and practical experiences.”<sup>29</sup> According to then director Grant Strate, the concept was spawned in the aftermath of the 1985 National Choreographic Seminar, where artists in the field had an unprecedented opportunity to gather and collaborate in Vancouver. As an extension of this idea, the Summer Institute featured intensive non-credit workshops in various artistic fields, allowing advanced students and young professionals to learn and develop in a rich environment relevant to their art form. Aside from music, Simon Fraser University consistently provided intensives in visual arts, dance, and voice.<sup>30</sup> Later iterations of the event have also featured video and film sound intensives.

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highly critical of his own musical traditions, should be infatuated with the most traditional aspects of another culture” (“Surprisingly Easy Bedfellows: Gamelan and Computers in the Vancouver Summer Institute,” F-109-6-5-0-29, School for the Contemporary Arts fonds).

<sup>28</sup> The early synthesizer-building culture refers to the activity of musicians and inventors such as Donald Buchla and Robert Moog, before synthesizers were standardized for mass manufacture.

<sup>29</sup> Summer Institute director Grant Strate, 1989 and 1988 reports, F-109-06-5-0-10 and F-109-06-5-0-17, School for the Contemporary Arts fonds.


<sup>30</sup> The Voice Intensive was focused on acting, improvising, narrating, and related skills, not singing.

**Figure 4.** Promotional poster for a public performance during the 1989 Music Intensive at the Summer Institute. Photo courtesy of Simon Fraser University Archives.

LUNCH HOUR LECTURE/DEMO  
Summer Institute Music Intensive

**NEW WORKS FOR GAMELAN AND  
ELECTRONICS**

BY PARTICIPANTS



SFU THEATRE  
12:30 PM THURSDAY JULY 13  
ALL WELCOME

As for the rest of the Summer Institute, most music activities were based at Simon Fraser University's Burnaby campus, the then location of the Centre for the Arts. Enrolees paid substantial fees to participate and had options to apply for grants and financial aid to support them. Music participants were asked to choose two main areas of focus from five categories, all related to Indonesian

gamelan or electronic music.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of these choices, each student followed a tight schedule of classes and lectures from morning to late afternoon. At the end of the four weeks, public performances showcased what had been covered and accomplished during the month. A student interested mainly in gamelan typically participated in group rehearsals and lessons in the morning, and then followed more specialized classes on specific instruments and techniques.

The dual offer was an idea pushed by Martin Bartlett, who had organized the Javanese Music Intensive since the Summer Institute's launch in 1986. After its first two editions, Bartlett expanded the Music Intensive into the "Dance and Music of Two Worlds" concept, a program focused on Indonesian performing arts and electronic music.<sup>32</sup> In the 1990 brochure, the Intensive claimed to offer workshops in "two of the most significant influences on contemporary musical practice: Indonesian Gamelan and Interactive Electronics." Thus, starting in 1988, returning staff K.R.T. Wasitodipuro, I Nyoman Wenten, and Nanik Wenten rubbed shoulders with electronic music composers such as George Lewis, Martin Gotfrit, Keith Hamel, Barry Truax, and Martin Bartlett himself. Although in practice each series of workshops was its own, and not every student chose to participate in both fields, the option to join the two currents was open. As in previous years, Javanese and Balinese dance students worked and performed along with the gamelan study group.

From one year to another, the Music Intensives evolved in content and structure. First, the 1989 Music Intensive attempted to group all music enrollees into a single comprehensive schedule of both electronic and gamelan courses, but this experiment in format was not repeated in subsequent years.<sup>33</sup> Second, there were changes in teaching personnel. K.R.T. Wasitodipuro and his daughter Nanik Wenten visited Vancouver only in the first four years. Javanese music was then taught by musician Hardja Susilo for three subsequent years, with dance and Balinese music instruction given by returning I Nyoman Wenten. This 1990 personnel shift also corresponds to several other major changes, such as Martin Bartlett's passing over of the music directorship to Daniel Scheidt. This was also the first edition to be held mainly at the Western Front, although the centre had already hosted several events on behalf of the Centre for the Arts. Moreover, at about this time, artists George Lewis and David Rosenboom became the primary guest lecturers in the electronic workshop series, along with Scheidt.

In the summer of 1993, the year of Martin Bartlett's passing, no gamelan workshop series was organized. Instead, the Summer Institute program scheduled a World Percussion Intensive focused on rhythms and techniques from South Indian, Latin American, and West African traditions.<sup>34</sup> The university

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the five areas offered for the 1988 edition were: (1) Javanese gamelan, (2) Balinese music, (3) computer programming for live performance, (4) advanced computer music applications, and (5) mind over MIDI.

<sup>32</sup> Alternatively called "Dance and Music of Two Cultures."

<sup>33</sup> Although the 1989 final report praises the comprehensiveness of the music program, it correlates the rigid curriculum with lower attendance that year.

<sup>34</sup> The guest artists were percussionists Trichy Sankaran (South Indian drumming), Salvador Ferreras (Latin American drumming), Modesto Amegago and Albert St Albert (West African drumming).

held these percussion workshops annually for a few years afterwards. Meanwhile, the gamelan Intensives were revived independently from 1994 to 1997. Held at the Western Front, they were organized by gamelan enthusiasts who had previously enrolled for the Summer Institutes. They brought Javanese musicians A.L. Suwardi, Widiyanto, and Djoko Walujo to Vancouver, keeping alive the tradition to invite and collaborate with accomplished Indonesian artists. If this change reinforced the relationship between the gamelan community and the Western Front, it also implied a distancing from Simon Fraser University as gamelan's main institution. Gamelan courses remained a part of the university's music curriculum, but the Javanese instruments' most ardent users were not the SFU students anymore. As the Vancouver Community Gamelan grew between summers, a solid core of advanced gamelan musicians developed, eager to maintain a relationship with Javanese artists.

Although the gamelan summer workshops in Vancouver did not last beyond 1997, they should not be underestimated. For several years, they provided the longest-lasting contact with Indonesian teachers that students could count on. Steady gamelan instruction at Simon Fraser University was not secured until Sutrisno Hartana's hiring in 1995. This situation had the collateral effect of encouraging enthusiasts to organize on their own, outside of institutional grounds, if they were to keep playing gamelan together. Moreover, it provided the model by which Gamelan Madu Sari still collaborates with artists from overseas for short but intense intervals.<sup>35</sup> Lastly, because the Summer Institute involved Vancouver's leading institutions in interdisciplinary arts, it firmly placed gamelan in an artistic ecosystem that encouraged novel ideas and techniques for contemporary arts. As we shall see, such an environment had a lasting impact on Gamelan Madu Sari's artistic path throughout its existence.

## TWO WORLDS COURTING EACH OTHER

The computer music and gamelan workshops functioned very differently. The electronic music program focused on researching and developing tools for composition and did not aim at short-term performance. In contrast, the gamelan workshop focused on group rehearsal of mostly traditional repertoire that, after four weeks of intensive practice, could be performed publicly. Therefore, the guest artists leading the computer music workshops often performed and displayed their electronic devices before an audience at the end of the Summer Institute, whereas the gamelan concerts involved the students directly. This model implied that although computer music and gamelan coexisted, their fusion was not the goal. At the ideological level, the two streams were meant to expose students to two major musical fields in contemporary music and thus develop their appreciation and understanding. As noted earlier, Bartlett himself did not express a strong motivation to apply interactive computer music

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<sup>35</sup> Among others, Gamelan Madu Sari has worked with I Wayan Sadra, Heri Dono, and Eko Purnowo.

to the sounds and structures of Javanese gamelan, or to use influences from Indonesian music on electronic compositions.

Considering more pragmatic aspects of the Music Intensive, it becomes clear that developing a language between computer music and gamelan was beyond the scope of the month-long workshop. The gamelan traditions of Indonesia are in themselves so diverse and rich that they may require the full-time attention of students aiming to achieve a decent performance level. As the focus was on understanding the workings of Javanese and Balinese music, the musical structures, playing techniques, and physical interaction with instruments were at the forefront of the students' concerns. How to reinvest this knowledge in composition or improvisation was likely out of most students' reach.<sup>36</sup> For an intensive four weeks, it was challenging enough for participants to acquaint themselves with repertoires of both Javanese and Balinese music as well as the technique of specific instruments.

Moreover, the unreliability of the technology then used in contemporary composition was a major obstacle to performance. According to Andreas Kahre, the technology was not flexible enough to be easily integrated into existing musical forms.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, much of the learning curve for electronic music involved research, trial and error, and developing a technical familiarity with the material. The process was more focused upon the possibilities afforded by the technological means than their concrete application, explaining the lack of public performances by computer music students. While students engaging with gamelan were learning a well-established musical tradition, computer music attendees participated in the invention of another. Also, the musical output in contemporary electronic music was much more experimental and idiosyncratic, rendering the options for applying technological means unclear.

Despite these factors, computer music and gamelan did find rare occasions to interact during the Summer Institutes. In one notorious case, Pauline Oliveros was invited as guest music teacher for the 1989 edition. With her, Oliveros brought a composition that combined gamelan and electronics and its learning and performance formed the centrepiece of the Music Intensive that year. Named "Lion's Eye" (1985), it involves a performer adjusting the tempos of computerized sounds to the music of a full Javanese gamelan via a MIDI controller (Emulator-3). The device had to be operated through software fed with recorded gamelan samples. "Lion's Eye" having originally been performed by Daniel Schmidt's Berkeley Gamelan, the samples had to be retuned according to Kyai Madu Sari's own *slendro* tuning.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the more traditionally oriented gamelan performances led by K.R.T. Wasitodipuro and I Nyoman

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<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that composition for gamelan did happen during the workshops. For the 1988 edition, Kenneth Newby scored a new piece for gamelan in collaboration with choreographer Linda Rabin. In 1989, music students Michael O'Neill, William Naylor, and Tracey Classen composed new works for Javanese gamelan as well.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Kahre, interviewed by the author, 28 January 2022.

<sup>38</sup> To be precise, "Lion's Eye" was commissioned by Barbara Benary for Gamelan Son of Lion and did not feature electronics. A version strictly for electronics was also premiered in 1985. It was not until May 1989 that the Berkeley Gamelan realized the version for gamelan and electronics, shortly before Pauline Oliveros's visit to Vancouver.



Wenten, two nights mostly dedicated to the music of Oliveros showcased “Lion’s Eye” as the concluding act of the Music Intensive.

Moreover, a structural difference with past Music Intensives brought the two musical streams together. While prior editions allowed attendees to choose their preferred programs within the curriculum, the 1989 Music Intensive offered a single hybrid curriculum for all students to follow. This essentially forced students to be exposed to computer music and gamelan, wherever their prime interest lay. However, this lack of freedom may explain the lower attendance of that year, and this formula was abandoned for subsequent years:

For the first time the gamelan and electronics streams of this Intensive were blended into one five-week-long stream. As it turned out, we gained the advantage of a comprehensive curriculum but must now concede to the fact that not all participants wished to combine the two streams and that we, in fact, lost the potential for larger numbers of participants because applicants were not free to choose between the two streams.<sup>39</sup>

The 1989 Music Intensive brought gamelan and electronics into their closest contact, a fact perhaps best exemplified by the collaboration between Javanese virtuoso K.R.T. Wasitodipuro and electro-acoustic guru Pauline Oliveros in preparing “Lion’s Eye.” Despite being an import rather than a work that resulted from the workshops themselves, the piece is a milestone in connecting the dots between the Music Intensive’s two focal points. Later editions did occasionally feature similar collaborations, but to a much lesser extent. For example, archival material reveals a dance performance by I Nyoman Wenten with interactive live electronics. Otherwise, the gap between both streams was narrowed thanks to the overlapping presence of students in workshops. In 1992, guest lecturer George Lewis even rehearsed and performed with the Javanese music ensemble led by Hardja Susilo, stepping outside his area of expertise.

In essence, if the concrete application of computer music to gamelan music ever happened, it was short lived. The value of the Dance and Music of Two Worlds model lay in the exposure it offered its attendees to contrasting musical traditions. According to Hank Bull, there was “a great deal of respect for the coherence of each discipline,” and the Dance and Music of Two Worlds created “a nexus of understanding.”<sup>40</sup> Although it left no tangible product behind, it forged lasting relationships between individuals of various backgrounds and craft. More importantly, it gave gamelan a place of choice within the artistic discourse prevalent in Vancouver, and North America as a whole. By helping de-clutter gamelan of the strictly ethno-musicological interest that first brought its practice to the continent, Bartlett realized the goal he had set for the Institute:

A central idea of the Summer Institute is that gamelan is not just ‘ethnic’ music, but rather is part of the global discourse about contemporary art and music and their place in world culture. It isn’t easy to get past the

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<sup>39</sup> Final report of the Summer Institute, 1999, F-109-06-5-0-17, School for the Contemporary Arts fonds.

<sup>40</sup> Phone conversation between the author and Hank Bull, 29 March 2022.

ingrained Euro-American-centrism that is still high on the list of Unquestioned Assumptions in North American artistic and musical circles, but projects like this are steps in the right direction.<sup>41</sup>

### AN IMPRINT ON VANCOUVER'S THRIVING GAMELAN SCENE

Although three decades have passed since the last Music and Dance of Two Worlds workshop in 1992, Vancouver's gamelan scene has expanded and thrived. New gamelan ensembles have formed, such as Michael Tenzer's Gamelan Gita Asmara (University of British Columbia) and Jon Siddall's Gamelan Si Pawit (Vancouver Community College), and Gamelan Madu Sari has remained greatly involved in composing and performing new repertoire. Two full-length recordings of such works have been released (*New Nectar*, 2003; *Hive*, 2010), and a third is to come. In the process, the group has acquired a smaller gamelan *gadhon*, which was housed at the Western Front for a long time. Originally purchased by Martin Bartlett in 1990 to achieve greater independence from Simon Fraser University and to enhance mobility, these instruments have likewise been used for new composition.

The clear path towards creating original pieces rather than performing only Javanese pieces is a testimony to the impact of the Music Intensive on its attendees. Many participants were composers who eventually wrote for gamelan or were heavily influenced by its repertoire. While their learning curve for traditional repertoire peaked during the Summer Institutes, it was also doing so in an environment that brought Javanese and Balinese music into a Western contemporary arts space and discourse. With projects such as Linda Rabin's 1988 new choreography scored for gamelan and Pauline Oliveros's "Lion's Eye," students were taught that gamelan was a living tradition, welcoming to new ideas even from Westerners. Moreover, these projects occurred under the benevolent eyes of leading Indonesian artists. With such mentors only sporadically present in Vancouver, gamelan enthusiasts who were engaging year-round with this tradition naturally became pro-active in their use of the gamelan and became confident enough to create their own works.<sup>42</sup> The continuing involvement of Javanese artist Sutrisno Hartana, who encourages new composition, since his arrival in 1995 has only uplifted this tendency.

Other contextual events also favoured this understanding of gamelan culture, such as the New Music movement in Indonesia, which had been gaining influence since the late 1970s.<sup>43</sup> This stream of new creative output was

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Bartlett, public note, 1991, F-109-6-5-0-29, School for the Contemporary Arts fonds, Simon Fraser University.

<sup>42</sup> For example, traditional dance did not live far beyond the stay of Nanik Wenten and I Nyoman Wenten in Vancouver. Apart from Lorraine Thompson and others who travelled to study in Indonesia, traditional Balinese and Javanese dance was dependent on the sporadic but intensive instruction given during the workshops. Similarly, lack of permanent Indonesian teachers, and ultimately the end of the Summer Intensives, pushed gamelan enthusiasts to find alternative ways to perform and engage with the tradition.

<sup>43</sup> The Pekan Komponis Indonesia was a composition festival organized in Indonesia, encouraging composers from different regions to showcase often radical yet regionally rooted ideas. Mark In an interview with the author on 31 March 2022, Parlett explained that at the time he first heard

brought directly to the eyes and ears of Vancouver artists when the New Music Indonesia project toured North America and performed in Vancouver in the fall of 1991.<sup>44</sup> It was this event that led composer Aloysius Suwardi to stay in Vancouver for a month and compose “Proses Dua” with three musicians from Gamelan Madu Sari. Many such collaborative residencies were later arranged between Gamelan Madu Sari and guest Indonesian artists, often resulting in original works. Perhaps the best example of such a collaboration is the interdisciplinary performance “Semar in Lila Maya” (2006–8). Over two years in the making, this contemporary *wayang listrik*<sup>45</sup> was a theatrical work with live algorithmic video projections whose score comprised new Javanese gamelan works by members of Gamelan Madu Sari. Involving members of the Javanese group Wargo Laras as well as residencies and performances in Java and Canada, the spectacle is Gamelan Madu Sari’s most ambitious project.

**Figure 5.** Gamelan Madu Sari performing “Semar in Lila Maya” in Vancouver with members from Wargo Laras. Photo courtesy of Mark Parlett.



gamelan, he was already exposed to two streams of musical output: *karawitan* (traditional music for gamelan) and new compositions.

<sup>44</sup> New Music Indonesia was a program of contemporary works by Indonesian composers, assembled in the context of Festival of Indonesia 1990–1, which promoted Indonesian culture throughout the United States. The ad hoc group mostly featured musicians from the ASKI Surakarta conservatory and presented pieces by Aloysius Suward, R. Suppangah, Blacius Subono, I Nyoman Windha, and I Wayan Sadra. New Music Indonesia toured North America with their experimental works and stopped by Vancouver on 12 October 1991, leading to a month-long collaboration with Suwardi at the Western Front shortly after the tour. The three students involved in “Proses Dua” were Kenneth Newby, Michael O’Neill, and Christopher J. Miller. Later, Gamelan Madu Sari collaborated as a group with Heri Dono on two contemporary *wayang* performances.

<sup>45</sup> The literal translation of this term is “electrical puppetry.” For an elaborate description of the *wayang listrik* concept, see Dulic (2006).

Aesthetically, the Music Intensive's legacy did not establish regular use of electronics or technology in Gamelan Madu Sari's new repertoire. Paradoxically, such a merger seems to predate the Summer Institute itself. Kenneth Newby, especially, was already composing works for his *gender wayang* quartet and plexiglass MIDI controllers, which he called "flying bonangs."<sup>46</sup> He and others who gravitated towards the Music Intensives later composed interdisciplinary works involving electronic sounds and gamelan elements.<sup>47</sup> Beyond these specific cases, the Music Intensive helped create a climate favourable to experimentation with gamelan, notably for its fusion with other music traditions and art forms. Such a fusion is Michael O'Neill's Beledrone ensemble, founded in 2011, which merges the instrumentation and style of Balinese *beleganjur*<sup>48</sup> with Scottish highland bagpipes.<sup>49</sup> Entirely devoted to new repertoire, Beledrone is a good example of the gamelan-related projects that seem to emerge only from Vancouver.<sup>50</sup> Like "Semar in Lila Maya," which fused dance, theatre, live projections, and gamelan, it embraces the same spirit of interdisciplinarity which was gamelan's default environment upon landing in the city.

## GAMELAN AND ELECTRONICS, THEN AND NOW

Decades later, Martin Bartlett's aspirations for gamelan have materialized in Vancouver. By first introducing Javanese music workshops in 1986, he wished to offer an alternative to Western music idioms through gamelan's communal aspects and direct interaction between musician and instrument. Given the longevity of Gamelan Madu Sari, the enthusiasm for Indonesian arts was not fleeting. Core musicians such as Mark Parlett, D.B. Boyko, Ann Hepper, Michael O'Neill, Sam Salmon, and Kenneth Newby, all of whom were participants at the Music Intensives, remained involved with the group for many years. The urge to create original works came after years of short but intensive periods of learning with accomplished Indonesian artists.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, when listening

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<sup>46</sup> This group was called Cymbali and featured Kenneth Newby, Andreas Kahre, Michael O'Neill, Lorraine Thompson, and later Russel Shumsky. The earliest evidence of a Cymbali concert that I could trace is a performance at the Western Front on 9 December 1989, shortly before the visit of Pauline Oliveros to Vancouver (<https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/events/cymbali-in-concert/>). According to a conversation with Kenneth Newby, Cymbali had been active for a few years prior.

<sup>47</sup> Examples of such productions are *A Sound Is Heard in the World* (1991), *Ecology of Souls* (1993), and *New Music across America: Amphibious Tales and News from Hyperspace* (D.B. Boyko and Ken Newby) (1992). All occurred at the Western Front and are archived at <https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/events/a-sound-is-heard-in-the-world/> and <https://legacywebsite.front.bc.ca/events/ecology-of-souls-cd-release-concert/>.

<sup>48</sup> A *beleganjur* is a Balinese processional gamelan, which musicians play while walking. It is known for its large *ceng-ceng* cymbals and absence of metallophones.

<sup>49</sup> Michael O'Neill, who was a participant in the Music Intensives, has created several compositions involving gamelan throughout his life. He notably owns a *pelog*-tuned Balinese *gender wayang* quartet, which he now uses with an ensemble called Turtle Bliss. A recent performance they gave is "Show on Earth: Wallace Line," with Mark Parlett as the puppeteer in 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Michael O'Neill was a student of Martin Bartlett and inherited his fascination for new tuning systems. Although O'Neill's focus settled on new instrumental combinations, he exemplifies the influence of Bartlett on his surroundings at the time of his involvement with gamelan.

<sup>51</sup> This view is also expressed by former Gamelan Madu Sari member Christopher Miller. See Miller (2005).

to an album by Gamelan Madu Sari, one will find compositions often using group singing, *balungan* melodies, interlocking rhythms, and *céngkok* improvisational patterns.<sup>52</sup> These features of Javanese music were internalized by the musicians so that they could reinvest them in their own compositional ideas. This informed musical output shows an understanding of traditional *karawitan* that corresponds to Bartlett's ideal of approaching gamelan with respect.

In placing gamelan at the centre of two fundamental institutions for interdisciplinary arts, Bartlett shaped how this musical tradition evolved in the city. A review of the types of projects involving Gamelan Madu Sari reveals an ensemble eager to experiment and merge music for gamelan with other types of music or other art forms.<sup>53</sup> The people and students surrounding Bartlett were artists of different backgrounds, interests, and approaches, so it is natural that they were demographically dominant within the gamelan workshops. In this context, the choice to have gamelan coexist with computer music was coherent if unprecedented. The greatest legacy of this idea is the exposure it gave to both music streams, especially among young professionals and students starting a career in contemporary arts. Given the newborn state of computer music at the time, the hardware wasn't expected to be easily applied to performance. However, now that the technology has become more reliable and readily available, this prospect no longer seems out of reach. But a search for recent examples of electro-acoustic technologies applied to gamelan composition should not be focused on Vancouver. Rather, such an approach is embraced by young Indonesian composers such as Dion Nataraja and I Putu Arya Deva Suryanegara, who are searching for ways to bridge the two. With this merger now gaining steam, it is interesting to look back at a time and place when the worlds of gamelan and electronics came so close together without quite synthesizing.

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<sup>52</sup> Like algorithms, *céngkok* are possible patterns that a musician can use to ornament the core melody of a piece. The pattern options are determined by the instrument, but also by the pitch sequence of a melodic line.

<sup>53</sup> For a lengthier analysis of why these features distinguish Gamelan Madu Sari from fellow Canadian ensembles, see Bellemare (2021).

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## ABSTRACT

During Expo 86, composer Martin Bartlett showcased his commitment to having Javanese music settle in Vancouver. By organizing a month-length workshop on Indonesian performing arts, he secured the Indonesian Embassy’s gift of a full Javanese gamelan to Simon Fraser University. The success of this first workshop encouraged Bartlett to repeat the experience for several years. In the summer of 1988, the event took an unexpected turn by concurrently featuring gamelan and electronic music workshops side by side. Dubbed “Dance and Music of Two Worlds,” it provided a unique place of encounter in which Javanese music traditions coexisted with electronic arts. Although the two hardly intermingled, the 1980s and 1990s saw many interdisciplinary productions mixing gamelan and electronics emerge from participating students. At the time, this relatively unexplored encounter between sound worlds put a stamp on the regional identity of the Vancouver gamelan scene, one still echoing today.

**Keywords:** Expo 86, Martin Bartlett, Javanese gamelan, electronic arts, Simon Fraser University, Javanese music

## RÉSUMÉ

Lors de l’Expo 86, le compositeur Martin Bartlett a démontré son sa détermination à instaurer une culture de musique javanaise à Vancouver. En organisant un atelier d’un mois sur les arts de la scène indonésien, il a obtenu le don d’un gamelan javanais complet à l’Université Simon Fraser de la part du gouvernement de l’Indonésie. Le succès de ce premier atelier a ensuite encouragé Bartlett à renouveler l’expérience pendant plusieurs années. À l’été 1988, l’événement a pris une tournure inattendue en mettant en parallèle des ateliers de gamelan et de musique électronique. Baptisé « Dance and Music of Two Worlds », il offrait un lieu de rencontre unique où les traditions musicales javanaises coexistaient avec les arts électroniques. Bien que les deux ne

s'entremêlèrent guère, les années 1980 et 1990 ont vu émerger de nombreuses productions interdisciplinaires mêlant gamelan et électronique par des étudiants participants. À l'époque, cette rencontre relativement inexplorée entre ces univers sonores a marqué l'identité régionale de la scène de gamelan à Vancouver, un héritage qui résonne encore aujourd'hui.

*Mots clés* : Expo 86, Martin Bartlett, gamelan javanais, arts électroniques, Université Simon Fraser, musique javanaise

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**Laurent Bellemare** holds a master's degree in musicology from the Université de Montréal. Active as a musician in various ensembles, he has been a member of the Balinese music ensemble Giri Kedaton since 2015. His specialization in the musical traditions of Indonesia led him to visit that country during the 2016–17 academic year. He recently completed a thesis on the naturalization of Indonesian gamelan in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Laurent is also a father, science fiction fan, and death metal singer.