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A gamelan glossary

A practical glossary for those learning to play gamelan.

Please note that this glossary is intended for beginners and, with this in mind, some definitions have been simplified.

The terms given in this glossary are in Javanese and refer to Central Javanese gamelan, which is dominated by the contrasting playing styles developed in the rival courts of Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta (Yogya). Generally the Solonese style is more refined, the Yogyanese more lively and vigorous and the rivalry continues even today. This glossary is based on Solonese usage.

Alok

Lit., to shout or yell.

Short vocal interjections used to add excitement to a piece.

Andhegan

Lit., stopping but not ending.

A pause when the gamelan players stop and the singer continues briefly, after which the piece resumes (sometimes in a different *irama*).

Angkatan

Lit., the lifting up of (i.e. start of).

For example - *angkatan ciblon* - played by the ciblon leading to the gong to signal a change in the piece e.g. *irama wiled*.

Balungan

Lit., skeleton or frame.

The term *balungan* refers to the basic melody of a gamelan piece, and also the group of instruments that play this melody i.e. slenthem, demung, saron and peking. I suppose you could call it the bare bones of a piece.

Balungan mlaku

Mlaku - lit., walking.

Balungan with (in general) a note for every beat e.g.

6 5 3 2 5 3 2 1

Balungan nibani

Nibani - lit., to fall or to drop on to.

Balungan with alternating pin (see below) and notes e.g.

. 3 . 2 . 3 . 1

Note that the pin falls on the first and third beats of each *gatra* (see below) which are the weaker beats.

Balungan ngadhah

Ngadhah - lit., to scurry like a gecko

Doubled *balungan*, with two (or more) notes per beat e.g.

56i2̇56i2̇ 56i2̇i6 5

Bentuk

Usually translated as form. The form of a Javanese gamelan piece is largely dictated by the colotomic structure, that is the arrangement of the 'punctuating' instruments i.e. gong, kempul, kenong, kethuk. see 'Basic Bentuk', downloadable in pdf form from the UK Gamelan Network website. See <http://www.gamelannetwork.co.uk/playing-techniques/bentuk.pdf>

Buka

Lit., opening or beginning.

A melodic phrase used to introduce a gamelan piece, played on the rebab or gender or, if it is a loud-style piece (or if neither of these is available), on the bonang barung. This is accompanied by a kendhang *buka*, which always takes a certain form, depending on the type of piece being played.

Buka celuk

A sung *buka* - usually sung by one voice.

Cengkok

Melodic patterns played by the 'soft' instruments, i.e. rebab, gender, gambang, suling and siter.



Gantung

Can be translated as hanging. A *gatra* which consists of a single sustained tone e.g.

3 3 . . or . . 6 .

Garap

Lit., to work.

Might be thought of as interpretation or, more correctly, the choices which can be made on some instruments when playing a piece e.g. choice of *cengkok* by soft instrument players, choice of *sekaran* (see below) by the bonang barung.

Gatra

Lit., embryo.

Division of the *balungan*. Each *gatra* contains four beats, some of which may be *pin*, or which may be subdivided.

Gembyang

The equivalent of an octave in Western music - although it isn't really - Javanese 'octaves' have either 5 notes (*slendro*) or 7 notes (*pelog*). Also used as a bonang term when playing notes in the upper and lower registers in unison. See also *nduduk gembyang* below.

Gendhing

Generic term for any gamelan piece and also used specifically to refer to certain types of large pieces which consist of a *merong* - a formal first section - which cannot be played on its own, followed by an *inggah*.

Gerongan

A type of vocal melody sung by a number of voices, usually male, in unison.

Gongan

The music between two strokes of the gong

Grambyangan

A melodic unit played to indicate the *pathet*, for example a *grambyangan* might be played by the gender or bonang before the start of a piece.



Gropak

Lit., fast.

e.g. *irama gropak* - played at a faster pace than *irama lancar*, or *surwuk gropak* - an exciting ending which gets faster and faster and then stops abruptly.

Imbal

Lit., to repeat a musical theme.

Interlocking patterns played on two instruments.

Saron imbal

Saron *imbal* is usually played to the *seleh* note of each *gatra*. Player 1 plays on the beat, the second player anticipates on the off-beat e.g.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>balungan</i> | 6 | 5 | 3 | 2 | | | | |
| player 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| player 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 3 |

Bonang imbal

The bonang barung plays two notes, separated by one note. The bonang panerus plays the note in between and the note above, on the off-beat, anticipating the barung

e.g. *slendro manyura*

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| bonang barung | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| bonang panerus | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 |

How the *imbal* relates to the *balungan* depends on the *irama* in which it is played.

Irama

A Javanese musical concept which describes the instrumental relationships within a gamelan piece e.g. the kendhang to the balungan, the decorating instruments to the balungan.

See <http://www.gamelannetwork.co.uk/playing-techniques/irama.html>

Karawitan

A modern term (first used in the late 19th century) referring to any music, gamelan or non-gamelan, played in the *slendro* or *pelog* tuning systems. Can also be used to mean Javanese 'classical' music.



Kébar

Lit., something which attracts attention.

A lively section, played in *irama tanggung*, usually within a *ladrang*, characterised by ciblon drumming, bonang *imbal*, a distinctive kempul pattern, *alok* and *keplok* (see below). In addition the saron and peking can play *imbal* or *nyacah* (see below).

Kempyung

Two notes separated by an interval of two notes in *slendro* or three notes in *pelog* e.g. 2̣ and 6̣ and 1̣ and 5̣.

Kenongan

Music between two strokes of the kenong.

Kepatihan

System of notation in which the notes are referred to by numbers. The system uses dots above the note to indicate high octave, and below to indicate low, and symbols, as follows, for the punctuating instruments.

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| ① | gong ageng (big gong). |
| ② or (2) | gong suwukan (smaller gong) |
| 3 | kempul |
| 5̇ | kenong |
| 6̇ | kempyang |
| 7 ⁺ | kethuk |

The kendhang has its own system of notation, with symbols representing the drum sounds.

Keplok

Rapid interlocking clapping used in *kébar*, or during the first *kenongan* of a *wiled* section, or throughout *irama rangkep*.

Kinthilan

Lit., to follow along.

A playing technique in which two saron share the peking part between them e.g.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>balungan</i> | 6 | 5 | 3 | 2 | | | | |
| saron 1 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| saron 2 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |



Mipil nibani

Lit., to fall on to the note. Also called *mipil lompatan* lit., to jump or hop.

These are *mipil* patterns used for *balungan nibani*, and sometimes to emphasise an important note even when the *balungan* is not *nibani*. e.g.

irama tanggung .
balungan 1 . 6
bonang barung 1 5 1 . 6 6 1 6

irama dados
balungan 2 1 2 6
bonang barung 2 1 . 5 5 1 . . 5 1 5 . 6 6 1 6

Ngelik or Lik

In Java pitch is not referred to as high or low, but small or big respectively. *Lik* means small, therefore high in pitch. *Ngelik* means to go high in pitch. The *lik* is the section of a piece e.g. a *ladrang* or *ketawang* which is pitched higher than the other section and in which singing usually occurs.

Nduduk gembyang

Lit. sitting in octaves.

On the bonang, playing *gembyang* in patterns e.g.

balungan (irama dados) 3 3 . .
bonang barung 3 . 3 . . 3 . 3 . .
333 . 33 . . 333 . 33 . .

Nduduk tunggal

Playing a single note (lower octave) in *gembyang* patterns e.g.

balungan (irama dados) . 5 . 5
bonang barung 555 . 55 . . 555 . 55 . .

This is used when the *balungan* note is low. *Tunggal* means single.

Nyacah

A style of playing the peking and/or the saron often used in *srepegan* and consisting of melodic phrases landing on the *seleh* note of each *gatra*. This is a chance to improvise within certain guidelines e.g. avoid ugly jumps and gaps and, if possible, try to have a smooth descent (or ascent) leading to the *seleh* note. e.g.

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| <i>balungan</i> | 3 2 3 2 | 5 6 1̇ 6 |
| <i>nyacah</i> | 63561̇532 | 53212356 |

Ompak or umpak

Lit., base or foundation (in architecture an *ompak* is a stone base for a wooden pillar)

The opening or main section of a piece or, in a larger *gendhing*, a transition e.g. *ompak inggah* - transition to the *inggah*.

Pancer

A single note inserted between every note of a piece.

e.g. Ketawang Subaskatâwâ *slendro sanga*

⑤ 1̇ 1 1̇ 6 1̇ 1 1̇ 5 1̇ 1 1̇ 6 1̇ 1 1̇ ⑤

In this case the *pancer note* 1̇ is not usually notated.

Panerusan

Collective term for all the soft instruments which elaborate on the basic *balungan*, i.e. gender, gambang etc.

Pathet

Pathet might be thought of as mode. Each *laras* has three main pathet:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Slendro</i> | <i>Pelog</i> |
| <i>nem</i> (lit., six) | <i>lima</i> (lit., five) |
| <i>sanga</i> (lit., nine) | <i>nem</i> (lit., six) |
| <i>manyura</i> (lit., peacock) | <i>barang</i> (lit., thing) |

The *pathet* will usually be given at the top of the notation with the title of the piece e.g. Ladrang Pangkur, *slendro manyura*.

Ladrang Pangkur can also be played in *slendro sanga*, *pelog barang* and *pelog nem*.

Each *pathet* has different characteristics defined by the most important notes, tonal range and the melodic patterns used. It is however an extremely complex subject.



Pesindhèn

The solo female singer of the gamelan.

Pin

A beat on which no new note is played, represented by a dot in *kepatihan* notation.

Pinjalan

Lit., hopping like a flea.

As *kinthilan*, but played by the demung and slenthem, with the slenthem echoing the demung half a beat behind.

Plèsèdan

Lit., slipping off target or hinting.

Anticipating a repeated note from the next *gatra*. For example kenong *plèsèdan*, often called slippery kenong.

2 1 2 $\hat{6}^3$ 3 3 . .

The kenong is slightly delayed and anticipates the repeated note 3 in the following *gatra*. (See *gantung*)

Salahan

Lit., mistake.

A distinctive pattern anticipating the gong e.g. the drumming pattern used for a ladrang, irama tanggung:

Normal pattern:

o o b p o o b p o o b p o o b p

Salahan

p b p o b o p b p o b p o o b p

Sekaran

Lit., flowering.

Ornamental patterns leading to a *seleh* note, such as those played by the ciblon, bonang barung or panerus. e.g.

1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3 $\overline{35}$ 6 1 2 $\overline{356121}$ 6
sekaran



Seleh

Lit., to put something down, to settle.

The point, usually the last note of a *gatra*, when all the instruments of the gamelan settle on the same note.

Sesegan

Seseg lit., compressed or close together.

The fast section at the end of a *gendhing*, or the slight speeding-up which precedes the *suwuk*.

Sindhènan

Vocal parts sung by the *pesindhèn*.

Sirep

Lit., calm, or a magic spell.

Quiet section when some of the instruments may drop out.

Soran

Sora lit., loud and forceful.

Loud-style i.e. without the 'soft' instruments. When playing a loud-style piece the *bonang barung* is the melodic leader.

Suwuk

Lit., end (referring to a piece of music)

Signalled by the *kendhang* which plays a pattern to indicate the *suwuk* and gradually slows down.