

Bela Bartok LAM 97 Mikrokosmos, Volume IV: From the island of Bali (1926)

Gamelan is the general name for an Indonesian orchestra or instrumental ensemble (e.g. from Bali or Java). They consist mainly of instruments similar in sound to xylophones and marimbas, metallophones similar in sound to glockenspiel and celesta, together with sets of gongs of bronze, bamboo, chimes and various drums.

A gamelan is often made up of fifteen to twenty players; there is no conductor. The music is based on the principle of Heterophony. There is a main, fixed melody—known in Java as the *balungan* (meaning skeleton and therefore skeleton tune.) This melody is played in long notes on lower sounding instruments, and punctuated by the large gongs. Above and around this, other instruments weave decorated versions of the same melody, building up a complicated web of sound made up of interlocking patterns. In general, the higher the pitch of an instrument, the more notes it contributes to the musical texture.

Questions:

1. Where does Gamelan music come from?
2. What types of instruments would we hear in Gamelan music?
3. In what way is the performance of Gamelan music different from Western music?
4. What does heterophony mean?
5. Identify the *balungan* Bartok's piece.
6. Why does the gong parts play few notes?

In your own time look more into the background of Balinese music. What is Gamelan? Gain some ideas of the concepts and techniques behind gamelan music, and perform the ostinato at LAN 97.

Bela Bartok (1881—1945)

- Influenced greatly by folk music and published nearly 2000 folk tunes from Hungary and Rumania.
- Wrote 5 book and innumerable articles on folk music, made setting of or based compositions on folk tunes.
- Was a virtuoso pianists and a teacher of piano at the Budapest Academy of Music from 1907-1934.
- His Mikrokosmos, 153 piano pieces in six books of graded difficulty, is not only important for studies but also a summary of Bartok's own style and of many aspects of the development of European music in the first half of the 20th century.

“Bartok's ideal was to express, in 20th century terms, Bach's texture of contrapuntal fullness, Beethoven's art of thematic development, and Debussy's discovery of the sonorous value of chords.”

- His music often has 'motoristic' rhythms, characterised by irregular meters and offbeat accents.
- Textures may be prevailingly homophonic or made up of contrapuntal lines. The polyphony may include free use of imitative, fugal, and canonic techniques.
- Harmony is partially an incidental result of the contrapuntal movement; it grows out of the character of the melodies, which may be based on the pentatonic, whole tone, modal, or irregular diatonic and chromatic scales. All kinds of chords appear, from triads to combinations built on fourths.