



# Smithsonian Folkways

## The Balinese Gamelan Orchestra Club

### A Smithsonian Folkways Lesson

Designed by: Aimee Meuter

University of Washington

#### Summary:

Learn about the music and culture of Bali by participating in a gamelan orchestra club. Listen to gangsa, a metallophone struck with a hammer. Practice hearing the rhythm of the gong cycle. Read a storybook about children playing Balinese gamelan, and create its soundtrack on instruments.

#### Suggested Grade Levels: 3-5

**Country:** Indonesia

**Region:** Asia

**Culture Group:** Balinese

**Genre:** Gamelan

**Instruments:** Xylophone, Gangsa (metallophone), Gong, Drums

**Language:** Indonesian

**Co-Curricular Areas:** Social Studies, Theater

**National Standards:** 2, 6, 9

**Prerequisites:** None

#### Objectives:

- Read Club of Small Men and musically describe it
- Listen to Gamelan and musically describe it
- Listen to and play arrangement of “Gamelan balaganjur: gilak”

#### Materials:

- “Orchestral Combinations: Balinese Gamelan” by n/a from *Man’s Early Musical Instruments*, (FW04525\_408)  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/mans-early-musical-instruments/islamica-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- Storybook: “Club of Small Men” by James McPhee, 1948. Can purchase on Amazon.com
- Reference book: Balinese Music by Michael Tenzer. Gain a thorough understanding of Balinese gamelan in order to most accurately teach this unit
- Book: Music in Bali: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture by Lisa Gold, 2004
- Instructor’s Manual: Music in Bali: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture by Ellen McCullough-Brabson, Ellen. Component of the Global Music Series, co-

edited by Bonnie C. Wade and Patricia Shehan Campbell. (\*See *Extended Activity*)

- Video: “Balinese Gamelan Music”
  - View a Balinese gamelan ensemble practicing on the gangsa, doubled-headed drums, gongs, and a flute. Gamelan performances in Bali are freely available online

### **Lesson Segments:**

- 1. Balinese Children’s Gamelan Ensemble Culture** (National Standards 2, 9)
- 2. Hear the Sounds of the Gong** (National Standards 2, 6, 9)

#### **1. Balinese Children’s Gamelan Ensemble Culture**

- a.** Reading a story for cultural context and transmission: *Club of Small Men* by James McPhee.
- b.** Discuss the story as an introduction to both Balinese and Gamelan music and culture as well as specifically children’s culture in Bali.
- c.** Interact with children while reading the story; prompt questions, evoke excitement in students to want to participate in their *own* gamelan orchestra club.
- d.** Interact with the students by having them “retell” the story with music; having them create the musical sounds on instruments that are described in parts of the story.
  - i.** Combining musical play with an excerpt from the story, “They sat there trying out the drums and cymbals and tapping gently on the gongs and little gangsas” McPhee, pg. 30. → For example, students tap gently on metal xylophones here, as if providing a soundtrack to the story

**Assessment:** Children will play along with the “musical” parts (where the story involves musical description) of the story without being prompted by the teacher.

#### **2. Hear the Sounds of the Gangsa**

- a.** Attentive and participatory listening and rhythm exercise: “Orchestral Combinations: Balinese Gamelan”.
  - i.** SGS audio: “Orchestral Combinations: Balinese Gamelan”, n/a, *Man’s Early Musical Instruments*, track# 408, FW04525
  - ii.** Listen to “Orchestral Combinations: Balinese Gamelan” by n/a from *Man’s Early Musical Instruments*, (FW04525\_408)  
<http://www.folkways.si.edu/mans-early-musical-instruments/islamica-world/music/album/smithsonian>
- b.** Listen once through the track while instructor counts out the rhythm and says “GONG” each time the big gong strikes, usually on the last beat of an eight-beat gong cycle.

- c. Ask listening questions: “What instrument sounds do you hear?” or “Do you hear any reoccurring patterns?”
- d. Play a rhythm activity: stand in a circle to do rhythm/listening activity in order to see each other and communicate as musicians of a gamelan ensemble would.
- e. Explain that gamelan performance in Bali is a community event and the actual performance comes together by listening to your fellow musicians and playing together.
- f. Lead the circle into this rhythm activity of counting the beats and saying “GONG” each time principal gong strikes: on the last count, which has the greatest emphasis.

**Assessment:** Children will be able perform the rhythm listening activity without needing to imitate or follow instructor’s lead. They will need to become familiar with the sound of the piece, listening regularly and practicing counting the rhythm in order to predict when to say “GONG”.

**Extension:**

- Go out into the community and seek a culture bearer who can demonstrate the music of Bali or can share stories of Bali, providing a cultural context to the music directly from the culture
- Make time for students to explore the musical culture of Bali online:
  - Ex: Ellen McCullough-Brabson’s online instructor manual