Indonesia is a country of astounding cultural diversity, nowhere more evident than in the stunning variety of musical and related performing arts found throughout its several thousand populated islands. Known formerly as the Dutch East Indies, Indonesia is one of many modern nations whose boundaries were formed during the centuries of European colonial domination, placing peoples with contrasting languages, arts, systems of belief, and conceptions of the world under a single rule. The adoption of a national language in the early twentieth century was a crucial step in building the unity necessary to win a revolution against the Dutch (1945–1949). Today, a pan-Indonesian popular culture has been contributing to an increased sense of national unity, particularly among the younger generation. Nevertheless, recent strife between ethnic groups, which dominated international headlines about Indonesia at the turn of the millennium, has challenged this sense of unity. Indeed, though we can identify some general cultural traits, including musical ones, shared by many peoples of Indonesia, to speak of an “Indonesian” culture or style of music is problematic. Regional diversity is still very much in evidence.

Most Indonesians’ first language is not the national language (Indonesian) but one of the more than two hundred separate languages found throughout this vast archipelago. Further, although many are familiar with the sounds of Indonesian pop music and such Western stars as Beyoncé and Justin Timberlake, they also know their own regional musical traditions. In Indonesia many kinds of music exist side by side in a complex pluralism that reflects both the diversity of the native population and the receptiveness of that population to centuries of outside influences. Indonesia is, then, a country truly home to worlds of music.

What first impression might this country give you? You would probably arrive in the nation’s capital, Jakarta* (jah-kar-tah), a teeming metropolis of more than ten million people—some very wealthy, most rather poor. Jakarta is near the western end of the north coast of Java, Indonesia’s most heavily populated (but not largest) island. (See the map on the following page.) The mix of Indonesia’s many cultures among themselves and with Western culture is nowhere more fully realized than in this special city. Many kinds of music are heard here. Western-style nightclubs, karaoke bars, and discos do a lively business until the early hours of the morning. Javanese gamelan (gah-muh-lahn; percussion ensemble) music accompanies

*Words in bold are defined in the Glossary, beginning on page 407.
nightly performances of wayang orang (wah-yang oh-rang) theater, an elaborate type of dance-drama from central Java. You might also run across Jakarta's own gambang-kromong (gahm-bang kroh-mong; small percussion ensemble) and perhaps a troupe from Bali, Sumatra, or any of the many other islands performing at the national arts center Taman Ismael Marzuki or the Indonesian cultural park Taman Mini. As you begin to find your way around the city by taxi, bus, or three-wheeled bajaj, you may develop a taste for highly seasoned food. You will certainly get a sense of Indonesia’s many cultures by roaming this complex city. Much of what you encounter, however, has a strong presence in the various regions in which it is rooted.

Central Java

Java is an island about the size of New York State (just less than 50,000 square miles). With over 100 million people, Java is one of the most densely populated regions in the world. (Indonesia’s total population is about 220 million.) Most of the central and eastern two-thirds of the island is inhabited by Indonesia’s largest ethnic group, the Javanese, roughly 75 million people who share a language and other cultural traits, including music, though some local differences persist. In Sunda, the western third of the island, live the Sundanese, who have a language and arts distinct from those of the Javanese. Despite its dense population, Java remains mostly a farming society, with wet-rice agriculture as the predominant source of livelihood. Although most Javanese profess to be Muslim, only a minority follow orthodox practice. Many adhere to a blend of Islam with Hinduism and Buddhism (introduced into Java over one thousand years ago) and with what most scholars believe to be an even earlier layer of belief in benevolent and mischievous spirits and in ancestor veneration.

From Jakarta a twelve-hour ride on bus or train through shimmering wet-rice fields, set in the plains between gracefully sloping volcanic mountains, leads to Yogyakarta (often abbreviated Yogya and pronounced jog-jah). Yogya is one of two court cities in the cultural heartland of Central Java. The other, about forty miles to the northeast, is Surakarta (soo-rah-kar-tah or soo-raw-kar-taw; usually called “Solo”). Most Javanese point to these two cities as the cultural centers where traditional gamelan music and related performing arts have flourished in their most elaborate and refined forms. These courtly developments contrast with the rougher styles associated with the villages and outlying districts.

Yogya is a sprawling city with a population of about 500,000. It has several multistory malls and hotels but few other buildings taller than two stories. Away from the several major streets lined with stores flashing neon signs and blaring popular music, Yogya in many ways resembles a dense collection of villages. Yet at its center stands one of Java’s two main royal courts, the official home of the tenth sultan (His Highness Hamengku Buwana X; hah-muhng-koo bu-waw-naw). Unlike any Western palace or court, this is a complex of small buildings and open pavilions appropriate for the tropical climate. It was not designed merely for comfort, however. Endowed with mystical significance as an earthly symbol of the macrocosmos (the ordered universe), the court is oriented to the cardinal directions. The ruler, whose residence is located at the very center of the court, is imbued with divine powers, as were the Hindu-Javanese kings many centuries ago.
In many of these pavilions are kept the court gamelan ensembles. Some date back many centuries and perform only for rare ritual occasions, while others have been built or augmented more recently and are used more frequently. Like other treasured heirlooms belonging to the court, most of these sets of instruments are believed to contain special powers and are shown respect and given offerings. Also kept in the palace are numerous sets of finely carved and painted wayang kulit (wah-yang koo-lit; puppets made of water buffalo hide) used in all-night performances of highly sophisticated and entertaining shadow plays. Classical Javanese dance, with gamelan accompaniment, is rehearsed regularly and performed for special palace functions.

Though the court is still regarded as a cultural center, it is far less active now than it was prior to World War II (during which the Japanese occupied Indonesia). Much activity in the traditional Javanese arts takes place outside the court and is sponsored by private individuals and by such modern institutions as the national radio station and public schools and colleges. In the rural villages, which long served as a source and inspiration for the more refined courtly arts, a variety of musical and related performing arts continue to play a vital role in Javanese life.

**GAMELAN**

The word gamelan refers to a set of instruments unified by their tuning and often by their decorative carving and painting. Most gamelans consist of several kinds of metal slab instruments (similar in some ways to the Western vibraphone) and tuned knobbed gongs. The word “gong” is one of the few English words derived from Indonesian languages. (Two others are “ketchup” and “amok.”) In English, “gong” may refer to any variety of percussion instrument whose sound-producing vibrations are concentrated in the center of the instrument, rather than the edge, like a bell. In Javanese, it refers specifically to the larger hanging knobbed gongs (see Figure 7.1) in gamelan ensembles and is part of a family of
words relating to largeness, greatness, and grandeur—*agung* ("great," “kingly”), *ageng* ("large"), and *gunung* ("mountain"). In addition to gongs and other metal instruments, a *gamelan* ensemble normally has at least one drum and may have other kinds of instruments: winds, strings, and wooden percussion instruments (xylophones).

Some ancient ceremonial *gamelans* have only a few knobbed gongs and one or two drums. The kind of *gamelan* most often used in central Java today is a large set, comprising instruments ranging from deep booming gongs three feet in diameter to high-pitched gong-chimes and slab instruments, with three drums, several bamboo flutes, zithers, xylophones, and a two-stringed fiddle.

Instruments in the present-day *gamelan* are tuned to one of two scale systems: *sléndro* (*sleyn*-dro), a five-tone system made up of nearly equidistant intervals, normally notated with the numerals 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 (no 4); and *pélog* (*pay-log*), a seven-tone system made up of large and small intervals, normally notated 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Some *gamelans* are entirely *sléndro*, others entirely *pélog*, but many are actually double ensembles, combining a full set of instruments for each system.

The scale systems are incompatible and only in a few rare cases are they played simultaneously. Neither of these scale systems can be played on a Western piano, and neither is entirely standardized, as I shall explain.

The instrumentation of a full *sléndro-pélog* *gamelan* varies slightly, but it usually includes all or most of the instruments given in Figure 7.2. Among these many instruments, it will be useful in listening to the Javanese examples on the CD to know the following:

- The *saron* (*sahron*) and *slenthem* (*sluhn*-tuhm), instruments with six or seven keys, which play the main melody
- The *gong* and *siyem* (*see-yuhm*) the two largest hanging gongs, which mark the end of major phrases of the main melody
- The *kenong* (*kuh-nong*), large kettles, resting horizontally, which divide the major phrases evenly (playing simultaneously with the *gong* or *siyem* at the end of major phrases, and subdividing evenly in between: usually two or four times per major phrase)
- The *kempul* (*kuhm-pool*), smaller hanging gongs, suspended vertically, which evenly subdivide phrases (often midway between *kenong* beats)
- The *kethuk* (*kuh-took* [as in English *took*]), a small kettle, resting horizontally, which subdivides secondary phrases (between *kenong* and *kempul* beats)
- The *bonang* (*bo-nahng*), middle and high-register gong-chimes with 10 to 14 kettles, which embellish the main melody (see Figure 7.3)

Most of the other instruments perform elaborations and variations of the main melody to create a rich and subtle texture.

The *gamelan* instruments are normally complemented by singers: a small male chorus (*gérong*) and female soloists (*pesindhèn*). Java also supports a highly developed tradition of unaccompanied vocal music, which serves as a major vehicle for Javanese poetry. Although Javanese have recorded their sung
CHAPTER 7

FIGURE 7.2
Central Javanese gamelan instruments.

FIGURE 7.3
Members of the Pujangga Laras karawitan group performing at a wedding in Eromoko, Wonogiri, Central Java, August 3, 2006.
poetry in several writing systems for over a thousand years, these are normally sung rather than read silently or aloud. Even important letters between members of the nobility were, until the twentieth century, composed as poetry and delivered as song. Although the postal system has eliminated this practice, vocal music, whether with *gamelan* or unaccompanied, enjoys great popularity in Java today.

The relation between vocal and instrumental orientations in *gamelan* music is reflected in the two major groupings of instruments in the present-day Javanese *gamelan*: “loud-playing” and “soft-playing.” Historical evidence suggests that these two groupings were once separate ensembles and were combined as recently as the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Associated with festivals, processions, and other noisy outdoor events, loud-playing ensembles were strictly instrumental. Soft-playing ensembles were intended for more-intimate gatherings, often indoor, and involved singing. Even today, performance style distinguishes these two groupings. In loud-playing style, only the drums and louder metal instruments are used (see the left-hand column of Table 7.1). In soft-playing style, these instruments, or most of them, are played softly, and the voices and instruments listed in the column on the right are featured.

### TABLE 7.1 The Two Gamelan Instrument Groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loud-Playing Instruments</th>
<th>Soft-Playing Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gong ageng</td>
<td>gender barung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siyem</td>
<td>gender panerus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kempul</td>
<td>gambang</td>
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<tr>
<td>kenong</td>
<td>celempung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kethuk</td>
<td>siter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kempyang</td>
<td>suling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bonang family</td>
<td>rebab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xaron family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slenthem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kendhang family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bedhug</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GAMELAN CONSTRUCTION

Bronze is the preferred metal for *gamelan* manufacture, owing both to its durability and to its rich, sweet sound quality. Brass and iron are also used, especially in rural areas. They are considerably cheaper than bronze and easier to tune but less sonorous. Bronze *gamelan* instruments are not cast but instead forged in a long and difficult process. Though the metal worker in many societies occupies a low status, in Java he has traditionally been held in high regard. Forging bronze instruments not only requires great skill but also retains a mystical significance. Working with metals, transforming molten copper and tin (the metals that make bronze alloy) into sound-producing instruments, is believed to make one especially vulnerable to dangerous forces in the spirit world. For this reason the smiths make ritual preparation and may actually assume mythical identities during the forging process. The chief smith is ritually transformed into Panji, a powerful Javanese
mythical hero, and the smith’s assistants to Panji’s family and servants (see Becker 1988; Kunst 1973:138).

The largest gongs may require a full month of labor and a truckload of coal for the forge that heats the metal. Only after appropriate meditation, prayer, fasting, and preparation of offerings does a smith undertake to make a large gong. The molten bronze is pounded, reheated, pounded, reheated, and gradually shaped into a large knobbed gong that may measure three feet or more in diameter. A false hit at any stage can crack the gong, and the process must begin all over.

**GAMELAN IDENTITY**

A *gamelan*, particularly a bronze set with one or two fine large gongs, is often held in great respect, given a proper name, and given offerings on Thursday evenings (the beginning of the Muslim holy day). Though *gamelan* makers have recently begun to duplicate precise tuning and decorative designs, each *gamelan* is usually a unique set, whose instruments would both look and sound out of place in another ensemble. Formerly it was forbidden even to attempt to copy the tuning and design of palace *gamelan* instruments, as these were reserved for the ruler and were directly associated with his power.

The variability in tuning from one *gamelan* to another certainly does not stem from a casual sense of pitch among Javanese musicians and *gamelan* makers. On the contrary, they take great care in the making and in the occasional retuning of *gamelan* sets to arrive at a pleasing tuning—one that is seen to fit the particular physical condition of the instruments and the tastes of the individual owner. For example, I spent one month with a tuner, his two assistants, and an expert musician as they gradually reached consensus on an agreeable tuning, and then altered the tuning of the many bronze gong and metal slab instruments through a long process of hammering and filing—all by hand. Bronze has the curious property of changing tuning—rather markedly during the first few years after forging and more subtly over the next twenty to thirty years, until it has finally
“settled.” It might seem that the lack of a standard tuning would produce musical chaos, but the actual latitude is rather small.

**GAMELAN PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS**

Despite the changes wrought by modern institutions in the contexts of music making and the ways music is understood, Javanese music is more closely interrelated with other performing arts and more intimately bound to other aspects of life than are the arts in the West. Concerts of gamelan music, with an audience sitting quietly and paying close attention to the music, have only recently appeared and serve mostly to present new, experimental works. In contrast, presentations of the more traditional gamelan music are best understood as social events that involve gamelan music. They usually commemorate a day of ritual importance, such as a birth, circumcision, or wedding. Normally a family sponsors such an event and invites neighbors and relatives, with others welcome to look on and listen. The invited guests are served food and are expected to socialize freely throughout the duration of the event. No one expects the guests to be quiet during the performance of pieces or to pay rapt attention to them the way an audience does at a Western concert. Rather, the music, carefully played though it may be, is seen to contribute to the festiveness of the larger social event, helping to make it ramé (lively, busy in a positive way). Connoisseurs among the guests will ask for a favorite piece and may pay close attention to the way the ensemble or a particular singer or instrumentalist performs, but not to the exclusion of friendly interaction with the hosts and other guests. Although the music is intended to entertain those present (without dance or drama), it also serves a ritual function, helping to maintain balance at important transitional points in the life of a person or community.

More often, gamelan music is performed as accompaniment for dance or theater—a refined female ensemble dance (srimpi [sréem-pé] or bedhaya [buh-daw-yaw]; see Figures 7.5 and 7.6); a flirtatious female solo dance; a vigorous, martial lance dance; or an evening of drama based on Javanese legendary history, for example. A list of traditional genres currently performed in Central Java with gamelan accompaniment would be long. Some are presented primarily in commercial settings, with an audience buying tickets. Others most often involve a ceremony.

The genre held in the highest esteem by most Javanese, and nearly always reserved for ceremony, is the shadow puppet theatre or wayang kulit (see Figures 7.7 and 7.8), which dates back no fewer than one thousand years. Beginning with an overture played on the gamelan during the early evening, shadow puppet performances normally last until dawn. With a screen stretched before him (almost all Javanese puppeteers are male), a lamp overhead, and puppets to both sides, one master puppeteer (dhalang) operates all the puppets, performs

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**Salient Characteristics of Javanese Music**

- Emphasis on percussion instruments (metal slab and knobbled gong, drums).
- Bronze preferred for metal percussion instruments.
- Use of two scales (five-tone sléndro and seven-tone pélog) that differ from the Western scale.
- Gamelan ensemble music that is either “loud playing” or “soft playing.”
- Stratified texture (main melody, punctuation, multiple variations, and drum pattern).
- Cyclic repetition of phrases.
- Use of different-sized gong instruments to “punctuate” phrases.
- Binary orientation in length of phrases and subdivision of main beats.
- Ensemble directed aurally primarily by drummer, not visually by a conductor.
- Often accompanies dance, dance-drama, and shadow puppetry.
- Flexibility in elaboration of main melody, tempo dynamics, and number of repetitions.
all the narration and dialogue, sings mood songs, and directs the musicians for about eight hours with no intermission.

Although the musicians do not play constantly throughout the evening, they must always remain ready to respond to a signal from the puppeteer. He leads the musicians and accents the action of the drama through a variety of percussion patterns he plays by hitting the wooden puppet chest to his left and the clanging metal plates suspended from the rim of the chest. If he is holding puppets in both hands, he uses his foot to sound these signals. He must be highly skilled as a manipulator, director, singer, and storyteller.

The puppeteer delivers not a fixed play written by a known playwright but rather his own rendition of a basic story—usually closely related to versions performed by other puppeteers, but never exactly the same. It might be a well-known episode from the Ramayana (rah-mah-yah-nah) or Mahabharata (ma-hah-bah-rah-tah),
epics of Indian origin that have been adapted and transformed in many parts of Southeast Asia and have been known in Java for one thousand years. During a shadow puppet performance, the *gamelan* plays music drawn from a large repertory of pieces, none specific to a single play and many of which are played in other contexts as well. A good musician knows many hundreds of pieces, but like the shadow plays, the pieces are generally not totally fixed. Many regional and individual variants exist for some pieces. More importantly, the very conception of what constitutes a *gendhing* (guhn-deeng)—a “gamelan piece” or “gamelan composition”—differs from the Western notion of musical pieces, particularly within the Western “classical” tradition.

**FIGURE 7.6**
Dancers at the Pakualaman palace in Yogyakarta perform a *bedhaya*, female court dance, here with innovative costumes.

**FIGURE 7.7**
Puppeteer Ki Gondo Darman performing *wayang kulit* at the ASKI Performing Arts Academy in Surakarta.
**Gamelan Music: A Javanese Gendhing in Performance**

We can best begin to understand what a Javanese gendhing is by considering one in some detail—how it is conceived and how it is realized in performance. Listen to Bubaran “Kembang Pacar” (boo-bah-rahm kuhm-bahngpah-char) (CD 2, Track 4). To enable you to hear and understand the individual layers of the music, I had my advanced students of Javanese gamelan at the University of Wisconsin–Madison perform this special version, which begins with only the main melody played by itself (all four major phrases), with successive layers added, one by one. The timed Close Listening guide gives the order in which these instrumental layers are added, and the counter number for each. Once all the layers are in place, the ensemble plays the entire piece as it would be heard in Java, including the gradual slowing down to end. This gendhing consists of four major phrases of melody (we can refer to them as A, B, C, and D). In this demonstration version, all four are first played alone, with no punctuation, drum, or elaboration. As the gendhing repeats, one layer of punctuation, drum pattern, or elaboration is added in each successive major phrase (marked by the gong), as shown in the Close Listening guide.

Once all the instruments have entered, the ensemble finishes out the third full statement of the gendhing and continues through a fourth statement (A, B, C, and D) slowing to end.

You will note that it is an example of loud-playing style throughout. And it is in the pelog scale system with small and large intervals. It uses the pelog bem (pay-log buhm) scale—tones 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, with an occasional 4, but no 7. But what about its structure: How are the sounds organized in this piece?

The structure of this gendhing, like most of the Javanese repertory, is based on principles of balance, divisions and subdivisions, and cycles that repeat. The major phrases in a gendhing are marked off by the sound of either the large gong or the slightly smaller gong siyem. For most gendhings, these phrases are of regular length as measured in beats of the main melody, the part usually played on the slenthem and the saron family (slab instruments)—almost always some factor of two: 8 beats, 16 beats, 32 beats, 64 beats, 128 beats, 256 beats. (In the genre of pieces that serve as the staple for accompanying dramatic action, as we shall see, the major phrases are of irregular length and the regular unit is marked instead by the medium hanging gongs known as kempul.) A major phrase is usually subdivided into two or four shorter phrases by the kenong, and these are further subdivided by kempul arid kethuk (small kettle).

The result is a pattern of interlocking percussion that repeats until a sound signal from the drummer or one of the lead melodic instruments directs the performers to end or to proceed to a different piece. Whereas in Western music composers provide explicit directions for performers to repeat a section, in Javanese gamelan performance repetition is assumed. As we speak of “phrases” in describing music, Javanese liken the major phrase to a sentence and conceive of the subdividing parts as “punctuation.” For Bubaran “Kembang Pacar,” the pattern of punctuation is repeated throughout, with each major phrase. Today many Javanese musicians refer to notation to learn or to recall particular pieces, but they do not generally read from notation in performance. Further, what is notated is usually only the main melody; parts played on other instruments are recreated in relation to the main melody and are open to some degree of personal interpretation.
BUBARAN “KEMBANG PACAR”

CD 2:4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTER NUMBER</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Main melody—Gongan A through D

0:02      Saron and slenthem play major phrase A, 1st statement, 16 beats. (metal slab instruments)

0:17      Gongan B, 1st statement, 16 beats.

0:32      Gongan C, 1st statement, 16 beats.

0:46      Gongan D, 1st statement, 16 beats.

1:00      Gong enters, marking end of gongan D. (Large hanging gong; marks the ends of all major phrases)

Gongan A, 2nd statement

1:04      Kenong enters, playing on every 4th beat. (Large kettle, horizontally mounted; subdivides the major phrase)

Gongan B, 2nd statement

1:20      Kempul enters, playing on the 6th, 10th, and 14th beats. (Medium hanging gongs; subdivides the major phrase)

Gongan C, 2nd statement

1:30      Kethuk enters, playing on the 1st and 3rd beat of every group of 4 (every other beat throughout). (Small kettle; subdivides the kenong phrase)

Gongan D, 2nd statement

1:43      Kendhang (kuhn-dahng) enters, playing rhythmic patterns that fill the length of each major phrase (16 beats). (Set of large and small barrel drums; directs tempo and dynamics)

Gongan A, 3rd statement

1:56      Saron peking enters, echoing each tone of the main melody. (Smallest, highest pitched saron, metal slab instrument; doubles main melody except at slower tempos, when it usually varies the melody)
The main melody phrase is the first of the four that comprise the piece and consists of 16 even beats. The pattern of punctuation (kethuk, rest, kethuk, kenong, kethuk, kempu, kethuk, kenong, kethuk, kempu, kethuk, kenong, kethuk, kempu, kethuk, and finally kenong and gong simultaneously) is played for each major phrase, continuously throughout the piece.

The time distribution of the beats is even, but the degree of stress or weight is not (even though no beat is played more loudly than any other on any single instrument). The strongest beat is the one coinciding with the largest and deepest-sounding phrase marker, the gong (G), and with the kenong (N), at the end of the phrase. Javanese would count this as one, two, three, four, and so on, with the strongest beat being the sixteenth. This is the only beat where two punctuating gong instruments coincide. This “coincidence” releases the rhythmic tension that has built up through the course of the gongan, giving a sense of repose.

Although in the West we may dismiss events as “mere coincidence,” in Java the simultaneous occurrence of several events, the alignment of days of the week and dates (like our Friday the 13th), can be profoundly meaningful. It is not
uncommon to determine a suitable day for a wedding, or for moving house, based on the coincidence of a certain day in the seven-day week with a certain day in the Javanese five-day market week, and this in turn within a certain Javanese month (in the lunar calendar, rather than the solar calendar used in the West). The simultaneous occurrence of what to Westerners would seem to be unrelated (and therefore meaningless) events—such as the sounding of a certain bird while a person is carrying out a particular activity—can be interpreted in Java as an important omen.

This deep-seated view of the workings of the natural world is reflected in the structure of gamelan music, where coincidence is central to the coherence of the music. The sounding of the gong with the kenong marks the musical instant of greatest weight and is the only point at which a gendhing may end. Other, lesser points of coincidence also carry weight. If we consider the piece in terms of the balungan melody, the next strongest stress comes at the coincidence of the balungan with the kenong strokes. And in pieces with longer gongan (for example, 32, 64, or 128 beats), many of the saron beats do not coincide with any punctuating gong, making each kenong stroke and even each kethuk stroke an instance of stress and temporary repose.

The ethnomusicologist Judith Becker has argued convincingly that the cyclic structure of Javanese gendhing reflects the persistence of Hindu-Buddhist conceptions of time introduced to Java during the first millennium C.E. and not wholly eliminated by the subsequent adoption of Islam. (For an elaboration of this theory, see Hoffman 1978, Becker 1979, and especially Becker 1981.)

The punctuation pattern and its relation to the main melody are indicated in the first word of the full name of a gendhing. In fact, the way Javanese refer to gendhings normally includes their formal structure (in this case bubaran)—16 main melody beats per major phrase, with 4 kenong beats per major phrase, the name of a particular melody (in this case “Kembang Pacar”—a kind of red flower), the scale system (pélog), and the modal category (pathet nem).

The drummer in the Javanese gamelan acts as a conductor, controlling the tempo and the dynamics (the relative levels of loudness and softness). He or she need not be visible to other musicians, because the “conducting” is accomplished purely through sound signals. He or she does not stand in front of the ensemble but sits unobtrusively in the midst of it. The whole gendhing can be repeated as many times as the drummer desires, or as is appropriate to the context in which it is performed. Pieces in bubaran form usually are played at the end of performances—bubar means “to disperse.” The guests or audience are expected to leave during the playing of the piece; thus the number of repetitions may depend on the length of time it takes those in attendance to leave.

Already we have a fairly good understanding of the structure of this piece as performed. Let us focus our attention now on the part played by the drummer, using the smallest and largest drums in combination. Throughout the piece he plays a pattern specific not to this particular piece, but, like the punctuating pattern, generic to the bubaran form. That is, the drumming, as well as the punctuation pattern, for any of the forty or so other pieces in this form would be the same: an introductory pattern, several variant patterns for the main phrases, and a special contrasting pattern reserved only for the playing of the final major phrase and that, together with the slowing of tempo, acts to signal the ending. The patterns
are made up of a vocabulary of drum strokes, each with a name that imitates the actual drum sound (dung, tak, dang, ket, and so forth). It is the drummer who first begins to play faster, thereby signaling the ensemble to speed up a few phrases before they are to end. To end, other musicians all know they need to slow down during the final major phrase, but the precise rate is determined by the drummer. The playing of a special drum pattern used only for the final major phrase confirms to all the musicians that it is time to end.

We have seen how the punctuating gong parts and the drumming fit with the main melody in Bubaran “Kembang Pacar.” We can now turn to the elaborating melodic instruments—here the gong-chimes (bonangs)—which normally play at a faster rate, providing variations based on the main melody. I mentioned earlier that the only part normally notated is the main melody. The embellishing parts are derived through processes generally understood by practicing musicians. Ideally all musicians can play all the parts. In reality this is true only in the best professional groups, but most musicians have at least a passive knowledge of all the instruments and know how to respond to various signals and subtler nuances.

The two bonangs here perform in a style called “walking,” usually alternating left and right hands in sounding combinations of tones derived from the main melody. The players have not learned particular bonang parts or sets of variations, note for note, for this one piece. Rather, they have thoroughly internalized a vocabulary of traditional patterns known to fit with certain phrases of the main melody. Both bonangs embellish or elaborate on the main melody with the bonang panerus (bo-nahng pa-nuh-roos)—the smaller, higher-pitched bonang—playing at twice the rate of the larger bonang barung (bo-nahng ba-roong). Yet it is not simply a matter of mechanical replication throughout, for alternate tones can be substituted (for example, 6 5 3 5 instead of 6 5 6 5) and other choices can be made. Still, we can understand why the Javanese often refer to the main melody with a word that translates as “outline” or “skeleton,” for it provides just that for the elaborating instruments and, in soft-playing style, for the voices as well. The degree to which the main melody actually sounds like an outline depends on its tempo and the resulting levels at which it is subdivided by the elaborating instruments.

**IRAMA LEVEL**

In the performance of Bubaran “Kembang Pacar” (CD 2, Track 4), the bonang barung plays at twice the density of the balungan, subdividing it by two. This ratio defines one of five possible levels of balungan subdivision known as irama (ee-raw-maw) levels. If the tempo had slowed sufficiently (as we will see in the next piece), the bonang barung would have doubled its ratio with the balungan, subdividing each beat by four. Ward Keeler aptly likens the process to a car shifting gears, in this case downshifting as it goes up a steep grade (Keeler 1987:225). To maintain its relationship with the bonang barung, the bonang panerus would double as well, resulting in an 8-to-1 ratio with the balungan. At the slowest balungan tempo, the bonang barung would have a ratio of 16 beats to 1 balungan beat; and the bonang panerus, along with several of the soft instruments, would play a full 32 beats for each balungan beat!
Now let us consider some of the music most closely associated with shadow puppet performance (Figure 7.8). The piece we have studied so far is seldom played for dance or dramatic accompaniment. The musical staples of the shadow puppet repertory are pieces with dense *kenong* and *kempul* playing and *gongan* of varying length—pieces that generate a level of excitement, partly because of the dense gong punctuation. Each *pathet* includes at least three of these staple pieces: relatively calm, somewhat excited, and very excited. The gong punctuation is densest in the very excited pieces and least present in the calmest pieces. The puppeteer determines which piece is to be played; he must be just as thoroughly at home with the *gamelan* music as he is with the many hundreds of characters and stories that comprise this tradition.

We are going to listen to a version of one of these pieces, the Yogyanese *Playon “Lasem”* (*plah-yon lah-suhm*), *sléndro pathet nem* (CD 2, Track 5), which exemplifies the “somewhat excited” category. Depending on the mood the puppeteer wishes to establish, the piece can be played in loud-playing or in soft-playing style, or switched at any point. (The calmest of the three is usually in soft-playing style; and the most excited is always performed in loud-playing style.) Also, the length of the piece can be radically tailored to suit the needs of the dramatic moment. Sometimes it may go on, through repetition of a central section, for five or ten minutes. During the course of the all-night performance at which I recorded this example, the puppeteer (Ki Suparman) signaled this piece to be played eighteen times—all, of course, within the *pathet nem* section of the night, which lasted from about 9:00 P.M. to about 1:30 A.M.

The rendition you hear (CD 2, Track 5) begins in soft style but speeds up and gets loud at the end of the first phrase. It then proceeds through the entire *gendhing*, begins to repeat (from phrase E), and ends, on signal, after the first phrase of this repeatable section. Throughout most of the selection, you can hear...
Close Listening

PLAYON “LASEM,”

CD 2:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTER NUMBER</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
<th>PHRASE IN MAIN MELODY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Puppeteer knocks on puppet chest to signal musicians to play.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:03</td>
<td>Full gamelan ensemble begins to play in soft-playing style, including female singer (pesindhèn).</td>
<td>Phrase A, 10 beats of the main melody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:11</td>
<td>Puppeteer clangs loudly on metal plaques. Gamelan speeds up and switches to loud-playing style. Female singer and soft instruments drop out.</td>
<td>Phrase B, 12 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:18</td>
<td>Brief shouts by the puppeteer as rival characters engage in fight.</td>
<td>Phrase C, 12 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:24</td>
<td>Continued clanging on metal plaques accompanies the fight.</td>
<td>Phrase D, 12 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central section (repeatable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:31</td>
<td>Drumming and clanging on metal plaques accentuate fight action.</td>
<td>Phrase E, 16 beats of the main melody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:38</td>
<td>Lively accompaniment continues.</td>
<td>Phrase F, 8 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:50</td>
<td>Lively action and accompaniment continue. Drumming is especially active here.</td>
<td>Phrase H, 8 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:53</td>
<td>Lively action and accompaniment continue.</td>
<td>Phrase I, 12 beats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00</td>
<td>Lively action and accompaniment continue.</td>
<td>Phrase J, 8 beats.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the puppeteer adding to the excitement by clanging several metal plaques, which hang from the puppet chest positioned to his immediate left. While he operates puppets with his hands, he activates the metal plaques with the toes of his right foot! At several points in the selection, we also hear the puppeteer’s shouts, as he gives voice to the puppet characters, who are engaged in a fierce fight.

This gendhing and others like it have potential for a great variety of renditions, through changes in tempo, instrumentation, and ending points. This is the essence of shadow puppet music—a very well-known gendhing, played over and over, but uniquely tailored each time to fit precisely with the dramatic intentions of the puppeteer and kept fresh by the inventiveness of the instrumentalists and singers, who constantly add subtle variations.

**Repeat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:04</td>
<td>Section repeat begins; lively action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>Puppeteer performs pattern of knocks that signal gamelan musicians to move to ending phrase (K).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:12</td>
<td>Puppeteer’s signal knocks continue, confirming his intention to end the piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15</td>
<td>Performance of Playon “Lasem” ends; puppeteer continues knocking on puppet chest to set mood, and he begins to speak.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just east of Java, separated from it by a narrow strait, lies the island of Bali (bah-lee). The unique culture and spectacular natural beauty of this island have fascinated scholars, artists, and tourists from around the world. In Bali almost everyone takes part in some artistic activity: music, dance, carving, painting. Although the Balinese demonstrate abilities that often strike the Westerner as spectacular, they maintain that such activities are a normal part of life. The exquisite masked dancer by night may well be a rice farmer by day, and the player of lightning-fast interlocking musical passages who accompanies him may manage a small eating stall.

Most of the several million people inhabiting this small island adhere not to Islam, Indonesia’s majority religion, but to a blend of Hinduism and Buddhism resembling that which flourished in Java prior to the spread of Islam (fifteenth to sixteenth century C.E.). In this the Balinese and Javanese share elements of a common cultural heritage. As in Java, we find percussion ensembles known as
gamelan (or gambelan), with metal slab instruments and knobbed gong instruments that look and sound quite similar to those of the Javanese gamelan. Some of the names are the same (gendèr, gong, gambang, saron, sulung, rebab) or similar (kempur, kemong). Most ensembles employ some version of the pélog scale system (some with all seven tones, others with five or six). The accompaniment for Balinese shadow puppetry (as in Java, called wayang kulit) employs the sléndro scale system, although the instruments used consist only of a quartet of gendèrs (augmented by a few other instruments for Ramayana stories). Many Balinese pieces employ gong punctuating patterns similar in principle to those of Java. The Balinese play gamelan for ritual observances, as in Java, though usually at temple festivals, or in procession to or from them, rather than at someone’s residence.

Nevertheless, certain characteristics clearly distinguish the musics of these two neighboring cultures. For example, the Balinese maintain a variety of ensembles, each with its distinct instrumentation and associated with certain occasions and functions. There is no single large ensemble that one can simply call “the Balinese gamelan.” However, the style of music one hears performed in most ensembles in Bali shares several characteristics: (1) strictly instrumental, (2) characterized by changes in tempo and loudness (often abrupt), and (3) requiring a dazzling technical mastery by many of the musicians, who play fast interlocking rhythms, often comprising asymmetrical groupings of two or three very fast beats. People often comment that Balinese music is exciting and dynamic in comparison with other Indonesian musics; exploiting contrasts in the manner of Western art music.

They may also comment on the “shimmery” quality of the many varieties of bronze ensembles. This quality is obtained by tuning instruments in pairs, with one instrument intentionally tuned slightly higher in pitch than its partner. When sounded together, they produce very fast vibrations. In the West, piano tuners rely on these same vibrations, called “beats,” to “temper” the tuning, although on a piano it is intervals that are made intentionally “out of tune” rather than identical strings sounding the same tone. Of course, the intentionally “out-of-tune” pairs of metallophones are perceived to be “in tune” (that is, “culturally correct”) in Bali, just as the piano is in Western culture.

The most popular ensemble in Bali today is the *gamelan gong kebyar* (kuh-byar), which developed during the early twentieth century along with the virtuosic dance it often accompanies (also called kebyar—literally, “flash,” “dazzle”). Kebyar music is indeed “flasy,” requiring not only great virtuosity of the players, but also a consummate sense of ensemble—the ability of many to play as one.

Listen to “Kosalia Arini” (ko-sal-yah a-ree-nee; CD 2, Track 6), a piece composed by the prolific Balinese composer and skilled drummer Wayan Beratha in 1969 for a *gamelan* festival. This piece demonstrates features typical of *gamelan gong kebyar* (Figure 7.9), many of
which contrast markedly with Javanese gamelan music and with older styles of Balinese music. These include episodic structure—the piece is clearly divided into sections with contrasting instrumentation, rhythm, and texture. Portions of the piece involve cyclic repetition, but the overall design is neither cyclic nor rigidly binary as in Javanese gamelan pieces.

Michael Tenzer, a U.S. scholar, composer, and performer of Balinese gamelan gong kebyar, has provided a detailed analysis of this piece (Tenzer 2000:367, 381–83), from which the following much briefer commentary derives. Most basic are the contrasts between what Tenzer calls “stable” (cyclic) and “active” (noncyclic) sections.

**FIGURE 7.9**
The gamelan gong kebyar of Bali.
The overall piece proceeds through four main sections (see the Close Listening guide). As you listen, notice the changes (often abrupt) in tempo, instrumentation, dynamics, and register (high pitch or low pitch). Each section is identified not only by characteristic rhythm and texture but also by tonal center. Though repetitive in some sections, the whole piece is much more like a fantasia or an exuberant study in contrasts (especially in dynamics and in rhythm) than even the most dramatic renditions of Javanese pieces.
Indonesian Popular Music

Most of the music Indonesians would identify as “popular” is, like most popular music anywhere in the world, characterized by the use of at least some Western instruments and Western harmony (see Hatch 1989). Essentially a commercial genre, it is disseminated through the mass media and performed by recognized stars. Unfortunately, space does not allow us to explore the interesting history of Western-influenced music in Indonesia, which has primarily been in the popular vein. However, I would like to introduce one variety of contemporary popular music and consider one key representative musical group. The forces of globalization have intensified since the 1980s, inundating the Indonesian marketplace with the commercial cultural products of the West, including various forms of American pop, rock, and jazz. Our final two musical examples represent different responses to this process. The first, by a group called Krakatau (named after the famous volcanic island lying just west of Java), involves a careful synthesis of Sundanese (West Javanese) gamelan and fusion jazz.

Krakatau, Sundanese Gamelan, and Fusion Jazz

Krakatau (Figure 7.10) was founded in the late 1980s by Dwiki Dharmawan (dwee-kee dar-nya-wan), a jazz keyboardist whose skill in imitating the styles of Joe Zawinul (Weather Report) and Chick Corea won him an award from the Yamaha Music Company of Japan in 1985. The early recordings of Krakatau present original fusion jazz tunes with complex harmonies and rhythms. They include jazz songs, some in English, sung by a female Javanese-Sundanese singer, Trie Utami, who offers polished and sophisticated imitations of African American jazz vocal styles. Yet beginning around 1993 and 1994, members of the group, particularly

FIGURE 7.10
Krakatau in performance.
Dharmawan and Utami, grew tired of merely imitating the music they admired from the West. Because the core members had all spent much of their youth in West Java (Sunda), they decided to incorporate Sundanese musical elements into their music, adding local experts on saron, bonang, rebab, and kendang. In short, they set out to create a hybrid variety of music, mixing Western and indigenous Indonesian musical instruments and elements.

Experiments in such combinations have been taking place in Indonesia for centuries. Special challenges are posed by the fact that many Indonesian instruments and songs use tunings and scales, such as sléndro and pélog, that are not compatible with Western ones (take a look back at Figure 7.2). In the nineteenth century, brass band instruments were played with pélog gamelan instruments in the courts of Central Java, representing a symbolic fusion of Javanese and Dutch power. In the early twentieth century, Javanese composers began to write pieces combining Javanese singing with Western instruments.

In the 1990s, Indonesia saw a sudden growth in experimental combinations of pop/rock instruments and indigenous Indonesian ones. The musician often acknowledged as the inspiration for this trend is Guruh Sukarno Putra (goo-roo-koor-no poo-tra), who produced Guruh Gipsy, a landmark album in 1976 involving piano, synthesizers, and rock instruments playing along with Balinese gendhers and drums and incorporating Central Javanese vocal styles and West Javanese scales and melodies. Guruh is the youngest living son of the founding father of the Republic of Indonesia, President Sukarno. His music has sometimes been referred to as pop berat (literally “heavy pop”; see Hatch 1989), a music more varied and challenging to listen to than the easy rhythms of dangdut. But where Guruh drew on various regional Indonesian styles, the members of Krakatau have attempted to focus on their own region, Sunda.

In 1994 they released Mystical Mist, in which some pieces sounded more like jazz fusion and others more Sundanese. In their most recent release, Magical Match, the blend is more even throughout. One of the ingenious ideas they have employed is the tuning of their Western instruments to the scales of Sundanese traditional music. Dwiki programmed in a complex alteration of pitches for his keyboard and worked out special fingerings so that when he strikes certain combinations of black and white keys on his keyboard, he can produce the tones of sléndro, pélog, or other scales typical of Sundanese traditional music. The bass player uses an electric bass with no frets (the horizontal metal strips found on guitars that facilitate production of the Western scale). With skillful placement of his fingers, he can play bass patterns in sléndro and other non-Western scales. On this album Trie Utami sings not like a jazz singer but with the distinctive timbre of a Sundanese female singer (pesindhèn). The example on our recording, however, is purely instrumental, illustrating most clearly the skill of the musicians in creating a piece that tries to be not just Sundanese and not just Western but a “magical match” of the two.

Listen to “Shuffl endang-Shuffl ending” (CD 2, Track 7) and follow it with the Close Listening guide. The title mixes the English word shuffle (a type of African American ecstatic song/dance combination performed in worship, also known as “ring-shout”) and the Sundanese words for drum (kendang) and gamelan musical piece (gendhing). Krakatau is joined by Zainal Arifiin, Adhe Rudiana (who teaches traditional music at the Indonesian College of Performing Arts in Bandung, West Java), and recent graduates Yoyon Darsono, Elfik Zulfiqar, and Tudi Rahayu.
While it is possible to enjoy the sounds and the rhythm without knowing their origins, the meaning this music has for Krakatau members and for their fans in Indonesia is its ability to “Sundanize” jazz or pop music and to “jazz” or “modernize” Sundanese music at the same time. Its ambiguity provides a bridge between the seemingly incompatible worlds of local Indonesian/traditional culture and Western/modern culture. Dharmawan and other members of the group, whom I got to know in August 2000, did not have a clear sense of what to call their music. We talked about “new age,” “world music,” and “ethno-pop.” They clearly hope that this music will reach beyond Indonesia to attract listeners from around the world, not only to their own music but also to the rich treasury of Indonesia’s traditional music.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have experienced some of the great diversity within Indonesia’s music. We have listened to four examples that contrast with one another, yet share certain similarities that make them “Indonesian.” Of course, we must be careful about drawing broad conclusions about an entire country’s music from just four examples. After all, what four examples could you think of from your own country that could fairly represent the diversity of music heard there?
All of these examples, even the fusion example by Krakatau, have involved some form of Indonesian percussion ensemble (gamelan). There are many kinds of popular music in Indonesia that use the national or local languages but otherwise sound close to Western pop music, with squealing electric guitars, pounding electric bass and bass drum, keyboard synthesizers, harmony and so forth. And there are indigenous traditions featuring solo voice, chorus, or instruments that sound very different from any of the examples we have covered. Nevertheless, some of the features we have heard are indeed characteristic of Indonesia and much of Southeast Asia as well. These include (1) the use of knobbed gong instruments; (2) the use of other percussion instruments (mostly metal slab instruments); (3) the stratified layering of main melody, punctuation, melodic elaboration, and drum pattern; (4) the flexibility in performance (particularly in accompanying drama); and (5) the binary (2, 4, 8, 16, etc.) orientation in phrasing and subdivision of the beat. All four of our examples have emphasized the dense, filled-in, constantly “busy” approach to musical sound that we would also hear in many other kinds of music from this vast and diverse island nation, but not in East Asian countries, such as Japan, for example.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to predict the future for Indonesia’s various musical activities. In June 1999 Indonesia experienced its first free elections in more than forty years, with a staggering forty-eight political parties vying for seats in the people’s consultative assembly (a new diversity based more on political philosophy and religion than on regional or ethnic identity). This new openness has already begun to affect Indonesian music by engendering an outpouring of political songs on commercial cassettes and videodiscs (VCDs), a sharp increase in the number of amateur street singers accompanying their urgent and impassioned songs with guitars and shouts of “Reformasi!” (“Reformation!”). Yet at the same time, musicians young and old continue to play traditional and innovative gamelan music in Java and Bali, and pop musicians work out new approaches to music making, responding to the social world that inevitably shapes all musical activity.

Study Questions

1. What material or materials are used in constructing a gamelan?
2. How do Javanese and Western musical scales differ from one another?
3. What is a gendhing?
4. How are loud-playing and soft-playing styles distinguished from one another?
5. What instruments mark the “punctuation” in a Javanese gendhing?
6. What instruments play the main melody?
7. What do the other instruments do in the performance of a gendhing?
8. What is meant by irama level and how is it different from tempo?
9. Who directs the musicians in a Javanese shadow puppetry performance, and by what means?
10. What is unusual about the gendhings that are the core musical pieces for accompanying shadow puppetry, such as Playon “Lasem”?
11. How do the gamelan musicians know when and where to end a gendhing when accompanying shadow puppetry?
12. Where is Bali, in relation to Java? How does it compare in size and population?

13. What gives Balinese gamelan music its shimmering quality?

14. How do Balinese attain such lightning-fast speed in playing melodic and rhythmic patterns?

15. What are some of the challenges of creating “fusion” music that combines Indonesian and Western instruments?

16. What aspects of traditional gamelan music (as seen in the examples from Java) do not seem compatible with fusion music such as Krakatau’s “Shuffendang-Shufflending”?

17. In what senses is Indonesia diverse and how does the diversity relate to Indonesia’s history?

18. What are some of the ways in which Javanese gamelan contrasts with a Western classical orchestra?

19. Can you describe a Javanese shadow puppetry (wayang kulit) performance? Think about social context, performance personnel, items used (for the puppetry and for the music), physical layout, length of performance, type(s) of music, and other features.

20. What features of the Balinese gamelan gong kebyar music, as exemplified by “Kosalia Arini,” contrast most markedly with the two Javanese gamelan examples (Bubaran “Kembang Pacar” and Playon “Lasem”)?

21. In what ways is Krakatau’s music a response to globalization? How does it differ from mainstream Indonesian popular music?

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**Note**

**ON PRONUNCIATION**

Pronunciation for Indonesian (national language), Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese (regional languages) is quite consistent with spelling. Consonant sounds are close to or identical to consonants in English or European languages, with a few exceptions:

- c is pronounced “ch”
- d is pronounced with the tongue touching the back of the front teeth (“dental d”)
- dh is pronounced with the tongue touching the roof of the mouth (“retroflex d”)
- t is pronounced with the tongue touching the back of the front teeth (“dental t”)
- th is pronounced with the tongue touching the roof of the mouth (“retroflex t”)
- r is rolled, as in Spanish.

Vowels are mostly as in Spanish, with two pronunciations of a (from Java and Bali) and several pronunciations of e (from Java, Bali and Indonesia).

- a as in Bach, or father
- a as in bought, or law, in open final (and sometimes penultimate) syllables in Javanese
- é as in pay
- è as in bet
- i as in beet
- o as in bone
- u as in boot or as in took

The second-to-last syllable often receives a slight accent; for example, Bali is pronounced baht-leee, rather than bah-leee. However, several exceptions occur, and some words may be accented differently depending on regional dialect. In those cases, the accents shown here each represent one possible correct pronunciation.

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