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## East meets West with gamelan at Marin Symphony

Jane Lott  
 Article Launched: 04/23/2008 02:32:56 PM PDT

Tourists travel thousands of miles to enjoy the balmy climate, the exotic and romantic atmosphere of Bali, one of the 13,000 islands of Indonesia in the Pacific southwest. What contributes to this alien beauty is the unusual emphasis on art: painting, sculpture, dance and particularly music - the tintinnabulation of the gamelan, heard throughout the land. Gamelan means, essentially, an ensemble of gongs and percussion instruments played in intricate rhythms and patterns. The combination of mallet and bell creates an ethereal sound particularly suited for outdoor settings.



Gamelan Kori Mas will take part in a concert April 27 and 29 with the Marin Symphony. From left are Michael Steadman, Samuel Wantman, Ken Worthy. (Provided by Marin Symphony)

In the United States, a public gamelan performance is fairly unusual. But April 27 and 29, the Marin Symphony provides the opportunity to hear authentic gamelan and an East-meets-West amalgam in a program called "The Wind Beneath the Wings."

The authentic gamelan in the Marin performance consists of the three musicians of Gamelan Kori Mas, including Michael Steadman, who became acquainted with the music when he was studying harp at the Eastman School of Music. He describes gamelan as "a lot like marimba" because of its intricate rhythms, which, he adds, is "one of the most distinguishing things of Balinese music."

Unlike harp or other western music, gamelan is not notated, so the player must learn the music and rhythmic patterns by rote. That has its drawbacks, but it also allows for direct contact with the music. And of course, one would have to travel to Bali to study.

Steadman, who spent some

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time there learning music, notes that "a great way to experience Bali is to take a gamelan lesson (because they don't have the same concept of art that we do."

In his pre-concert talk with Marin Symphony maestro Alasdair Neale, Steadman will explain how music gets made in Bali - and some of the differences between Balinese and so-called western music. Subsequently, he will perform with Gamelan Kori Mas before the symphony concert.

"Our role at this event is to explain Balinese music to a western audience," he says. "I'll be a sort of translator, and we'll be doing some demonstrations."

Besides introducing the audience to Balinese gamelan, Steadman's intention is to educate listeners so they can enjoy the symphony program's piece by Colin McPhee, a Canadian ethnomusicologist - or one who studies the music of indigenous people. McPhee was the first westerner to catalogue, study and transcribe the music of Bali. As a composer, he used the western orchestra to synthesize Balinese, western classical music and jazz

into a piece called "Tabu Tabuhan."

As the symphony's music director, Neale chose to include the piece because it works well with the iconic "Carmina Burana," by Carl Orff, otherwise known for the Orff method of music education. The famous "Carmina," the featured piece on the program, will be performed by the orchestra and sung by the combined voices of the Marin Symphony Chorus, Schola Cantorum San Francisco and the Marin Symphony Youth Chorus. The singing groups were prepared and directed by symphony chorus director Stephen McKersie.

Although it is quite popular, "Carmina" is a hard piece to program around, Neale says. "One of the reasons I programmed 'Tabu Tabuhan' was because of the percussive nature of it" - a quality the two pieces share.

Neale, who has been to Bali several times, is excited to bring gamelan to Marin, although the McPhee piece is not a literal representation.

"You can't do that with a symphony," he explains. Neale quickly adds that "Tabu Tabuhan" is a wonderful and ingenious evocation - what the composer called a "nuclear gamelan." "It's very accessible, full of energy," he adds.

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The piece is structured in three movements - two fast outer movements and a tranquil slow movement in between, featuring a flute solo played by the symphony's new principal flautist, Monica Daniel-Barker. Two pianos, along with an array of mallet instruments, take soloist roles in the fast movements.

Despite the similarities to gamelan, however, "Tabu Tabuhan" is not a literal reproduction, Neale emphasizes. "It's hard to categorize."

But easy to enjoy, just as true gamelan is.

"The first time I heard gamelan," Neale says, "I was transfixed by it. On every occasion I've heard it, I've loved it since."

"Doing this piece puts me into the world of Bali."

IF YOU GO

Who: Marin Symphony, under the direction of maestro Alasdair Neale, along with Gamelan Kori Mas (Golden Gate Gamelan)

What: Gamelan performance, followed by the symphony program featuring Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" and "Tabuh Tabuhan" by Colin McPhee

When: 7:30 p.m. April 27 and 29; Neale and Gamelan Kori Mas' Michael Steadman in conversation at 6:30 p.m.; Gamelan Kori Mas performs in the foyer before the program, starting at about 7 p.m.

Where: Marin Veterans Memorial Auditorium, Marin Center, 10 Avenue of the Flags, San Rafael

Note: The April 27 pre-concert lecture and reception "Carmina and the Media" with film score composer Gary Malkin is sold out

Tickets: \$27 to \$64

Information: 479-8100, [www.marinsymphony.org](http://www.marinsymphony.org) [www.gamelankorimas.com](http://www.gamelankorimas.com)

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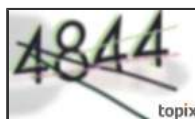
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