



# Gong Kebyar Goes Worldwide Guarding Balinese Culture

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**Abstract.** *Gong Kebyar* is a traditional Balinese five-tone *pelog* tuning that gives birth to kebyar musical expressions. It has the feel of something that was conceived in accordance with the prevailing zeitgeist. The flexible principle that underpins *Gong Kebyar's* development allows it to be enthusiastically embraced by the people of the Archipelago and even the international community. The presence of *Gong Kebyar* within Balinese society coincides with the cultural dynamics of the Balinese people. With its synthesis of religion, aesthetics, and solidarity, Balinese culture includes the gamelan *Gong Kebyar* in various expressions and community activities. As a text, *Gong Kebyar* has contributed positively to the growth of the Balinese performing arts. *Gong Kebyar* has contributed to the socio-cultural development of the Balinese people and has the capacity to protect Balinese culture. This paper aims to introduce *Gong Kebyar* to the world and advance it in the global competitive arena. Utilizes qualitative interpretative methods, and its discussion is adapted to the cultural studies paradigm. Its analysis emphasizes the sociocultural constructed and value-rich nature of reality.

**Keywords:** *Gong Kebyar*, worldwide, Balinese culture.

## 1 Introduction

Gong Kebyar is traditional Balinese music with a five-tone *pelog* tuning that gives rise to kebyar-tinged musical expressions (Fig. 1). In general, it presents kebyaran drums, a form of composition produced by playing all gamelan instruments simultaneously in polyrhythmic, dynamic, and harmonious accentuations, both as instrumental performances, accompanying different dances, and as learning media [1].

Musically, gamelan Gong Kebyar has a harsh temperament (coarse-sounding ensemble). Percussion instruments dominate the harmonic construction that gives birth to the unity of the 'gamelan' apparatus. Gong Kebyar may become the most popular form of performing arts in Bali due to its adaptability and musical expressions, which are constantly evolving in response to the present circumstances. This is because Balinese artists constantly search for something new to develop, making Gong Kebyar's life more vibrant [2].

The analysis of Gong Kebyar is predicated on the potential and advantages possessed by Gong Kebyar, namely multifunctional and multi-contextual Balinese traditional mu-

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sic, as well as providing players with unlimited space. Gong Kebyar has inherent musical standards (*uger-uger*) that have been accepted as the norms of traditional Balinese music from generation to generation. Extrinsicly, Gong Kebyar's identity frequently serves as a framework for the incorporation of other Balinese gamelan musical elements into his compositions. Physically, Gong Kebyar is a musical instrument with nearly standard instrumentation and a uniform appearance. It is feared that Gong Kebyar will lose its traditional identity as a result of globalization's effect on its rapid and even global development.



**Fig. 1.** Gong Kebyar Ensemble

Referring to the preceding context, this paper addresses the following issues: 1) How does the existence of Gong Kebyar contribute to the preservation of Balinese culture, and 2) What potential does Gong Kebyar have for global expansion? Because the development of Gong Kebyar as a text is tied to the religion, society, and culture of the Balinese people, both of these problems are analyzed using a text and context study methodology.

## 2 Methods

This paper employs qualitative interpretive methods, and its discussion conforms to the cultural studies paradigm. Providing interpretations of empirical phenomena combined with logical systems, truth values, and the prevalent social context to meet the comprehension challenge. This analysis emphasizes the socioculturally constructed nature of reality and focuses more on the value-laden nature of the analysis.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Identity and Concept of *Rwa Bhineda* in *Gong Kebyar*

Gong Kebyar is a cultural work with a distinct identity representative of the Balinese performing arts community. Gong Kebyar has demonstrated stability by being built by the people in their own region, having advantages and uniqueness, gaining recognition so that their existence has roots, receiving community support, and being recognized by the community at large.

Identity is frequently used to refer to characteristics, personal information or notes, artistic identity, social identity, and cultural identity [3]. The concept of identity in the context of art can be understood as a detailed description of the characteristics or characteristics that distinguish one art group from another. As a form of Balinese cultural identity, *Gong Kebyar* possesses the following traditional characteristics: 1) it is generally played in a seated position facing the instrument; 2) it is physically dominated by traditional musical instruments with *pencon* and bladed instruments; 3) it employs a five-tone *pelog* barrel; 4) there is a *ngumbang-ngisep* tuning system; and 5) it is generally managed by a group of organizations known as *Sekaa*.

In their artistic endeavors, Balinese artists are always guided by the *rwa bhineda* concept of balance, which is oriented towards good and bad "dualism" or includes similarities and differences [4]. One can see how artists utilize aesthetic values to create high-quality art by understanding the concept of balance. Most art themes depart from the dualism principle, so strong morals and ethics are incorporated into art performances.

Balance in the second dimension is one of the basic concepts in *Gong Kebyar*. *Gong Kebyar* instruments are always made in pairs; *lanang-wadon* (male-female), and the *ngumbang-ngisep* tuning system (two of the same notes but with different frequencies). The intertwined elements of the tones in *Gong Kebyar* are synonymous with traditional Balinese music. Almost all types of Balinese gamelan have their own principles of braided play with various terms, such as: *kotekan*, *cecandetan*, *tetorek* and *ubit-ubitan* [5]. The technique of playing with plain strokes and *sangsih*, reminds us that there are elements in a balance that is not always equal, but in competitive interactions.

#### 3.2 *Gong Kebyar* Guards Balinese Culture

Gong Kebyar emerged in 1914 and initially only developed in Northern Bali. Gong Kebyar's originality and brilliance quickly spread throughout Bali [6]. At least since the 1930s, this gamelan euphoria had thundered between the kingdoms of Bali during Gong Kebyar performances [7]. Gong Kebyar evolves with a new concept, both physically, musically, and in terms of its function; it feels like something born out of the dynamism of the era [8]. This flexible principle underpins Gong Kebyar's rapid development with almost no obstacles; consequently, the people of Bali enthusiastically embraced it.

Gamelan Gong Kebyar can develop rapidly and continue to receive positive acclaim because it is a combination that is functional and highly adaptable. The presentation of Gong Kebyar offers limitless space for players to be creative, such as *sekaa* gongs for

children, women, youth, mixed youth, adults, and the elderly, which can provide an attractive touch with a livelier and sweeter look (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Children *Sekaa Gong* plays *Gong Kebyar*

[9] describes Gong Kebyar as the most popular and influential gamelan genre to develop on the island of Bali in the 20th century. Tanzer emphasized Gong Kebyar's firm and self-aware independence, unrestricted by categorization or function. According to [6], Gong Kebyar was created as instrumental music and a place for its composers to express themselves, with the freedom to create new songs and complex arrangements as a sign of new creations. Gong Kebyar [10] is indeed distinctive, both musically and in terms of its socio-cultural context.

The presence and journey of Gong Kebyar within Balinese society from pre-independence to the present coincide with the evolution of Balinese culture. As a cultural value, Gong Kebyar contributes to the preservation of Balinese culture throughout all of its socio-cultural changes. In numerous community expressions and activities, the gamelan Gong Kebyar exemplifies the Balinese culture's synthesis of religion, aesthetics, and solidarity [11]. Similarly, Gong Kebyar is a significant representation of Balinese cultural events and behavior as a cultural expression. This is because music is essentially a symbol of things associated with a society's ideas and behavior [12].

### 3.3 Potential and Competition in *Gong Kebyar*

The rapid development of Gong Kebyar is not only due to its physical characteristics, but also to the functional development of its aesthetic concept. The Gong Kebyar ensemble has a considerable impact on other gamelans [6]. The physical influence on the evolution of the Gong Kebyar is accompanied by the aesthetic influence. The aesthetics of ngebyar extend to a number of other Balinese gamelans' musical expressions. From an etymological standpoint, the Balinese term kebyar can be viewed in terms of sound and sight. Kebyar is a loud, simultaneous sound audibly, and a bright, momentary light visually.

Consciously and unconsciously, the musical characteristics of ngebyar color the aesthetics of certain Balinese Karawitan arts, such as the gamelan Gender Wayang, Angklung, Joged Bumbung, and gamelan Balaganjur. Gong Kebyar's primary influence is the sound system as a fundamental element of music as an art form. Nonetheless, when Gong Kebyar reached its zenith of development, the aesthetic principles of other

Balinese gamelan also influenced the musical principles of Gong Kebyar. Other Balinese gamelan musical elements are incorporated into the composition of Gong Kebyar, despite the fact that the identity of kebyar music remains extrinsic.

Through the Gong Kebyar festival or parade, the Bali Arts Festival (Pesta Kesenian Bali - PKB) arena has confirmed Gong Kebyar as a prestigious performing art that is valued by the international community since 1979 [7]. The spirited performance of Gong Kebyar at the Bali Arts Festival has inspired all levels of Balinese society to explore and develop the performing arts, which have become a source of pride. In fact, by presenting Gong Kebyar at this quite prestigious annual event, space is made available for art ambassadors from around the globe to seize the opportunity and fulfill their role. In the spirit of competition, the Gong Kebyar Festival makes a significant contribution, igniting the flame of progressive artistic creation alongside the dynamics of life.

The Gong Kebyar competition to be the prima donna in the Bali Arts Festival exemplifies one of the Balinese people's cultural strategies with very proud results. In this age of globalization, the fact that Gong Kebyar is a homogenous art form in Bali is a cultural fact that deserves respect. Physically, this multifunctional gamelan is a musical instrument that is nearly identical in appearance and instrumentation. However, if examined more clearly, the aesthetic expressions and artistic conceptions that are revealed in the Gong Kebyar festival are full of various colors.

### 3.4 *Gong Kebyar Goes Worldwide*

Gong Kebyar grew rapidly and was well-received because it is a practical club with a high degree of adaptability that provides its players with unlimited space [13]. Gong Kebyar is not an alien; it is well-known by commoners, villagers, city dwellers, and even the global community. The existence of Gong Kebyar is now globalized, such that artists whose notes are gamelan players cannot escape the aesthetic touch of Gong Kebyar, and many of them have become professional artists thanks to Gong Kebyar [14].

Gong Kebyar is one of the Balinese gamelans that has reached a global audience, having entered Europe in 1931 and spread to the Americas, Asia, and Australia through subsequent travels [7]. Gong Kebyar is not only owned by every village or banjar in Bali, his birthplace, but also by art galleries, government offices, and schools. Gong Kebyar is also found throughout the Archipelago, from the major cities of Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung to the Balinese ethnic communities of Lampung, Palu, Kendari, and Tanah Papua, among others.

Beginning in the 1960s, gamelan Gong Kebyar has been incorporated into university curricula in the United States (Fig. 3). Prof. Dr. Ki Mantle Hood, a world authority on ethnomusicology, brought a barung Gong Kebyar used by the art group Seka Anyar to the University of California, Los Angeles Institute of Ethnomusicology (UCLA). Through the concept of 'bi-musicality,' students from various nations have studied Gong Kebyar at this institute. Since then, Gong Kebyar has spread to numerous campuses, cities, and locations around the globe [15].

Gong Kebyar has always been an integral part of Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. The placement of Gong Kebyar's art group in the embassies of friendly nations would undoubtedly strengthen bilateral ties between Indonesia and the rest of the world. It is a

source of pride that Gong Kebyar, with its prima donna, is increasingly in demand for collaborative works that combine traditional and western music.



Fig. 3. Gong Kebyar as a learning medium for students from several overseas campuses

## 4 Conclusion

Gong Kebyar is one of the expressions of the Balinese people's beauty, which imbues civilization with the synergy of aesthetics, religion, and solidarity. As a text, Gong Kebyar has contributed positively to the growth and evolution of Balinese performing arts. In this context, Gong Kebyar has contributed to the socio-cultural development of the Balinese people, has been successful as a whole, and has the capacity to safeguard Balinese culture.

Gong Kebyar is able to maintain its local identity despite its advantages. Therefore, we are all obligated, particularly the Balinese, to preserve the uniqueness and integrity of Gong Kebyar. If this is ignored, not only will the people of Bali be harmed, but so will the people of Indonesia and the entire world; we all will lose this priceless treasure.

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