

## 12 Pop music and interculturality

### The dynamic presence of pop music in contemporary Balinese performance

*Zachar Laskewicz*

The future will bring us a diversified and complex world, and not the uniform cultural landscape which the Westerner has dreamt of for various reasons since the 19th century . . .

(Pinxten 1994: 133)<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary anthropology seems to have transcended the structuralist notion of culture viewed as something existing outside or above the dynamic force of individuals. It seems in this post-structuralist day and age that viewing culture as an entity in a constant state of flux is no longer a problematic issue, just as it is no longer difficult to suggest that the arts are more than simply a ‘reflection’ of a given culture but a force which actively brings about cultural change. Wading through the large amount of material written about Balinese music one quickly gets the impression that Western theorists, ethnomusicologists especially, are in their own way attempting to save the Balinese culture from ‘losing its ethnicity’. From developments in different academic disciplines this may now seem a paradox: an apparent attempt to protect the culture from its own development in a world in which we realise that change is the only ‘given’ cultural studies can offer us. My primary purpose in this chapter is to discuss the way the Balinese culture has been able to adapt to an ever-changing world. Cultural adaptation has been made possible by integrating the continuous change into meaningful experiences of the world. This results in updating and adjusting their forms of performance, helping to make their environment that much more comprehensible. I hope to demonstrate that this is only possible thanks to the integration of Western pop culture.

In an attempt to conceive of and describe the way Balinese culture assists itself in making its world more comprehensible, or rather develops and adjusts the Balinese systems of understanding for this purpose, a number of steps will be taken. We begin with a discussion of the term ‘performance’ and its implications in relation to the Western understanding of music as opposed to dance. Then we move on to discussing the role played by performance in perpetuating and changing culture. This is followed by an introduction to ‘interculturality’ as a theoretical concept, and after this we move on to a brief discussion of the remarkable ability the Balinese culture has to adapt to cultural change. The next area of discussion is involved with comparing the sorts of distinctions our culture makes between ‘traditional’ and

'popular' music, and how this differs for the Balinese. This leads on to a discussion of musical forms in the twentieth century which are, in the author's opinion, clear examples of popular musical forms which have provided the Balinese with tools to be used to actively adapt to rapid cultural change. This discussion begins with *Gong Kebyar*, a form of gamelan and an approach to music-making which was created to meet the new needs of Balinese culture during a period of rapid change around the turn of the century. We end on a discussion of new music and dance forms which are emerging from the Balinese youth of today, some Western forms which are adapted in a unique Balinese way often for anti-colonial purposes, and some combining Western music and traditional forms, which I refer to as *campuran*. It will be demonstrated that this adaptation is not the inundation feared by ethnomusicologists, leading to the 'uniform cultural landscape' suggested by Pinxten (1994: 133), but is a dynamic attempt by the Balinese of today to make sense of a diverging musical environment and to fit it into a particularly Balinese cultural agenda. As Pinxten suggests, cultures 'die' slower than we may like to think.

The term *performance* is used in this chapter to refer to both music and dance. Although many theoreticians and anthropologists restrict themselves to one of the two, the terms 'music' or 'dance' are simply insufficient to refer to the multimedial nature of performative experience, especially as far as Balinese culture is concerned. This is, however, no less true in our culture which includes the motional intention of disco music and of course music videos. In exploring the dynamic role of pop music in Balinese culture the word 'performance' seems to be the only applicable term considering that in Balinese 'traditional' art the terms music and dance are difficult to apply as separate entities: the one depends on the other and vice versa. I have used this term deliberately because, in my opinion, contemporary pop performance – most certainly in the Balinese case, but also in a contemporary European context – is so much more than simply the sound it makes. It is a dynamic, three-dimensional, interactive process which can involve visual elements (music videos, special staging, etc.), physical dynamics (loudness of the sound evoking physical vibrations in discos), sensual elements (in terms of sometimes violent emotional confrontation in a tightly filled space), movement-based structures (such as the strong desire to move one's body to music, in other words, to dance), olfactory elements (the smell of gyrating bodies, smoke and even purposely induced smells in specific circumstances), among others. Referring simply to the *music*, is a dangerous reduction: the terms *dance* and *music* are Western constructions that function to reduce cultural phenomena to individual analysable elements. So in referring to *performance*, I am referring in this chapter to that activity which young Balinese people involve themselves in while creating what we call 'pop music'. Using these parameters as a source, contemporary composers and performers create a dynamic environment that communicates vital spatial and temporal information which cannot be communicated in any other way.

Performing artists such as pop musicians and other composers create models which communicate to an audience. Some of these musical models are more accessible than others, adopting recognisable forms which an audience can interact with. Thanks to this interaction, change takes place in a musical culture. I Wayan Dibia,

an important Balinese choreographer and academic who is the director of the STSI (the Indonesian College of the Arts) in Denpasar, Bali, suggested that the composer plays a critical role in culture by bridging two opposing poles: *tradition* and *innovation*. On the one hand, the composer plays the role of the innovator in that he or she actively creates new forms and structures from his or her own experience of the old to adapt to new and changing environments. On the other hand, the composer has an important role to play in the perpetuation of his or her culture. According to Dibia, the composer retains a strategic position between a perpetuation of traditional forms and an innovation upon or alienation from the status quo. This creates a tension which remains in a state of unsteady balance. If, on the one hand, a composer's work has a tendency towards innovation, then he or she may have difficulty finding an audience. If, on the other hand, the composer has a tendency towards perpetuation, this will lead to stasis and eventual stagnation. A composer, or in fact any artist, often acts as a sort of bridge between *tradition* and *innovation*. The most successful composer is often the artist who keeps up with new developments in the surrounding culture, providing their listeners with a bridge to new developments through adopting a musical language which the audience recognises. I Made Agus Wardana, a Balinese composer who lives and works in Brussels, helped me realise the importance of this in Balinese terms: *musik harus diterima oleh semua orang: tidak terlalu sulit tapi enak didengar . . .* (music should be accessible to all people: not too difficult, and pleasant to hear . . .).<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I hope to demonstrate how new developments in Balinese popular music are helping to bridge this gap.

In contemporary Bali there are a number of forces which act upon this unsteady state of artistic development. On a village level, the perpetuation of existing local variation is considered important, and so there is often a greater emphasis on *tradition*. At the same time, on a state institutional level – at the STSI in Denpasar – there is a greater emphasis on innovation and experimentation, sometimes varying to a very large degree from traditionally accepted performance-based structures. Balinese culture, however, is not so easy to classify. On a village level, teachers of music and dance as well as gamelan groups are invited to teach new music or play new works for community events, such as concerts organised by the *banjar*<sup>3</sup> in order to provide the community with a bit of extra income. Important performers from another village can also be invited to teach the latest musical craze which may have been introduced during one of the major island-wide musical competitions. What is perhaps the most interesting level of change in the Balinese musical world is the influence of contemporary Western pop music on a new generation of Balinese youth. In this chapter, I would like to tackle the issue of intercultural influence by taking an analytical viewpoint which considers the two contrasting poles, both *tradition* and *innovation*, and the complex ways these two poles are bridged in contemporary Balinese culture. This means to what extent the performance event or style comes from a dynamic innovative variation on traditional material, and to what extent the creative activity is based on a perpetuation of imposed cultural forms. It will be suggested that the forms used by the Balinese youth of today achieve a healthy balance between the two extremes, giving a uniquely Balinese way of experiencing the current cultural environment.

In this chapter we discuss particular dynamic forms of Balinese performance which have helped to bring about cultural change and development, where innovation upon tradition is brought about by physical *action* and *interaction*. Examples are given of new Balinese performance forms, some of which combine Western-style pop and traditional music. In this way, I will demonstrate how the Balinese youth of today are finding it increasingly necessary to combine popular music with their traditional forms so that their environment becomes comprehensible in a rapidly changing world. I believe that it is through this active interaction with their environment in the form of music and dance performance that cultural change takes place. Music has such a strong connection with change because of its vital temporal and spatial aspects. It is, certainly in terms of the Balinese culture, embedded in a spatial and temporal performance-based environment, and is therefore in a constant state of adaptation in order to provide the culture with the tools necessary for understanding that changing world. If we are to help musicology along on its path to a non-transcendent view of culture, we have to develop a theoretical model which is sensitive to this change. If music is allowed to become static, a museum piece or an 'object' to be studied as something abstracted from the parameters of space and time – as has happened to a large extent in our own culture (especially within the field of traditional musicology) – it simply stops playing a significant role in perpetuating culture. In this chapter I wish to demonstrate that intercultural influences, like the adoption of Western popular forms, do not all have to be experienced in a negative way (as is the prevailing tendency in contemporary ethnomusicology). Instead they have to be seen as an inevitable, necessary and vital change which allows the music to retain structures which are comprehensible to the Balinese. A generation of Balinese youth has to deal with a whole new series of Indonesian and other external influences, and adaptation and integration of pop forms help them to assimilate and integrate them.

The fusion of a Balinese musical aesthetic with Western pop is a result of the cultural processes I refer to as *interculturality*. In order to approach interculturality, we have to discuss the different ways individuals make use of these processes to their own advantage. Interculturality often involves the recontextualisation of foreign cultural material within one's own culture. It is not the same as *globalisation* which is a term we are confronted with more and more often as the world gets smaller thanks to extended telecommunication technology. Interculturality, however, is most certainly becoming a more common form of artistic expression thanks to globalisation. People who are confronted with a rapidly changing world are searching for tools to understand that world. This is one of the major factors which has to be understood about the way interculturality works. I have experienced this process myself through adapting my own artistic habitus while learning the contrasting cultural possibilities available to me through my contact with Java, the Netherlands, Bali and Belgium, all of which contrasted with what I had accepted as the status quo. I have also witnessed this phenomenon, having been in contact for many years with an intercultural environment, i.e. a non-European community, including Balinese people, who combine with their own performance forms all sorts of physical/sensory material they experience in the new culture they find themselves in. I Nyoman

Wenten, an important Balinese choreographer who lives and works in California, told me in an interview that globalisation has brought to Indonesia special music schools which only teach Western music,<sup>4</sup> and that these schools are funded by the Indonesian government. According to Wenten, the ultimate plan of the Indonesian government is to encourage their students to play other forms of music outside the context of the gamelan tradition. The actual political implications of this attitude to Western musical forms are beyond the scope of this chapter, although it is certainly an example of the growing need for intercultural interaction in contemporary (Indonesian) society.

The intention here is to demonstrate that such intercultural experiences occur because the culture involved fulfils a personal need or desire. Traditional ethnomusicology often ignores the influence of Western popular music on non-European cultures because they conceive of this as an imposition on 'traditional' culture. Interculturality, however, should be seen as a tool we use to better understand the *other*<sup>5</sup> through dynamically interacting with the new environment. Diamond, herself an American composer who writes for the Javanese gamelan, comments on the importance of interculturality. As she observes in one of her papers: 'Western influence dominates in certain areas, like global distribution of mass media and material goods. But is there only one villain here? Or are many cultural practices both dangerous and wonderful? Is television only bad? Is the oral tradition only wonderful?' (Diamond 1990: 16). Similarly, Wardana, the Balinese composer mentioned previously, finds interculturality very important because it allows two cultures to produce something by combining their different musical ideas. His wording is literally 'finding a solution' or 'creating a harmony'; with different people, he says, you learn new things, new ways of looking at yourself.<sup>6</sup> The desire for intercultural influence, however, suggests an internal necessity for change, and one adapts the extra-cultural influence according to a personal agenda, which is only a natural process. Debussy, perhaps the most influential of French composers, introduced profound changes into the way music was listened to after brief experience of 'Eastern' music – in this case Javanese gamelan – at the 1889 Paris Exhibition: here began the lure of the exotic in music. The vague pentatonicisms, the new dimension of space and the exotic sensuality of sound seemed radically new and different, but in fact Debussy's 'impressionistic' creations had little to do with Javanese music, representing instead a personal agenda and the needs for expression and development within a staid French middle class. This tendency can be extended to many other artists from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, including Benjamin Britten and Steve Reich, both of whom were influenced by Balinese culture and made significant contributions to the development of music in Western culture. The innovations may have been influenced by the way the artists experienced Eastern culture, but their work does not necessarily *reflect* the culture which influences them: cultural anthropology taught us long ago that studying new cultures can often tell far more about the researcher than the culture being investigated.

The Balinese have always been open to intercultural influence and that influence is most certainly noticeable in the twentieth century. One only has to look at general

performances such as the *Barong* dance, which is considered to have developed from Chinese/Buddhist influences, or dance performances such as *Janger*, which is an unusual combination of European colonial culture and Balinese coupling rituals. Here the Balinese have been influenced by cultures beyond Balinese shores, but in such a way that there is no sense that the performances are any less *Balinese* than 'traditional' Balinese performance. At a time of dynamic change and development, namely the infiltration of Dutch colonialism and the downfall of the Balinese feudal system, a number of Western artists and anthropologists found themselves on Bali, finding there the answer to many of their unfulfilled dreams in the West. Here we can mention the names of Walter Spies (graphic artist), Colin McPhee (composer/ethnomusicologist), Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson and Beryl de Zoete (anthropologists). Just as Bali was to have an influence on these people epistemologically, they in their turn had an influence on the Balinese culture. This is an interesting area of discussion, considering that many of these 'scientists' were attempting to give an objective account of what Balinese culture was like when in truth they were helping it to change and develop. I think it is important here to conclude that while researchers or artists are attempting to understand and/or assimilate the new culture, the process is primarily self-reflexive, i.e. it is directed towards the needs and desires of the active intercultural party. This allows the observer to experience a superficial aspect of the culture in question, but this is not necessarily negative, and is quite often positive in that it forces us to question the way we experience and understand our world, and the (artistic) tools we use to do that. As a result of this, we very often tend towards interculturality because of expectations we harbour about the culture we are interacting with.

A typical misunderstanding which arises in Balinese–European cultural interaction is involved with the sort of music tourists *expect* the Balinese to enjoy, and how in real life the Balinese have played on this expectation to help promote their restaurants or art centres. Very often this takes the form of reggae music which did not, of course, originate in Bali. In a commercial sense it is considered to be appropriate for the tourist market. It provides genuine employment possibilities in the generally mid- to lower priced hotels and clubs, which means real job prospects for people who can appropriate this music on Bali. It functions primarily to affirm the popular conception of Bali as a 'tropical beach paradise'. The primary concern of these reggae groups is to emphasise the Caribbean-like nature of Bali or a Rastafarian aesthetic which suits our traditional image of 'tropical' culture. From my own experience with the Balinese, who live an intense and busy existence, nothing could be further from the (Balinese) truth.

One important point which should be noted here is the major contrast our culture makes between *popular* and *classical* music, not only in terms of genre but also quality: in our culture it is a 'folk' acceptance that pop music is in some way less refined and complex than 'classical' music, and even that pop music is a rung below 'classical' music, which is a static but sound reflection of some culture. According to Barth, pop music 'radiates the same tendency of attraction [to the Balinese] as among Western youth' (Barth 1993: 246). Despite pop music reflecting a dynamic culture in action, thanks to our cultural discrimination it is considered of lesser value and often

subversive. Furthermore, the developments in music in our culture are usually written *against* the period before, for example the radical newism of the avant-garde. Our image of art and artists is generally one of struggle involved with achieving a goal, misunderstanding between innovative artists against the status quo, and sometimes even pain or death. Such an image of art is simply impossible in terms of Balinese contemporary performance. Popular music is only distinguished in terms of genre and appropriate time and place of performance. Contemporary composers write dynamic new works which almost every Balinese person will find at the very least interesting, although more typical emotions include rapture and joy. Creation on traditional instruments or any type of Western instrumental audience will not be considered in terms of quality. Westerners, especially musicians and composers, find this musical aesthetic remarkably innovative and liberating, and therefore it comes as no surprise to discover that hundreds of Balinese musical instruments are made for an international market each year.

*Gong Kebyar* is such an important form of gamelan because it fulfils the roles played in our culture of both 'classical' and 'popular' music. This ensemble, which is actually both a set of instruments and a style of playing them, became enormously popular during a period of momentous change and cultural ferment brought about by a combination of the presence of Western artists and anthropologists, Dutch colonialism – which was increasingly undermining the cultural role of the Balinese feudal system – and the growing tourist trade. Since colonialism had depleted support from noble houses because of the lack of taxes on a village level, many of the gamelan ensembles reverted to the villagers which put the control of the music into the hands of the villagers themselves. The changes on the island on both a political and a cultural level meant that a new dynamic form of musical communication was necessary, one that stood against the staidness of the then existing forms, and *Gong Kebyar* certainly fulfilled these needs. A musical form accompanied by dance came into existence which was in a sense 'abstract', in that there were no narratives or 'stock characters': the function of the dancer was to present a 'kaleidoscope of moods and emotions that reflects the rapidly changing character of the music itself' (Ornstein 1980: 24). The word *kebyar* can be literally translated as 'bursting' into flame (like a fire) or bloom (like a flower), which is a relatively correct analogy for the music itself, which is filled with sudden bursts of sound and electrifying changes. It emerged in a period of artistic ferment in north Bali, and then spread like lightning across the island, replacing the existing forms: the metal keys of older gamelan orchestras such as the monumental *Gong Gede* were sometimes melted down and refashioned into the *Kebyar* ensembles which eventually became the basis for all contemporary Balinese music.

*Gong Kebyar*, and its accompanying dance forms, were so much more than simply musical forms: they brought with them an entirely new way for the Balinese to relate to their environment and one another, and in the author's opinion they were used as a tool to adapt to rapid socio-political and cultural changes that the twentieth century brought with it. Gamelan ensembles from across the island joined one another in large-scale musical contests, and Balinese 'mega-stars' demonstrating remarkable musical or dance techniques became popular for a short time before being lost again

into oblivion. Unfortunately the form has become so complex and difficult to play that its 'klasik' status puts it out of reach of the average Balinese youth. Many these days lack the specialisation taught in the music academies which have taken the role played earlier by the villages and have therefore now become the institutions controlling the development of the *Gong Kebyar* tradition. The young people of today are searching for new means to express their own approach to the world, something which *Gong Kebyar* cannot on its own fulfil: it has become too difficult for many young Balinese people, who are obliged to spend more and more of their time catering to either the tourist industry or the rapidly evolving business world. These new needs are often fulfilled by adapting Western pop music forms. These experiments in combining Balinese culture with Western pop function both to unite them with the world they are perpetuating in the industry, and to provide comprehensible forms of cultural expression in a postcolonial world.

Balinese youth whom I interviewed during fieldwork in 1998 told me that they considered their 'enjoyment' of pop and traditional music to be essentially the same. Popular music, though, has a vitality which they greatly enjoy, allowing them to experience a shared space enjoyed by other young people. The tendency within ethnomusicology – which is thankfully receding – to lament the 'imposition' of pop music as a result of tourism or commercialisation is a hopelessly out-of-date assumption, and is in general only perpetuated for the large tourist market. For the young Balinese, popular music has many advantages when compared to traditional music. To be able to dance to this music one does not have to have had years of dance training, which opens up a whole world of experiencing space, sound and the sense of community among other young people. Although Balinese traditional music has its own exuberance and sensuality, it involves a great deal of practice, whereas pop music is open to a wider audience and permits more freedom of movement. It must not be forgotten, however, that the Balinese who attend discos are often the same people who attend the new music festivals held around Bali, and are often directly involved in playing in both rock bands and traditional orchestras.

As discussed above, increasingly more young people are reaching out to other forms of music and have found, thanks to the massive influx of Western tourists, many new types of popular music to fulfil their needs, especially in tourist areas such as Sanur and Kuta. According to Bakan, 'the influx of Western popular music culture into Bali has created an awareness of a certain kind of musical energy and intensity that is very appealing to Balinese youth' (Bakan 1993: 335). Bakan goes on to say that even *Gong Kebyar* lacks communicative potential for the average youth of today because of the enormous technical skill required. I Wayan Dibia, director of the STSI in Denpasar, has made vocal the fact that he regrets the loss of many different performance forms which have been or will be lost because of the growing desire of the Balinese youth to specialise in Western music (Dibia 1993). As Dibia observes, more and more Balinese people, especially in the larger cities, are working five-day weeks and do not have the energy to participate in traditional performance either actively as a performer or even passively as a viewer. Staying at home and resting in front of the television for light entertainment is becoming increasingly more common. For the performing arts which are still popular, one can also notice a



process of movement from religion/cultural education to entertainment. Dibia comments on the fact that performances such as *Wayang Kulit* which were initially used for educational and religious purposes are gradually changing function (Dibia 1993: 52–3). The performances of today are becoming more and more entertaining at the cost of their initial function in the perpetuation of traditional values. The pedagogical sections are becoming increasingly shorter and the amusing sections which allow the audience to relax and enjoy the more slapstick sides of the performance are being extended, meaning in essence that the whole aim of the performance is to lighten up a tired audience who have spent the day at work. As Dibia demonstrates: 'society has become less ready to "digest" performances which are too serious . . . light entertainment which can be enjoyed without having to think hard has become both the food and the effective medicine for people to restore their physical and mental condition' (Dibia 1993: 66).

One of the unquestionable factors concerning the desire of the Balinese to look beyond their shores for musical satisfaction cannot be ascribed only to sociological change. Technology has made its impression not only on the reproduction of the human arts but also on communication in general, and in fact all the other ways we interact with our environment. Thanks to forms of telecommunication many of the 'traditional' forms of Balinese culture are threatened, at least as far as a whole school of Western ethnomusicology and a growing school of academics from Balinese extraction are concerned. Examples include Dibia (1993) who mourns the intrusion of the radio and television and Soedarsono (1995) who laments the availability of mass media which encourage people to stay at home and not attend traditional performances. According to I Nyoman Wenten, the last 20 years have seen a significant decline in the overall dedication of people in the villages to the gamelan and other artistic forms (Bakan 1993: 391). The reproducibility of music made possible by the introduction of recording techniques, most noticeably in the form of the cassette, and to a lesser extent the CD, has also contributed to this decline. This medium is so popular because it is affordable, small and transportable. It is a medium for Balinese youth actively to create their own traditions, even if they are based on Western models or *campuran*: fusion forms mixing traditional and pop music. Basically, reproduction makes Western music accessible to the young. The influence of mass media such as radio and television has of course had a great impact on Indonesia as a whole, both in Bali and Java. Slick marketing and lots of cultural propaganda have resulted in a new 'pan-Indonesianism' which resembles conformity to contemporary Western cultural values. Hatley points out the obvious in her article on cultural expression: the new Indonesianism revolves primarily around one thing: making big money and being successful in terms of a polished reflection of the unattainable 'American dream' (Hatley 1994: 257). Mass media, which take advantage of new technology such as the radio and the television, are fostering a new form of living and relating to the world based on an American middle-class norm all over Indonesia.

Reasons for this move towards a Western popular model are not restricted to technology or the mass media. It is also possible that Balinese youth are led to explore different musical genres because of the institutionalisation of traditional

gamelan forms. I am referring here to the fact that if a musical form is 'disembedded' from its original cultural context and then taught in a static environment it simply stops communicating to a whole new generation. This has certainly occurred thanks to the increasingly significant role the STSI plays in defining Balinese classical culture – one which is becoming available only to a select few. Balinese music is used by the Indonesian government for particular Indonesian political functions within both Indonesia and on a world stage, and in this regard its role as a 'popular' form has been reduced. The STSI comes directly under the control of the Directorate General of Higher Education within the Ministry of Education and Culture (Hough 1992: 14), and the institution's role is 'to manifest at the regional level the current discourse of national culture' (Hough 1992: 15). The Balinese performance culture is used to demonstrate Indonesia's ancient roots and its ethnic diversity 'united in the common purpose of national development' (Hough 1992: 18). According to Hough, the New Order period 'has been characterised by State intervention in cultural production throughout the archipelago. The co-option or appropriation of specific ethnic cultural forms to a national context appears to be a conscious effort by the state to enhance its own position and promote its economic and social programmes of development' (Hough 1992: 1). We can see this as part of a general cycle: in the past, before the advent of *Gong Kebyar*, Hindu–Balinese rulers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries served to standardise Balinese culture. Now, after a period of independent change and development, 'government-sponsored schools, research teams, and creative projects' from the Indonesian state itself are again exerting power on performance forms. It will be argued further in the chapter, however, that new forms are again developing outside the academies, influenced by or based on Western popular music which is still not under the control of the state in the way that the *Gong Kebyar* of today is. These new forms are essential for young people, just as *Gong Kebyar* was at the turn of the nineteenth century, to make sense of a rapidly changing world. We will begin with a discussion of Bali as a member state of the Indonesian republic, and the implications of this for the appropriation of pop music forms in Bali.

In the Sukarno period of Indonesian politics, Western music was included in his overbearing nationalist rhetoric which ultimately led to the banning of contemporary Western rock music. It is no wonder then that foreign music genres represent such a strong statement against a cultural dictatorship. In terms of a new generation of Indonesian youth of the New Order (*Orde Baru*), the mass media as means of communication in a common language has offered the young a tool for expressing their dissatisfaction with a corrupt political and social system. The Indonesian clones of Western bands should be viewed in terms of their ability to provide their audiences with a sense of liberation from an oppressive political system. Western popular music today has the advantage of escaping some of the restrictions imposed by the Indonesian state, and is accessible to a more general public of Balinese youth, who have grown up with it in terms of foreign recordings and television broadcasts such as MTV, which are not easily controlled by governmental decree. In Indonesia itself, the pop medium has enjoyed relative freedom compared to the more traditional art forms taught in the academies, simply because the Indonesian state considers it

less necessary to suppress because of its non-Indonesian origin. Both in a Balinese and in a larger Indonesian context pop music still has to the same degree a direct anti-societal function, or at least an expression of the vitality of youth, which stands against the corruption of the 'system' which favours an elite few and leaves the rest to struggle with meagre means. The Balinese have been no exception to the Indonesian model, finding an enormously enthusiastic market for both popular and fusion forms, although, as already demonstrated, their enthusiasm for pop goes far further than simply a reaction against society or as a result of the inundation of Western pop.

Later we will be discussing some of the vital applications of pop music forms in Bali, many of which stand against all the stereotypes perpetuated for a tourist audience. In terms of Balinese youth, disco music is indeed the newest rage and hundreds of young people flock nightly to the many clubs which have sprung up in the major tourist centres. One could lament the fact that traditional culture is being set aside, but such a conviction is entirely misplaced. All of the young people I interviewed liked both traditional and popular music, and received a great deal of satisfaction in both musical environments. They referred to popular music as *universal mendunia*, a form which allowed them to share a dynamic moment with (mostly young) people universally, whereas traditional music had a specific regional quality. This is to be expected in Bali because of the wide range of visitors whom Balinese people interact with, meaning that the music and the nightclub environment provide them with a common area they can take advantage of, connecting themselves with the international crowd. The Balinese world is now, of course, much bigger than the shores of Bali.

According to an interview held by the author with a young Balinese dancer and musician who sings for a new 'ethnic fusion' pop group (which will be discussed in more detail shortly), Western music, although lacking the *taksu*<sup>7</sup> of traditional performance, has a strong sense of freedom which is not obtainable in the same way in other musical forms. The combination of traditional and modern forms is highly popular, most likely because it helps the Balinese to reconcile their own culture with new Western forms, helping subliminally their general comprehension of the cultural changes taking place around them. They even feel that they have a personal obligation to perform these experiments, and to create new performance forms with the surrounding cultural 'tools'. The music that emanates from the West through the tourist industry has found a place in the lives of Balinese young people, especially those living in the larger tourist-based centres. This does not mean, however, that the West has successfully re-colonised Bali; it means that the Balinese have appropriated yet another level of it into their own culture. Such instances of cultural syncretism unite Balinese youth with what they feel to be a world culture made up of young people, revelling in being in busy places (perhaps a contemporary evocation of *ramai*<sup>8</sup>). The discos created initially for tourists are most certainly frequented by a large population of Balinese young people from a wide range of different age groups (from quite young: one of the people I interviewed was only 15 years old), although most are probably from a middle- to high-class section of society. Discos which are frequented by Balinese people include Janger, Bintang Bali, Skandal and many others.

The strongly linked nature of Balinese society results in a great emphasis on retaining connection with its young people, meaning that ‘estrangement’ between old and new generations – at least in terms of those in Bali who belong to a Balinese *banjar* and participate in the culture directly – is limited if compared to Western culture. Although forms of radical new music such as heavy metal or punk do not receive direct assistance, *banjar*-approved groups run by musicians set up major events weekly: I was told of an event held in a performance space in Denpasar set up by a death-metal initiative known as the Bali Corpse-Grinders in one of my interviews, or the Sunday Hot Music event which is held weekly for Balinese death-thrashers in Sanur, both of which are quite unknown to tourists who often content themselves with the artificial reggae performances intended to fulfil a tourist idea of what being ‘Balinese’ actually is.

The major forms of popular music I experienced during fieldwork on Bali were house, techno and punk rock. Yong Sagita is a well-known Balinese musician who has invented his own form of house music which is often played in Balinese discos. His work is interesting for a number of reasons. First, he uses native Balinese languages in his songs and, second, he uses Balinese gamelan music as part of the loud and repetitive house dynamic. His texts also are of up-to-date issues which Balinese people in Denpasar can relate to. His songs describe a number of situations young people are typically confronted with in contemporary Bali. The work ‘Toris’ is about misunderstandings in a conversation with a tourist, and ‘Hitom’ and ‘Bajang Sakura’ are both about a Japanese girl (common visitors to Bali). It appears that the language deployed is often quite basic, although the recording itself sounds pleasanter to a Westerner than the hard-core rock of most house music.

Astita, a Balinese composer and teacher at the STSI, refers to ‘house’ music as peculiar to Western-style discos, but at the same time refers to the phenomenon as ‘tripping music’, and observes that many Balinese pop groups are getting together and using a combination of both sampled gamelan instruments and sometimes Balinese texts to create house works for use in discos, similar to the work of Yong Sagita. He also recognises that this music form shares some characteristics with traditional music: ‘steady and hard rhythm over and over for a long time that tends to put people into a trance and become involved with the music’.<sup>9</sup> A combination of Balinese gamelan music and house music with repetitive hard rhythms played very loudly functions to totally overwhelm the (largely Balinese) audience, who become incensed and sometimes reach a trance-like state. Thanks to this dynamic musical pounding the body is almost forced to become involved in the communal sharing of a vital spatial and temporal environment, perhaps again helping the Balinese young people to achieve *ramai*. Young Balinese people I interviewed after having totally given themselves over to techno music seemed in a state of high intensity, in a totally entranced state which could undoubtedly be compared to the trance states regularly induced in traditional rituals such as the performance of the *Barong*.

Another musical genre which is highly influential in Bali is punk music. Punk is specifically interesting because it represents a new way of living and experiencing the world: it is so much more than simply loud music. It represents an anti-colonial tendency, one which goes against the stereotypes. The rather ghoulish texts of some

of the songs, the incredibly loud volume, the raw theatrics and the catharsis created in a punk environment do not have to be viewed in a negative way. The attraction is in the music itself, which provides its listeners with a sense of freedom to express themselves in a way that is not possible with other musical forms. It is not so much *what* the songs say, but how they go about presenting it, and the whole sensual environment which rejects repression and supports anarchy. With the assistance of a punk ethos many Balinese young people are creating an environment which assists them to cope with their culture in a world which is becoming more and more stifling as the pressure to please Western tourists grows.

Pop music is not limited to discos and other tourist-based situations. Perhaps the best-known cultural event – one which is very much an accepted part of Balinese cultural life – is the world famous Pesta Kesenian Bali, abbreviated to PKB, and often translated as the Bali Arts Festival. This event is basically an island-wide competition which involves all the best performers and performances coming together in Denpasar. There is now a section known as ‘Pop Daerah’ in which all the Balinese *kecamatan* (regions) compete by entering rock groups. This ‘regional pop’ division has a similar number of musicians to a rock band. The songs are written in Balinese, and often include fusion with Balinese gamelan instruments or melodies. The singers also dance, similarly combining traditional dance and costumes with pop dance and motions. According to Ni Made Wulan, a female Balinese singer and dancer who participated in the event, they ‘mix-and-match’ Balinese and popular forms. They use typical Western pop instruments, and sometimes gamelan instruments like the *trompong*. The music itself can also integrate Balinese playing styles such as *kotekan*.<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, music and dance are tools we use to experience or understand our environment, and it is only natural, therefore, that the Balinese will feel the necessity to combine and mix traditional forms, which they are familiar with from their ritual lives, with Western popular music, which is becoming more and more a standard part of Balinese existence. The case study in this regard is a group which has the specific intention of helping Bali along on the path of finding its own communicative form within the genre. The group in question is made up of a well-known Balinese musician and composer who teaches at the STSI in Denpasar, I Komang Astita, and his friends and family. They combine contemporary Balinese issues with Balinese musical forms, and of course Western pop, attempting to set a standard for Balinese bands in the future. They want to use the music to both perpetuate Balinese traditional culture and at the same time to adapt its musical forms to a new musical epistemology inherent in contemporary pop music. The group is called Koka Studio which is a combination of the names of the two major creative forces behind the group, Komang and Kadek, and they have called their first release ‘Om Swastiasu’, which is a traditional Balinese term for ‘welcome’. Komang’s daughter Tisna explained to me in an interview that this had the symbolic value of the band’s desire to be welcomed into the Balinese musical world: they see their work as a ‘first’ on the Balinese popular music scene, and hope that it catches on. It is also the name for the first song on the tape. Tisna thinks that Balinese youth are watching too much Western pop music on television, and Koka Studio are

hoping to demonstrate that Bali has its own type of pop music which does not have to resemble the Western model directly. A video of the group was even made and broadcast in Denpasar and Jakarta, and this included in addition to gamelan instruments adapted on a synthesiser, traditional Balinese dance movements and costumes.

As mentioned, the subject matter of the songs themselves concerns issues which are of importance to the Balinese of today. These extend from songs involved with religious issues, such as 'Canang Sari', concerning the presentation of offerings to the Balinese spiritual world, to protest songs trying to cope with the difficult issue of changes to the Balinese environment brought about by the rapidly increasing tourist industry. The song 'Inguh', for example, concerns the confusion Balinese people feel because of the continually decreasing amount of land left for their own houses or gardens, most of it having been taken up by hotels and tourist bungalows: nowhere left for 'nature' any more, only a superficial Western tourist world which forces the Balinese to question their existence and their future. The songs even extend to the reality of the material world, which is certainly a significant factor to the Balinese of today: the song 'Kartu Kredit' is a comical account of spending too much money using a credit card and discovering how much at the end of the month. The collection is an interesting mixture of themes, and the music itself resembles a replica of Western pop music forms with the typical addition of a drum machine and a Western singing style. Despite the idealism implicit in the band's hope entirely to change the Balinese soundscape, one hopes that such a venture will at least influence other bands to make similar developments within their own music in terms of taking on Balinese issues significant to the Balinese, and blowing new life into traditional forms.

These combined forms allow the Balinese youth to 'physically' comprehend the musical influences flooding in from the West, musical influences which are obviously a vital communicative form for the young people of today and have dramatic epistemological consequences for how they experience the world in general. Popular music, defined in opposition to 'classical' or 'formal' music by Western society, is a powerful force: one which surrounds us, forcing us to sensually experience the world in a certain way. It speaks to young people, and is so much more than simply a reflection of a given age, but an actual tool used to bring about cultural change and development. From the contents of this chapter, it is clear that Bali has seen many different and exciting changes in the twentieth century, and is evidently continuing to change, as all cultures do and always will. The Balinese obviously recognise the importance of these musical forms, and are adapting to them in a unique way so that their culture does not lose touch with a new generation of young people who are brought up in an entirely different cultural environment, influenced by various factors such as a new political regime, a new education system and an abundant and growing tourist industry. Thanks to their understanding of the importance of change the Balinese are protecting their own culture. I am pretty sure that my conclusion is the same as that of many others discussing the Bali of today: having such a remarkable ability to adapt, Balinese culture has a promising future, and certainly not one we have to worry about paternalistically here in the West. In

fact, Balinese music and culture in general is playing an ever more important role outside Bali. As always, the Balinese are teaching us more than we may be aware.

## Notes

- 1 All translations of Pinxten are by Laskewicz.
- 2 Taken from an interview held with Wardana on 8 April 1999 at his home in Brussels. My translation.
- 3 A *banjar* is the smallest social unit in Bali and is relatively highly regimented in that the members are connected to a complex system of social involvement.
- 4 Interview with I Nyoman Wenten held in Bali on 12 September 1997.
- 5 Term taken from Husserlian phenomenology referring to social structures developed by individuals to relate to the external environment, perpetuated by socio-cultural systems. Said (1985) refers to the cultural machines which are devised to understand the 'East' (the other) as *Orientalisms*.
- 6 Taken from the interview held with Wardana on 8 April 1999.
- 7 *Taksu* is a term which refers to the dynamism and the (supernatural) power inherent within Balinese traditional performance.
- 8 *Ramai* is a sense of being engulfed in a crowd, a preferred state of being anonymous in a world which normally involves many people sharing a small place.
- 9 Interview held with I Komang Astita held on 9 August 1999 in Denpasar.
- 10 *Kotekan* is a form of rhythmic melodic expression unique to Balinese music, resembling an elaborated form of hocketing which we find in mediaeval music.