

# Music and Culture in Bali

## MUS 8/MUS 713, Syllabus

Summer 2026

---

### Dates and Location:

July 8–22 in Ubud, Bali

### Pre-departure sessions:

June 22 and 24 at Queens College (dates subject to change)

### Instructors:

Ruka Shironishi ([ruka.shironishi@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:ruka.shironishi@qc.cuny.edu)), Fred Trumpy ([fmtrumpy@yahoo.com](mailto:fmtrumpy@yahoo.com))

---

### Course Description:

- This course will provide an immersive cultural and artistic experience.
- The students will learn to play on traditional, gamelan instruments, study privately with local masters (musical instrument and/or dance), and tour sacred landmarks and temples throughout Bali.
- While there is some emphasis placed on the study of gamelan, the course is designed to provide a wider-perspective on Balinese culture and art in general. (A musical experience is not necessary for enrollment.)
- In-person classes, lectures and daily writing assignments and journaling will be part of the coursework.

### Course work and activities:

- Learn a traditional composition with local, Balinese masters and rehearse as a gamelan (ensemble).
- Three private lessons on your choice of instrument or dance. You are *not* required to focus on one discipline. (i.e. You may have 3 different types of private lessons.)
- Attend performances of local musicians and dancers.
- Trips to landmarks such as Uluwatu and Monkey Forest.
- Lectures in a classroom setting.
- Writing assignments (analysis, essays and journals).

### Reference Materials:

Covarrubias, Miguel. *Island of Bali*. With an introduction by Adrian Vickers. Periplus Classics Series. Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2006. (*Original work published 1937.*)

Gold, Lisa. *Music in Bali: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Kerlogue, Fiona. *Arts of Southeast Asia*. World of Art. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004

Ramseyer, Urs. *The Art and Culture of Bali*. Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1977.  
Tenzer, Michael. *Balinese Gamelan Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

## **Grading:**

Coursework is weighted as follows:

Attendance/Participation.....60%  
Writing Assignments.....40%

## **Conduct and Guidelines:**

### ***Health Care***

Travelers to Bali may experience gastrointestinal illness, commonly referred to as “Bali belly,” which is typically caused by contaminated food or water. Students should not drink tap water or consume ice made from tap water. Only sealed bottled water from reputable sources should be used for drinking and brushing teeth. Students should also use caution when consuming raw fruits and vegetables, which may have been washed with tap water.

Vaccinations are not required for travel to Bali; however, students are encouraged to consult their healthcare provider prior to departure if they have health-related concerns. In the event of illness, Ubud has several foreigner-friendly medical clinics that regularly treat international visitors.

### ***Illegal Drugs***

Indonesia has strict laws regarding the use, possession, and trafficking of illegal drugs, including (but not limited to) marijuana. Penalties can be severe and may include lengthy prison sentences and heavy fines. Enforcement of drug-related laws is stringent, and students are expected to comply fully with all local laws and regulations.

Prescription medications are permitted, provided they are legally prescribed to the student. Students should bring medications in their original labeled containers and are strongly encouraged to carry a copy of the prescription or a doctor’s note, particularly for controlled medications. Students with questions about specific medications should consult their healthcare provider prior to travel.

### ***Renting Motorbikes***

Traffic conditions in Bali can be congested and unpredictable, and road infrastructure and driving practices may differ significantly from those in the United States. For individuals unfamiliar with local conditions, renting and operating motorbikes poses significant safety and legal risks, including issues related to licensing, insurance coverage, and local regulations.

For these reasons, and in the interest of student safety, motorbike rentals are not permitted for participants in this program. Alternative transportation options and organized group travel will be provided as appropriate.

**Dress Code**

Visitors to temples and other sacred sites in Bali are expected to dress modestly and respectfully. Clothing should cover the shoulders, upper arms, and knees. Footwear must be removed before entering temple grounds. Students should choose attire that is tidy and appropriate for a religious setting. Following these guidelines demonstrates respect for local customs and cultural traditions.

**About Balinese gamelan:**

Bali, Indonesia is known for its rich musical traditions, particularly Balinese gamelan, which plays a central role in both sacred and secular life. Gamelan music is closely integrated into religious ceremonies, dance performances, and community events, and is especially prominent in Ubud, often considered the cultural and artistic center of Bali.

Balinese gamelan is characterized by its percussive sound and layered textures, produced by ensembles of metallophones, gongs, drums (*kendang*), bamboo flutes (*suling*), and other instruments. A defining feature of gamelan music is its use of interlocking rhythmic and melodic patterns, in which individual parts are designed to work together as a whole. This approach reflects important cultural values of cooperation, balance, and community, emphasizing collective participation rather than individual virtuosity. Through this shared musical practice, gamelan serves as a fundamental expression of Balinese cultural and social life.

**Tentative course schedule:**

	Dates	Activities	Lecture topics/lessons
Day 1	June 22 (Mon)	<b>Class meeting at Queens College or Zoom</b>	Introduction to Balinese culture and gamelan, day 1
Day 2	June 24 (Wed)	<b>Class meeting at Queens College or Zoom</b>	Introduction to Balinese culture and gamelan, day 2
Day 3	July 8 (Wed)	<b>Flight to Denpasar</b>	_____
Day 4	July 9 (Thu)	<b>Arrive in Ubud,</b> A walk around Ubud	_____
Day 5	July 10 (Fri)	Gamelan workshop (10am–12pm), Class meeting (2–4pm), Monkey Forest (4pm)	Discussion on the gamelan workshop/ Gamelan Gong Kebyar (Gold, Chp. 2)

Day 6	July 11 (Sat)	Gamelan workshop (10am–12pm), Gamelan Semara Ratih (7:30pm)	Tuning and layering (Gold, Chp. 3)
Day 7	1 July 2 (Sun)	Leave at 8am: Batcave Temple/Tenganan village/ Beach (East Bali)	-----
Day 8	July 13 (Mon)	Instrument Lessons 10am–12pm; Observe Salukat's rehearsal (8pm)	Musik kontemporer (Tenzer, Chp. 8)
Day 9	July 14 (Tue)	Instrument Lessons (10am–12pm)	Analysis: Pendet Penyambutan
Day 10	July 15 (Wed)	<b>Day off</b>	-----
Day 11	July 16 (Thu)	Gamelan Workshop (10am–12pm); Class meeting (3–5pm); Shadow Puppet Theater (8pm)	Wayang kulit (Gold, Chp 4)
Day 12	July 17 (Fri)	Gamelan Workshop (10am–12pm); Class meeting (3–5pm)	Significance of Balinese temples, cultural tourism (Covarrubias, Chp. 12)
Day 13	July 18 (Sat)	Leave at 10am Padangpadang 12:30pm Leave for Uluwatu 3pm Kecak 6pm	-----
Day 14	July 19 (Sun)	Dance lesson (10am–12pm); Class meeting (3–5pm)	Discussion on Balinese dance (Gold, Chp. 4)
Day 15	July 20 (Mon)	Mount Batur; Class meeting (3–5pm)	Reflection and Summary
Day 16	July 21nd (Tue)	<b>Flight to New York</b>	-----
Day 17	July 22 (Wed)	<b>Arrive in New York</b>	-----