Gamelan & Mental Health:
Experiential Music Making in University Communities

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ABSTRACT

Gamelan ensembles in North American institutions, have served as a pedagogical tool in music curriculums since their initial proliferation abroad in 1960, with Mantle Hood's (1960) concept of "bi-musicality" serving as the primary motivation. I argue that the usage of these ensembles needs to grow beyond the original pedagogical agenda that brought them here, and that universities and scholars should acknowledge the benefits these ensembles provide beyond Hood's term of bi-musicality.

In recent years, the rapid decline in mental health, has constituted what some scholars call a crisis, or an epidemic of loneliness. This decline is especially present among millennials and members of generation z in North America, who have lived through the September 11th terrorist attacks, multiple conflicts in the Middle East, the housing market crash of 2008, and now the COVID-19 global pandemic. Engaging with sources that identify these generations perception of the American Dream, and case studies that identify feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression within these generations, I argue that more needs to be done to remedy this decline in overall mental wellbeing. I believe one potential remedy lies in community music making.

Engaging with Turino's (2008) concept of presentational and participatory music making, and Clendinning's (2020) spectrum of pre-professional and experiential ensembles, I examine the benefits that participatory, experiential-focused music making groups can provide to their members. I engage with scholarship that identifies mental benefits of community based music making within the context of music therapy. I further supplement this argument through my engagement with gamelan ensembles around me, conducted via fieldwork between August 2023 and March 2024.

Finally, I argue that the social and mental benefits provided in experimental gamelan ensembles, coupled with their unique relationship within North American institutions of higher learning, make them especially advantageous to the demographic of college-aged students, who have been especially affected by the ongoing mental health crisis.

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Chapter 1: Looking Beyond Pedagogy

While in Bali during the summer of 2023, I spent my free time volunteering with Insitu Recordings, a multifaceted non-profit organization that, among many other things, records gamelan music. At one of the many recording sessions I attended that summer, I was handed a camera and asked to take pictures. The gamelan being recorded that afternoon, Gamelan Pesel, was set up under the shade of trees in a clearing behind the family compound where they rehearsed. Tasked with taking photos while the recording equipment was set up, I observed the musicians, who were all around my age (20s and 30s). They sat with arms around one another, laughing, smiling, and telling jokes while passing around snacks and water. The atmosphere was incredibly warm and welcoming, even to me. I had barely grasped the basics of Bahasa Indonesia and my tall stature and lack of familiarity with Balinese social etiquette meant I stood out like a sore thumb. The closeness of the musicians was unfamiliar to me and quite distinct from the social conventions in which I was raised. There appeared to be little personal space, as musicians sat near to one another grasping each other's arms and legs while rolling heads back in laughter.

Once the equipment was in place and recording could begin, the musicians moved to their respective instruments. However, the laughing and joking would only subside when a member of Insitu Recordings indicated that the recording equipment was running. For a few seconds, the only sounds breaking the silence were the kites flying overhead and the rustling of leaves caused by a gentle breeze massaging a nearby grove of bamboo. Once the breeze had passed, and the fluttering of the kites and leaves had subsided, a

member of Insitu Recordings indicated that it was the optimal moment to start playing, and the group swung into action, effortlessly and in perfect synchrony. I was blown away by their virtuosity and the fervor with which they played.

The group's cohesion reminded me of descriptions I had encountered in the scholarship on Balinese music that I had read in preparation for this trip. So much of it highlighted the communal nature of gamelan music, and in that moment, I understood why the social dimensions had been such an enormous fixation for scholars outside of Bali. The words of Colin McPhee, the first North American to publish a major monograph on Balinese music, capture the spirit of this infatuation: "From a musician's viewpoint Bali is the ultimate happy island where music, dance, and drama are not only loved by all but play a most important part in daily life" (McPhee, 1966, p. 1).

At the end of each piece, we sat still and in silence until the ringing of the final gong had completely dissipated. The musicians then erupted in celebration, clapping, cheering, and patting each other on the back. After the recording session ended and the gamelan and recording equipment had been put away, we were graciously invited to eat with the group. This was a gesture of gratitude from Gamelan Pesel's leader, I Wayan Arik Wirawan, and it was for everyone present: musicians, the recording team, as well as the entire family living at the family compound where the group rehearses. One of the members of Insitu Recordings told me that the amount and quality of food was impressive and a gesture of gratitude to everyone who contributed to the afternoon's success. We sat in a giant circle and enjoyed the meal as conversations flew across the space between us. The smiles, jokes, and laughs I had observed earlier continued too, and

several members of the group approached us to express their gratitude for recording the group, while making sure that we had enough to eat.

The socializing I experienced that day had an impact on me. Reflecting upon it later, I began to wonder what role gamelan may have played in supporting the tremendous social cohesion and strong bonds I had witnessed. The total effect of my experiences in Bali that summer also transformed my academic journey. Upon returning to the United States, I decided to change the focus of my thesis from mental health advocacy in rap music to gamelan's effects on surrounding communities. I made this decision not only because of what I had witnessed in Bali but also because of what I have experienced participating in gamelans in North America. What interested me most were the mental health benefits that these groups might provide their members, through the socialization and bonds that form between them. Seeing the social cohesion and strong bonds of Gamelan Pesel made me reflect on my experiences and a lingering question: are the strong bonds and social cohesion I witnessed in Gamelan Pesel present in gamelans in North American universities, or are these benefits overlooked due to curriculum and pedagogy?

My time in Bali and contemplation of this question eventually led to the central argument of this thesis—that gamelans in North America stand to offer benefits that go beyond those that are pedagogical. Because they excel in building communities and mutual support between members, they might also prevent loneliness and isolation, which are key elements of a mental health crisis in the U.S., especially among college students. Further, because many U.S. academic institutions have gamelans, they might

consider supporting what these gamelans are doing as well as encouraging their students to participate in the music.

When looking for studies on the mental health benefits of gamelan, the majority of scholars acknowledge the social aspects of gamelan music, given the scholarly infatuation with music in Bali as expressly pro-social. Some scholars have even flirted with the idea that gamelan ensembles are bastions of sociality and well-being while discussing the benefits afforded by gamelan music in the context of music therapy (Bakan et al., 2008; Eastburn, 2003; Loth, 2014; McIntosh, 2012). However, few scholars view these ensembles through the lens of individual members' mental well-being. In an effort to remedy this gap, this thesis lays the groundwork for future scholars who wish to acknowledge the mental and social benefits that these ensembles can provide to members of university groups. Scholarship on other modes of community music making that have been adapted to a therapeutic context is more common, and some of the conclusions therein are extendable to gamelan music. Furthermore, there is excellent scholarship on communities more broadly as well as supportive communities, which I engage with North American gamelans.

My experience in Bali with Gamelan Pesel would continue to echo in the back of my mind as I engaged with gamelan communities at universities in North America. In particular, I embarked on fieldwork in the American Southeast. One of the gamelans I worked with is at Wake Forest University (Winston Salem, North Carolina) and run by Elizabeth Clendinning. Clendinning is an ethnomusicologist with a serious interest in gamelan music in the United States, and her work inspired some of my initial thinking about this project (2020). My time with the Wake Forest University gamelan involved

trips to observe rehearsal procedures and interview members. On the first trip, I remember members of the group entering the room, introducing themselves to me, and then catching up with one another. Lighthearted laughter filled the air—not entirely dissimilar to what I had witnessed in Bali during the recording session of Gamelan Pesel. Once rehearsal began, Clendinning allowed me to formally introduce myself so that members could ask questions about the nature of my research. One person asked if I was an ethnomusicologist, and I was caught off guard. At the time, I had not considered the question because I was a student. Clendinning must have seen the gears turning in my head as I struggled to provide an answer. She jumped in: "Yes you are! Own it!" Other people present followed suit, contributing further signs of affirmation.

Halfway through the rehearsal, the ensemble took a break for snacks. People began striking up conversations, while graciously offering one another refreshments. There was a combination of students and community members present, with one commuting from Charlotte, North Carolina, an hour away. Despite the diverse identities and ages, members were able to come together and build bonds over a common interest in playing gamelan. This situation, and others I would experience, resonated with the accepting atmosphere and environment of support I had witnessed in Bali during the summer of 2023, but now within the context of North American institutions of higher learning.

Similar to Wake Forest University gamelan's rehearsals, the gamelan at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's (UTK Gamelan), in which I have participated for two years, has an inclusive social environment. Rehearsals also include a dedicated snack time, during which people talk to one another and share food that members of the group

have contributed to our prized "snack box." Another activity that helps establish this climate consists of introductions that occur whenever a new person attends a rehearsal—this could be a new member, or someone just checking out the group. Each member of the group introduces someone else in the room to the visitor, stating their name as well as a fun fact about them. This activity, while enjoyable, also deepens the bonds between members by having them participate in a mock show and tell, demonstrating what they know about each other as well as creating opportunities for people to get to know each other better. Members are also asked to share their favorite "rule," which were memorized until we recently committed a collection of them to a working document. These rules consist of silly inside jokes and important values that older members let new members in on during their first rehearsals. Some of these are funny, for example, "Do not open the portal," which essentially means, do not open your phone, with the term portal coming from our instructor, who refers to phones as portals that suck the energy out of the room. There are also rules that come from our instructor's Balinese mentor, I Wayan Sinti. Sinti's rule is "When loud, **LOUD**. When soft, *soft.*" This serves as an effective reminder to bring the music to life with appropriate dynamics and other types of expressivities. At the same time, it serves as a sentimental reminder of the international influences at work in our local community. The list also contains rules that emphasize the values of our ensemble, including such suggestions as, "Aspire to share what you know;" "It's better to be wrong together than right by yourself;" and "Everyone is important." These rules are meant to encourage and welcome new people who may not be confident with the conventions of the ensemble or in their playing ability. Furthermore, these rules are made by the community; in the process of creating the rules list the group met and

decided what rules we would set to ink and make official. We also occasionally add new ones, for example, when someone says something that sounds like it should be a “rule” going forward.

Jonathan Adams leads the UTK gamelan and strives to create a welcoming environment where students can learn to play gamelan and experience new ways of being musical in a stress-free atmosphere. The creation of this friendly and welcoming space is partly inspired by a desire to recreate the environment he experienced being around one of his mentors, the Balinese musician I Made Subandi. During my trip to Bali, I was fortunate to have met Pak Subandi. Pak Subandi was a lighthearted man who saw eye-to-eye with the people around him. Despite having an international reputation and an impressive career that includes many celebrated compositions, he maintained a humble and playful attitude. Before he passed away unexpectedly last year, he also spent a great deal of time and energy working with and supporting young people. Seeing how he interacted with musicians at several recording sessions reminded me of the atmosphere at UTK Gamelan rehearsals, where members enjoy a non-hierarchical environment and above all, we are encouraged to have fun while also learning.

These enthusiastic and fun experiences remind me of the way my friends and I would occasionally joke around in the University Wind Ensemble at Western Carolina University. However, in our case, this sociality was met with a reprimanding glare from the director, not encouragement. With those times now behind me, and my friends scattered around the United States following graduation, I have realized that most individuals my age seem to lack opportunities to be present with friends and joke around. While this could be interpreted as “becoming an adult” in North America, the fact that

people my age in Bali seem to find time for socialization, and within the context of serious music making, stuck with me upon my return to North America. I believe that the lack of these opportunities for young adults in North America is contributing to an ongoing epidemic of loneliness. Now recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many individuals suffered from loneliness exacerbated by strict isolation guidelines, many feel a sense of urgency to remedy these issues. I believe one remedy may lie within the energetic and welcoming atmospheres I have experienced participating in gamelan ensembles.

I believe that participation in a gamelan, and community music making more broadly, can serve as an important tool for combatting a worldwide mental health epidemic. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) found that five percent of people around the world suffer from depression (2023). While five percent may seem small, on a global scale this equates to around 394,104,000 individuals, or one in every twenty. The WHO also notes that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in individuals from the ages of fifteen to twenty-nine (2023). The severity of this is deeply personal to the individuals who suffer from it, yet often, such problems remain invisible or are inadequately treated. Being a member of a supportive community, however, can be beneficial, as I have observed within my research and participation in gamelan ensembles.

Many might have imagined that the end of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic would yield an increase in socializing, as individuals begin to leave their homes more frequently, resuming pre-pandemic activities, and finding comfort around others once again. However, many still struggle to recover from the effects of the

isolation. Further, rising trends in loneliness predate the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study conducted on the prevalence of loneliness in 113 countries, researchers found that "problematic levels of loneliness are experienced by a substantial proportion of the population in many countries" (Surkalim et al., 2022, pp. 1-2). Specifically, this study relied on data collected from January 2000 to December 2019, or pre-pandemic (Surkalim et al., 2022, pp. 1-2). While it is easy to breathe a sigh of relief as we return to a sense of normalcy in a post-pandemic society, it remains important to acknowledge that the social isolation endured during the pandemic, while exacerbating the trend, did not initiate this issue.

I have lost five of my loved ones to the act of suicide in my 24 years of life. These are losses that I have not taken easily: years of therapy have been necessary to process this grief and the complex emotions that come with loss. To Ethan, Ian, Wesley, Camden, and Eli, I love you all and though your time on Earth came to an abrupt and cruel end, I hope your memory will live on, not only through me but through the work done in this project. These losses have been a huge part of my life and shaped my values as a human and how I perceive life itself. Through this research, I hope to bring attention to these issues and let people know they are not alone, especially during times of decline in mental health. There is always a chance for a better day and new people to meet. Even if one person were to read this and be compelled to join a community music group to access the social and mental support I identify in this thesis, I would consider this project a success.

The growing sense of urgency to address the ongoing mental health crisis is reflected in the increasing number of studies on mental health in recent years (Ansdell et

al., 2016; Ansdell & DeNora, 2014; Batsleer, 2020; Brown et al., 2024; Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020; Cox et al., 2019; Groarke et al., 2024; Kiernan & Davidson, 2022; Loth, 2014; Masi et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2019, 2021; Surkalim et al., 2022; Wilkinson, 2001). However, within the realm of scholarship on gamelan music, few scholars have addressed the crisis, or how gamelan ensembles could serve as a potential remedy. This subject, however, came up during an interview with Andy McGraw, an ethnomusicologist and director of two gamelans at the University of Richmond, Virginia. McGraw stated: "I think the real story here right now—and I think we [Americans] have struggled to tell this story, but I think it's really important—is the pro-social aspect of it [university gamelan] within the context of cultures in which we have an epidemic of loneliness" (Andy McGraw, personal communication, November 15, 2023). I found this statement compelling. It put some of my feelings into words, and the fact that it came from such a widely respected expert on gamelan music made me more confident about the direction of my research. It also confirmed the lack of scholarship on this topic, as well as the capacity for gamelan ensembles to be pro-social environments in the United States.

Within the context of an ongoing mental health crisis among university students, I believe gamelan ensembles, which are already in close proximity to students, have the potential to alleviate some of the effects of the crisis. Broadly speaking, I propose community music as a remedy for the ongoing mental health crisis. I believe gamelan has the potential to be an exceptional remedy, particularly in the case of students at institutions of higher learning. Engaging with scholarship pertaining to mental health studies and communal musicking practices, I argue that, with the ongoing and growing mental health crisis amongst young adults in university settings, community music

making groups can serve as a bastion of mental well-being and socialization. Specifically, within my research, I look to gamelan ensembles as a potential therapeutic modality: they are already entwined within the North American university system, making them readily available to both university students and broader university communities. This is not to say that gamelan or any other community group is a cure-all for the ongoing crisis, but I argue that gamelan can be utilized alongside other mental well-being activities, like therapy or prescription medication, to help individuals achieve better mental wellness.

Scope, Parameters & Definition of Terminology

Well-being, loneliness, and mental health are terms that get used interchangeably at times, but each carries its own implications and nuances. In this work, I position loneliness as closely tied to poor well-being or mental health. While individuals may equate loneliness to different emotions or feelings, the World Health Organization identifies loneliness as a symptom of depressive disorder, defined as "a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time" (2023). While this is a good baseline for assessing depression, individuals may experience it differently. The World Health Organization also offers a "well-being index," a series of questions created to estimate one's well-being. This index asks individuals to measure how they are feeling on a scale of one to five and then adds up the score to indicate one's well-being on a scale of zero (poor well-being) to twenty-five (excellent well-being). The focus of this index is on how the participant perceives their daily life and comfort throughout the day and allows for qualitative data to be gathered on a matter pertaining to individuals' emotions. Negative well-being in this case is associated with individuals lacking certain feelings, such as being "calm/relaxed, active, rested, and [in] good spirits" (WHO, 1998). The last

question in the index asks participants how often they participate in things that interest them. This question has special relevance for this research, with communal musicking potentially serving as an activity of such interest.

Scholars have noted the efficacy of creating music together in forging meaning and lasting relationships. Christopher Small (1999) states, “The act of musicking brings into existence among those present a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act of musicking lies” (p. 13). By designating musicking as a verb, Small positions the music making as an action, which creates space for acknowledging the creation of bonds with fellow performers and parallels the last indicator on the WHO index. In my personal experience, participation in communal music making has provided me with a meaningful space. Once a week, I can clear my mind of deadlines and projects, and work with others toward a common goal, while building relationships.

To create a qualitative guide to reducing loneliness, Masi et al. (2011) provide four strategies that can help reduce loneliness. These strategies are “improving social skills, enhancing social support, increasing opportunities for social interaction, and addressing maladaptive social cognition” (Masi et al., 2011, p. 6). In this thesis, I map these four strategies onto examples of community music making, both in my fieldwork and in examples from other scholars. In doing so, I gauge the efficacy of community musicking, and gamelan in particular, as a tool to combat loneliness.

For this project, I specifically identify the benefits provided by playing gamelan within the context of North American institutions of higher learning. Gamelans in North America are not representative of gamelans in Indonesia. It is important to note that

throughout this project when using the term gamelan, I am referencing gamelan within North America (except where I have stated explicitly otherwise). Furthermore, gamelans in North America, in and outside of institutions of higher learning, are not a monoculture and vary in their goals. Even gamelans within North American institutions of higher learning vary a great deal. Clendinning notes that these "speak to different educational agendas that can be envisioned on a spectrum from focusing on pre-professionalism (the conservatory model, based on demonstrated musical and sometimes cultural competency) to experientialism and creating a well-rounded graduate (the liberal arts model)" (2020, p. 56).

In this project, I engage with ensembles on the experiential side of Clendinning's spectrum. I specifically argue that experiential focused ensembles improve the accessibility of positive mental well-being for members and the community. Clendinning's ideas serve as a foundation for this work as I aim to further explore the gamelan-related benefits of self-discovery and connections that she discusses. By playing in an experiential gamelan, members gain access to a healthy community of support.

Creating a community, at a basic level, consists of people coming together. McMillan and Chavis (1986) identify four elements of a community:

> The first element is membership. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is influence, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last

> element is shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. (p. 9)

These elements emphasize individuals' feelings within a community as an important aspect of what constitutes a community.

Furthermore, Szahaj (2016) defines ten aspects of a "good" community, with eight of these closely mirroring features of McMillan and Chavis' elements. Szahaj defines a good community as one that is *constructive*, meaning that it has been made consciously by autonomous individuals. The next aspect is being *just*, in that each member is treated equally. Another is *communal*, meaning that members can rely on one another for empathy and solidarity. Next is *inclusivity*, meaning the community is accepting of anyone who wishes to join. A good community is also *pluralistic*, with the group respecting internal diversity of perspectives. And finally, a good community is *participatory*, whereby being an active member of the community is encouraged (Szahaj, 2016, pp. 213-215). These traits coupled with McMillan's & Chavis's elements allow us to gauge music making's efficacy in creating a community, and more specifically, one that is good.

The range of a community created through music making can extend beyond any single group, resulting in an intraregional network stretching across a wide geographic region, as described by Clendinning (2020, p. 92), or remain as small as the local and close-knit community of single gamelan at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. However, it should be noted, that even local communities have wide webs of

connections, as is true for the UTK Gamelan, which I explore later in this thesis. For this research, however, I largely focus on the local communities that form around common geographical locations, but it is important to note that even such local communities transcend their local geographies in important ways.

Local communities, of course, span much further than my research encompasses, which attests to the legacies behind them. Clendinning identifies this as a pedagogical lineage and argues that "teaching gamelan in the United States fosters local and global musical communities, creates transnational musical lineages, and affects teachers and students in the United States and in Indonesia" (2020, p. 14). Even within the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's gamelan, our pedagogical lineage stretches from our current instructor to the Balinese musicians he studied with, their teachers, as well as several guest artists that our instructor has brought to work with us in Knoxville. Together, they inform our rehearsal practices and the nature of the community that emerges from them.

Discussion of Theoretical Frame & Methodology Employed

In this thesis, I draw upon research methods that include interviews and participant observation, as well as experiences playing in gamelan communities in North America. My methods are further informed by Liz Przybylski's *Hybrid Ethnography* (2021), in particular, how to carry out research that is both in-person and online. By reaching out to communities online, I was able to establish a wider reach, beyond my geographical location. I was also able to facilitate interviews with collaborators over video calls. While internet-based research does not replace face-to-face interaction, it supplements live experiences by allowing for introductions to happen online, in turn perhaps facilitating future face-to-face interactions. I conducted interviews with members

of the gamelans I have worked with, and these were not limited by any demographic or specific identifiers. Most interviews were preceded by face-to-face interaction with the intention of meeting virtually at a later date over Zoom or Microsoft Teams. To further supplement the information I gathered in interviews, I also conducted an online survey.

For this project, I engaged with three communities: Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina; Wake Forest University in Winston Salem, North Carolina; and The University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. These sites were picked not just for their geographical closeness but also because these universities have active gamelans, each with its own unique community supported by the ensemble. Engagement with these ensembles involved observing and participating in rehearsals, as well as interviewing instructors and members.

Gamelan Giri Murti at Wake Forest University was obtained in 2015 by Elizabeth Clendinning and consists of community members and students. The gamelan at Western Carolina University was established in 1999 by William Peebles, and usually has a supportive group of community members and students but currently consists of only students, a lasting effect of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The ensemble at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was brought to the school in 2018 by Leslie Gay, and since 2021 been led by Jonathan Adams. The members of this group consist of a mixture of students and community members. Each of these ensembles are unique, but they share similarities in emphasizing experiential music making. In chapter three, I further dive into these ensembles and their corresponding environments at each respective university.

Gamelan Music's Proliferation Beyond Indonesia

Scholarship on gamelan has exploded into a complex multifaceted body of literature since it first emerged in the late 19th century. Many aspects have been examined and debated. One key thread maintained throughout the scholarship on gamelans in institutions of higher education is that of its pedagogical benefits, including "bi-musicality" as first conceptualized by Hood (1960). Gamelan music's proliferation across the United States academic scene was supported by the pedagogical aim of exposing students to music different from their own, perpetuating the pedagogical benefits that Hood initially proposed. It is important to understand the background of gamelan ensembles being established within United States academic systems as it is the foundation and basis for future works on gamelan music's entanglement within such institutions.

In 1960 Mantle Hood considered the benefits that the "conditioned Western musician" could gain through learning music from other cultures (p. 56). He stated that the practice of musicality of different cultures "prepares the way for the professional activities of the performer, the composer, the musicologist, and the music educator" (Hood, 1960, p. 55). Two years prior to this publication, Hood had started the gamelan ensemble at UCLA, about which, he praises the fact that "there are several advanced graduate students who manage themselves quite capably in several different musical cultures" (1960, p. 59). The use of gamelan as a pedagogical tool within the curriculum of schools of music that followed is largely responsible for their presence and unique relationship with North American institutions of higher learning.

At the same time, notions about bi-musicality have grown and changed with the proliferation of new ideas and the growth of musicology as a discipline, as evident in the writings of Clendinning (2020), Deschênes (2018), and Titon (1995). For instance, Titon pulls the idea of bi-musicality away from its original pedagogical connotations, explaining that, "For me, bi-musicality has never just meant lessons in acquiring musical technique. Bi-musicality helps me understand musicking in the world, and my being in the world musically, from a particular viewpoint: the musical knowing that follows from musical being" (1995, p. 296). By removing its pedagogical connotations and emphasizing the understanding of culture and one's position within the larger world of music, Titon argues for a more inclusive definition of bi-musicality, one that is not constrained by an individual's skill level in a musical practice but that instead perpetuates understanding and knowledge.

With the line between the binary established by *bi* in bi-musicality being increasingly blurred, perhaps it should be abandoned altogether for a more encompassing or inclusive term. This is a sentiment that Deschênes (2018) argues for, stating:

> the scope of the term bi-musicality is too narrow. I would rather suggest the use of the term transmusicality, since the learning … involves much more than learning an instrument, theoretical constructs, and a repertoire or style of music (p. 276).

Deschênes argues for the concept of *transmusicality* because the learning of another culture's music requires much more than just learning an instrument. Rather, North American university students must "get down from the Western musical ivory tower to let another music reach [them]" (2018, p. 288). This process expands a musician's ideas

of what it means to be musical, beyond their day-to-day experience in music. Moving beyond the simplicity of bi-musicality as learning new music, transmusicality is much more complex, as musicians' ideas of musicality are challenged or broadened, by practicing music from other cultures.

Gamelan music's introduction into the North American academic system was originally encouraged through pedagogical values that were tied to the ensembles. However, as these ensembles have become more entangled with institutions, a myriad of other benefits have begun to be noted. Clendinning (2020) identifies a few. She describes how gamelan music has grown past the initial pedagogical agenda and how gamelans "have become models of experiential, liberal arts-style educations in which the ensemble is meant to provide nonspecialists with a type of hands-on musical and cultural enrichment that cannot be found elsewhere" (2020, p. 56). Over time, these ensembles have become less focused on enriching the musicality of their members and more focused on providing an experience to learn about culture. However, this is not the case in every ensemble, as Clendinning's spectrum highlights that these ensembles have "different educational agendas" (2020, p. 56). Clendinning also mentions beneficial aspects that these ensembles have beyond the institution where they are kept, including those that extend to Indonesian musicians. For example, Indonesians are often brought into the United States as guest artists and help teach these ensembles, while working towards degrees of higher education (2020, p. 73). She also highlights the safe space these ensembles provide to their students by specifically referencing an anecdotal experience from her gamelan ensemble at Wake Forest University. The ensemble at Wake Forest provides students with "a safe context … to learn about others while they explored

expressing themselves artistically" (Clendinning, 2020, p. 121). As gamelan ensembles have become entangled with academic institutions, the benefits of their presence have grown beyond the original pedagogical agenda that initially brought them there.

The zeitgeist, during which these ensembles were placed in North American institutions of higher learning, was borne from a focus on the pedagogical benefits they can offer to music students. However, as these ensembles have become more ingrained in North American music curricula, the benefits they offer have grown beyond simple pedagogy. While many scholars continue to discuss at length the role of bi-musicality, I believe it is time to move beyond this narrow view of engaging with gamelan music in a university curriculum.

Community Music Making as a Remedy

Some scholars have noted the efficacy of community music making as a remedy to the recent decline in mental well-being. Through participation in these ensembles, bonds can be formed with fellow members. These environments also allow for a safe space for self-expression. The same can be said about gamelan ensembles. For example, its use in prisons, adult literacy programs, and even efforts to support children on the autism spectrum are clear examples of its capacity to support mental well-being (Bakan et al., 2008; Eastburn, 2003; McIntosh, 2012). However, I was unable to find scholarship directly focused on these increases in participants' mental health or well-being. Such research does exist concerning other types of music making, including community rap groups, chorus groups, and drumming circles.

Thomas Turino (2008) writes about the importance of participatory or community music making groups in ways that can help us identify features of this activity that make

them uniquely qualified to support mental well-being. Turino defines participatory music as focusing "on the activity, on the doing, and on the other participants, rather than on an end product that results from the activity" (2008, p. 24). By removing the focus on the end product, he argues that participatory traditions, "allow more people to take part in the artistic realm over a lifetime, ha[ving] important benefits for individual and social health" (2008, p. 51). This highlights the value of community music making that is based on participation and inclusion. By being more inclusive, these ensembles allow participants to have more agency within the group as well as facilitate the forming of bonds between members.

Scholars have also noted the benefits provided by participatory music making in the realm of music therapy (Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020; Mitchell, 2021), which will be further explored in chapter two. By acknowledging what community-based musicking can do for participants, I aim to position gamelan ensembles as community-based groups that boast similar benefits. Specifically, gamelan ensembles' proximity to universities means they could provide these benefits to college-aged young adults who attend these institutions—the very demographic most affected by today's loneliness epidemic.

Gamelans as Community Music Ensembles

As I discuss in chapter two, community music ensembles are diverse, with examples ranging from air guitar bands to group drumming (Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020; Mitchell, 2021). For this project, I focus on gamelans that are experientially focused community groups at institutions of higher learning. In chapter three I go into much greater detail about how experientially focused community gamelans demonstrate

an adeptness for creating communities and providing support to their members. As stated previously, I have always advocated for mental health and well-being, and this project extends from that passion. It is through my own experiences in a gamelan ensemble that I was led to frame this project on experiential university gamelans through the lens of mental health and well-being. By playing in the gamelan at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I have witnessed firsthand how a community continues to grow around this ensemble as bonds are formed between new members that contain the potential to become lasting friendships. Within the context of an experiential focus, several aspects, unique to gamelan music, help in promoting this community.

The primary factor of university gamelans that supports the creation of communities lies in their experiential values, which are further complimented by certain aspects of gamelan music. One such aspect found in Balinese gamelan is *ombak*, the shimmering wave-like effect created by the paired tuning of the instruments (Gold, 2005, p. 33). In an experientially focused group, the necessity of two individuals to produce *ombak* places an emphasis on participation. It is simply not possible to play this music "in-tune" without a partner. Furthermore, *kotekan* (interlocking patterns played by two or more individuals), also requires two people to realize (Gold, 2005, p. 58). Requiring two players to realize a single melody further promotes participation by inviting players to focus on the composite sound of the group, which works together to create a unified sound. Features like *ombak* and *kotekan* are not indicative of a community being present, but when paired with the experiential values of the university gamelans I worked with, they encourage the formation of bonds between members. Gamelan itself is a niche music

making practice in North America, thus concepts like *ombak* and *kotekan* are unknown to the average layperson.

Overview of Thesis

The following chapters further define and explore the extent of the ongoing mental health crisis as well as the possible roles of community music making within this crisis. Overall, I argue that gamelan music has the potential to help mend these issues. In subsequent chapters, I establish the extent of the ongoing mental health crisis through engaging with studies on rising levels of negative mental health. Then, I position community musicking practices, and gamelan in particular, as one partial remedy for this crisis. I also discuss at length the scholarship upon which this thesis rests, while simultaneously demonstrating gaps in literature in terms of identifying community music as a remedy for poor mental health and well-being.

In chapter two, I engage with scholarship pertaining to the ongoing mental health crisis, establishing data from several regions and cultures, thus extending the boundaries of this study to a larger population (Groarke et al., 2024; Oldenburg, 1997; Surkalim et al., 2022). I also further identify possible reasons for the decline in mental wellness in younger individuals. I then explore how capitalism can stifle community music making experiences. Throughout the chapter, I also explore cases where community music has been documented as a remedy or prescription for improving mental health, with examples ranging from drum circles to rap groups (Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020; Turino, 2008). I also utilize my research in the field to supplement this scholarship, as well as my own experiences playing in gamelan ensembles. After all, I am part of the demographic I am writing about, due to my participation in the University of Tennessee, Knoxville’s

gamelan ensemble, and my own mental health struggles that I have dealt with most of my life. In this chapter, my own experiences serve as a springboard to highlight the experience of others, garnered both from my field experiences and through scholarship on the topic.

In chapter three, I examine the different types of gamelan communities that form in North America and how these communities can be shaped through larger intraregional gamelan networks, as well as the Indonesian artists who helped establish them. Then I explore the mental and communal benefits of experiential university gamelans. I draw upon my fieldwork with three experientially focused university gamelans, as well as interviews and data collected through a survey. Through the framework of Chavis and McMillan's elements of community, Szahaj's aspects of a good community, and Masi et al.'s strategies to reduce loneliness, I examine the efficacy of these ensembles in creating good communities and reducing loneliness.

Lastly, I owe every collaborator who helped inform this project a great debt. Within my own experiences, I have wrestled with my own mental well-being for most of my life and have been in therapy for several years. This project is fueled by my own feelings and passions, and I would like to thank the many individuals who have made this possible through either support or participation. Without these people, I do not know where I would be and I extend my greatest thanks for believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

Chapter 2: An Epidemic of Loneliness and Potential Solutions Through Music Making

Introduction

In an interview conducted over video call, I discussed the efficacy of gamelan ensembles to create social bonds with Andy McGraw, ethnomusicologist and director of gamelan programs at the University of Richmond, Virginia. In the interview, McGraw highlighted the accessible and sociable nature of university gamelan ensembles, stating that there are,

> positive social effects of engaging face to face in creative acts and creative activities in which there aren't winners or losers. It's not sports, but sports have a great benefit too. But in activities like gamelan, string band, taiko, pan drum, shape-note singing, or these kinds of ensembles, where there isn't a terribly high bar musically and that they're kind of engineered for the average community and their range of interests and abilities. Like anybody can count to eight and hit a gong. Not everyone can walk in and play a note on an oboe with it in tune or something. And with the gamelan tradition, as you know, you can take it as far as you want to go in terms of depth and virtuosity. And there aren't a lot of ensembles like that. (personal communication, November 15, 2023)

McGraw describes gamelans as one of the many music ensembles "engineered for the average community." He also highlights their accessibility and capacity for creating meaningful social bonds. When McGraw states that "anybody can count to eight and hit a

gong," he is drawing attention to the fact that repertoire exists that is immediately accessible to beginners, while also emphasizing that "you can take it as far as you want to go in terms of depth and virtuosity." These features make gamelans especially adept at creating social bonds between members and establishing a larger sense of community, benefits that are key to slowing the ongoing decline in mental health.

In this chapter, I highlight major sources of mental duress. I begin by deconstructing the American dream through the eyes of millennials and Generation Z, then move into the negative effects that capitalism can have on music making. In a capitalist society, monetary gain and the value of goods and services are emphasized, and as such both the process of making music and individuals' self-worth are often defined by the quality of the product they create. With such a large emphasis on the worth of a final presentable product, low stress music making experiences, like gamelan (as typically encountered in the experiential ensembles I have studied), are undervalued and have often been pushed to the side in favor of professional-level performance practices.

Disillusionment With the American Dream

I argue that the disillusionment of the American Dream in millennials and Generation Z is a contributing factor to the rise in their experience with detrimental mental health effects. While the wide-scale impacts of this disillusionment may seem daunting or even hopeless, I believe that a remedy lies in participatory music practices, such as gamelan, to help combat rising levels of negative mental health.

Economic inequities and lack of economic mobility have left younger adults harboring feelings of helplessness. The idealized American dream, at its core, is about the mobility of economic class (Hanson & White, 2011, p. 3). Typical rags-to-riches stories

come to mind that promise success through hard work in the land of opportunity that is the United States. But with the realities surrounding the current lack of mobility, a disconnect has formed between ideal and reality, leading to negative mental health for many. Putnam (2016) explains, “Americans believe that income inequality has increased in recent years, and they are right about that” (p. 43). A common joke I have heard among my peers embodies this sentiment: “Instead of playing with Legos and Barbies when I was four, I should have been investing in the housing market, stupid me.” Individuals of college age, disillusioned with the American dream, have begun to feel helpless or powerless, and in turn, a decline in overall mental well-being has set in, which often manifests as anxiety, depression, and loneliness. While the disparity in wages may not directly affect some younger millennials or Gen Zs, it did affect their parents, potentially barring some younger millennials and Gen Zs from sociable activities or clubs that required money to participate. This includes music, sports, theater, or other extracurricular interests.

When millennials and Gen Zs began to enter the workforce, they did so with childhood memories of their parents struggling to make ends meet or endure crises, which influenced them in their developmental years and laid the seeds for the problems they now face. Regarding the increasing wage gap’s effect on their parents, Putnam states, “Even ideal parenting cannot compensate for all the ill effects of poverty on children, and even incompetent parenting cannot nullify all the advantages conferred by parental affluence and education” (2016, p. 134). No matter how nurturing a parent may be, they may not have the financial capital to support a child’s learning or interests. In turn, parents who lack parenting skills but enjoy financial stability can pay fees that bar

entry for those who are less fortunate. The lack of financial capital is further exacerbated by the privatization of social networks, communities, and community institutions that were once public and helped children and parents equally (Putnam, 2016, p. 226). With the privatization of community activities and fees to join music making or other social experiences, the children of parents who could not afford these were excluded which can lead to feelings of isolation.

Not all is hopeless, however. Young adults can diminish the negative effects of disillusionment by forming communities of support. Participatory music making lends itself perfectly to the creation of such communities in special ways. David Gauntlett (2011) describes the unique benefits of participating in a community that creates, crafts, or produces art, stating, "Through creative activity, where making is connecting, we can increase our pleasure in everyday life, unlock innovative capacity, and build resilience in our communities, so that we can face future challenges with confidence and originality" (p. 245). I believe such music making groups, where the focus is on the process and wherein the collective product is made by the members and for the members, could be a potent remedy to the diminishing mental well-being of young adults.

Music Making in A Capitalist Society

Capitalism places an emphasis on services and the selling of goods, often placing music in the role of a service or saleable good. Turino (1997) shed light on the effects this has on music making through a comparison of participatory versus presentational music. He explains that "Participatory music is *not* for listening apart from doing: presentational music is prepared by musicians for others to listen to" (1997, p. 52). Presentational music focuses on preparation for an audience, and with that focus comes anxiety to provide a

high-quality product that meets their expectations. The source of this anxiety comes from the fact that “in the United States, the presentational and recorded fields are most highly valued, and commercial popular music is the type most widely known” (Turino, 1997, p. 51).

Further adding to the anxiety associated with presentational music, Turino explains that “because public musicking is so strongly associated with professional presentational performance … North Americans will typically gauge themselves against the stars” (1997, p. 50). The value of professional presentational music alongside self-comparison to popular musicians, instills anxiety within those who would dare to call themselves musicians. These anxieties manifest through a fear of failing to gain an audience’s approval, or anxieties surrounding self-imposed expectations when comparing oneself to professionals. Thus, many American citizens choose not to engage in participatory or presentational music making, paralyzed by fear of not being good enough, and unaware of opportunities for, or the value of, participatory music making experiences. Participatory music has been undervalued, due to its focus on the members engaged in making music together rather than an end product that will be marketed or sold.

By joining community ensembles, North Americans can begin to normalize public music making, without the anxieties born out of comparison with pop stars. However, normalizing communities outside of a workplace or home requires the establishment of a space away from the stressors of work or domestic duties. Oldenburg (1997) further argues this point in his discussion of the “third space,” which he describes as a neutral ground: “The *raison d’etre* of the third place rests upon its differences from

the other settings of daily life" (p. 23). Unfortunately, third spaces are largely absent, as those spaces are frequently taken up with commerce, leaving fewer venues for community exchange and sociality (Oldenburg, 1997, p. 19). I believe that the illusion of the American Dream and capitalism's omnipotence combined with anxieties around music making have stifled opportunities to connect with others through musicking. However, there are potential remedies to this, including participation in gamelan music, and other community music groups that facilitate the production of third spaces for their participants.

Symptoms of Poor Mental Health

The deterioration of the American dream and pressures of capitalism are major contributing factors to the decline in mental well-being or health among millennials and Generation Z. Zogby claims that "many who reject the ideal of the American Dream feel powerless" (2011, p. 113). The feeling of being powerless is just one of many feelings associated with the decline in mental well-being, with others including loneliness, anxiety, or depression. These feelings represent symptoms of poor mental well-being, and each comes with its own detriments and ill effects. Each also invites different modes of treatment.

A sense of irony surrounds feeling lonely in the digital age, where humans are more connected than ever. Still, it is important to acknowledge that these feelings are very real and legitimate, despite so many of us being just a couple of taps away from talking to someone. Loneliness is defined as "the pain one feels as a result of a discrepancy between one's social needs and one's ability to satisfy those needs" (Cox et al., 2019, p. 2). The unprecedented increase in social media throughout adolescence has

altered how young adults perceive their own social needs, creating a disconnect between their perceived needs, and their ability to fulfill them. Batsleer (2020) highlights this, stating “the inflation in the quantity of possible connection due to the abundance of Internet-mediated social relationships creates new desires and expectations of connection, friendship and popularity” (p. 108). The unprecedented increase in sociable online relationships has exacerbated the disconnect between perceived social connection and desired social connection.

Furthermore, millennials are more geographically mobile than ever before, less likely to attend regular religious ceremonies, and less likely to be married (Cox et al., 2019, p. 11). By not belonging to a community and traveling more often, it has been harder for people to find a sense of belonging and establish roots in a local community. This has subsequently led to an increase in feelings of loneliness (Cox et al., 2019, p. 13). Along with this isolation, comes feelings of not belonging or alienation, further exacerbating the initial feelings of loneliness. To make matters worse, in the United States there are “powerful social and psychological pressures to appear socially successful, and loneliness is thus something that young people, like others, may seek to hide or deny, and find difficult to talk about” (Batsleer, 2020, p. 2). This has contributed to a stigma around loneliness, and people failing to reach out for help.

Caused by uncertainty and tumultuous world events, millennials and Generation Z have a growing sense of anxiety about the future and their place in the world. Anxiety itself is defined by Wilkinson (2001) as being “comprised of a complex emotional process which involves not only our thoughts but also our physiology and behavior” (p. 15). The root of this emotion stems from “a situation of threatening uncertainty”

(Wilkinson, 2001, p. 17). Wilkinson describes a rise of anxiety in the general public as people become more "risk conscious" (2001, p. 5). In a risk conscious society, the availability of information, through social media and accessibility to news, has made the general public more aware of the risks that can befall them. Specifically, within the demographic of college students, the uncertainty of post-graduation life and heavy reliance on and exposure to the Internet contribute to growing risk consciousness (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 120). Being glued to global news and social media does not help either.

Wilkinson identifies a few things that could lead to high anxiety as well as its potential effects. He states, "Where unemployment is high, job insecurity is rife, the divorce rate increases, and people are unable to maintain close confiding relationships, then we should expect them to be particularly vulnerable to the experience of anxiety" (2001, p. 58). These are potential risks to millennials and Generation Z, particularly as they become adults. Wilkinson further identifies issues with individualization, stating that "The loss of community and tradition, and the modern experience of work and employment are all conceived as having contributed towards the development of a social environment in which we are made vulnerable to the distress of anxiety" (2001, p. 18). Individualization has placed the burden on individuals to find communities where they can feel a sense of belonging.

One issue faced by many millennials and Generation Z, and one that I have especially struggled with, is depression, which is also on the rise. Depression is "the presence of sad, empty, or irritable mood, accompanied by related changes that significantly affect the individual's capacity to function" (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013, p. 156). This was highlighted during the global COVID-19 pandemic when I and many others in my cohort spent formative years in social isolation and online video classes. In examining the lasting effects that the pandemic had on college students, Brown et al. (2024) found that "For depression symptoms, there was a significant quadratic effect such that depression symptom scores peaked eight months following the pandemic's onset (around Dec 2020/Jan 2021) and then went back towards pre-pandemic levels" (p. 556). This parabolic effect was in part attributed to the seasonal depression of the winter, but accentuated by "the lack of social support, health issues and anxieties, and/or lack of opportunities to visit family and friends" (Brown et al., 2024, p. 556). The inability to see friends or family, coupled with greater concerns about physical health during a global pandemic, led to an unprecedented rise in seasonal depression, much greater than the typical trend found during the winter months. Depression can be difficult to deal with. Its detrimental impact on the individual's ability to function can in turn lead to more negative feelings about oneself and spiral out of control. However, activities like community music making, where the primary expectation is to be present and participate, can help ease depression and isolation.

Participatory Music Making's Efficacy Against Loneliness, Anxiety, and Depression

Many scholars have acknowledged music making's efficacy in creating bonds between individuals. I aim to highlight these benefits and discuss them further using Chavis and McMillan's (1986) elements of community as a guide, which include "membership, influence, integration or fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection" (p. 9). Furthermore, to show that these communities are beneficial to their members I engage with the aspects of what Andrzej Szahaj (2016) calls a good

community, they must be “constructive, just, communal, inclusive, pluralistic, and participatory” (pp. 213-215). Such communities, I argue, enable members to engage with the four strategies for reducing loneliness as laid out by Masi et al. (2011). These are “improving social skills, enhancing social support, increasing opportunities for socialization, and addressing maladaptive social cognition” (p. 6). With a framework established by linking this scholarship, I aim to show that gamelan ensembles at universities can create communities of support for their members. In this chapter, I apply this framework to examples of community music making more broadly. This framing will be unpacked further and applied to the three communities surrounding gamelans I worked with during fieldwork in Chapter 3.

Individuals seeking a sense of belonging can find it in participatory musicking, a term coined by Christopher Small that means, “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance” (1999, p. 12). As Ansdell (2017) states, in such musicking opportunities, individuals create “a hospitable community of musical practice for themselves—and with it a modest and realistic mode of belonging” (p. 62). Through participation, individuals can create the third space—discussed above—that is increasingly lacking in American society. In such a space, participants are no longer bound by hierarchies or the labels of “employee” or “head of household;” rather they all unite under the same title: member. In such an environment, symptoms of poor well-being and mental health can be lessened by feelings of belonging. Additionally, participants are given a sense of agency by being able to “create their own modes of community and belonging,” no longer defined by wider societal boundaries (Ansdell, 2017, p. 61). The metaphorical breaking of societal

chains that occurs in such contexts also allows for further engagement with other participants and even introspective reflection on one's own identity.

The fact that agency is returned to the participant mirrors McMillan & Chavis's second element of community, namely, one's *influence* in the group, meaning "a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members" (McMillian & Chavis, 1968, p. 9). Music ensembles utilized in the context of music therapy provide agency to members and allow for socialization by removing societal labels and instilling a sense of belonging to the group. Some might argue that in this case, it is not the music itself that is the remedy, but rather the socialization and community formed around it. For example, speaking of various music therapy contexts that focus on ensemble playing, Ansdell and DeNora (2014) suggest that "In all cases, it is not the music per se that accomplishes this enhancement but rather what is done with, done to, and done alongside musical engagement" (p. 9). However, I would argue that it is the activity of musicking itself that creates the space in which these benefits become more readily accessible. The sociality that Ansdell and DeNora praise is important, but the musicking itself is also important.

The act of musicking together also facilitates multiple of Masi et al.'s strategies for combatting loneliness. Creating strong bonds between members who create music together leads to individuals "enhancing social support." (2011, p. 9). Furthermore, by participating in the musicking individuals practice Masi et al.'s third strategy of "increasing opportunities for socialization" (2011, p. 9). In the situations described by Ansdell and DeNora, the low stress music making environment provides members the

opportunity to socialize with others and develop deep bonds of support between one another.

Further highlighting the sociality of musicking, Gauntlett (2011) argues, "Making is connecting because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people" (p. 2). The music provides comfort that may not be found in a more formal treatment setting, such as a doctor's office. The music acts as a metaphorical spoonful of sugar that promotes relaxation and connection; here the full benefits of socialization in participatory music making may be achieved.

Participatory music making also affords less invasive means of treatment for mental health issues, with no prescribed medication or medical personnel needed on site. One such project, entitled the St Mary Abbotts Rehabilitation and Training (SMART), aimed to utilize the noninvasive nature of participatory music making as a means of music therapy to community members in the western London area of Chelsea. This project started as a charity run by psychiatrists, who aimed to help patients reenter the surrounding community after being hospitalized (Ansdell et al., 2016, p. 2). In this project, many beneficial effects were noted in music's ability to create a therapeutic space:

> The music project accommodates variety and diversity, and works against segregation…. The project is accessible and tolerant…. The project addresses needs flexibly and encourages recovery…. The project celebrates variety and generates new musical experiences…. The SMART project bridges sites, models of care, and experiences of illness/health. (Ansdell et al., 2016, pp. 193-195)

By creating an inclusive jam session open to anyone in the SMART community, this project facilitated an environment of accessibility, encouraged healthy mental growth, and fostered expression through musicianship. The project emphasized feelings of "hospitality" and "belonging," further highlighting the communal effect that music has in bringing people together (Ansdell et al., 2016, p. 194). By creating this third space through community music making, participants were able to alleviate stress while also creating opportunities for socialization.

Repeated opportunities for socialization promote lasting bonds between members. By having routine rehearsals over long spans of time, members build relationships and "share experience over months and years. This helps with the 'creative maintenance' of a chronic illness and its accompanying psycho-social problems, not just through professional help, but via peer support" (Ansdell et al., 2016, p. 194). Community music programs allow members to build lasting relationships with one another that start with common topics surrounding the music they are making but easily expand to include other common interests. The continuous peer support over long spans of time that Ansdell et al. highlight maps onto McMillan and Chavis' fourth element of community, which is "shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences" (1986, p. 9). Members are given the chance to put themselves into a social scene, while also maintaining a sense of safety within the less social and more musical aspects of the ensemble.

Musical activities can also provide the perfect environment for comradery, in addition to community. In Australia, The Scattered People participatory music program

created a vehicle for refugees to regain a sense of what was lost. Refugees seeking asylum were able to "regain a sense of being human, create a sense of community, develop resilience, and regain agency" by singing songs from their home countries and sharing music with refugees from other countries, all while contained in the hostile environment of detainment (Lenette et al., 2016, p. 129). This program consists of musicians, asylum seekers, and refugees and aims to "share positive messages of solidarity and hope" (Lenette et al., 2016, p. 126). Within the harsh conditions of the detainment camp, individuals from around the world came together and formed a sense of community around music and being detained. Further highlighting music's efficacy, the researchers observed that "music played a key role in providing respite from dire circumstances of collective fear, despair, and trauma, while at the same time encouraging the formation of a more positively based sense of community" (Lenette et al., 2016, p. 131). By providing an environment where refugees can empathize with one another and safely express their shared negative feelings, through the medium of music making, the refugees were able to come together and contribute to creating a sense of comradery and community.

One case study focused specifically on promoting youth mental health in Ontario, Canada, shows just how successful these programs can be. The Sing It Girls group was formed by music therapist Adrienne Pringle and mental health professional Cathy Thompson to "help young girls and early adolescents grow healthy self-esteem while also helping to minimize anxiety which can be prominent during these years" (Clements-Cortés & Pascoe, 2020, p. 39). Through engagement with the Sing It Girls group, Clements-Cortés and Pascoe found, "Group singing is an effective tool for promoting

youth mental health because it increases social capital and positive affect; reduces stress and anxiety; and improves self-esteem, sense of purpose, and sense of identity" (2020, p. 38). This community uplifts and supports one another through their music, including through singing and breathing techniques taught during the 45-minute classes (Clements-Cortés and Pascoe, 2020, p. 39). These benefits may not have been the participants' intention when joining the group. Nonetheless, this group provides a third space for the community members through the medium of singing together.

Clements-Cortés and Pascoe further identify the DRUMBEAT project as beneficial to youth mental health. The DRUMBEAT project aims to "provide youth with the opportunity to engage in musical expression as a means of increasing self-esteem and social competencies to reduce feelings of alienation" (Clements-Cortés and Pascoe, 2020, p. 38). Clements-Cortés and Pascoe conclude that "The social, emotional, and intrapersonal benefits of participating in group drumming and singing programs make these activities an effective tool in promoting youth mental health; implementation of and engagement in such initiatives should be encouraged" (2020, p. 39). These groups achieve the betterment of youth mental health not by placing the label of patient on the participants, but rather by allowing participants to place their mental health issues in the backseat. As members participate in the group, others view them through the inclusive and equalizing lens of community, mirroring the just equality that Szahaj defines as an aspect of a good community (2016, p. 213). Many participants may share issues and feelings of negative well-being and can be brought together through these community ensembles. Together members can relate to one another on a level that cannot be achieved in the common patient-doctor relationship seen in therapy. Thus, these

relationships further develop bonds among community members. Members are also allowed a form of escape as they can just focus on the music or performance and not feel compelled to discuss hard-hitting or sensitive topics. These participatory music communities provide a form of understanding and socialization, benefits that they do not receive from other activities within their lives.

Another case study, that involves community music performances as a vehicle for individuals to better express themselves, further highlights music's malleability when addressing poor well-being. Mitchell (2021) examines her time serving as a music therapist for a Children's Mental Health Facility in Ontario (p. 195). During her time at the facility, she arranged the "Coffee House" event, where both staff and children were able to perform any music of their liking, ranging from pop songs to air guitar performances (Mitchell, 2021, p. 196). She explored the benefits that the children and staff gained by performing at the event. For example, she states, "Through watching them perform, staff members gained new awareness of youths' strengths and a more holistic understanding of them outside of their roles as 'clients'" (Mitchell, 2021, p. 199). The staff at these events enabled participants' expression of self by encouraging them to write and perform their own lyrics, made possible in part by the safe environment created for this activity. As a result, the participants gained the ability to speak out and say things they might have been too scared to talk about in other social situations. The music here acted not only as a vehicle of expression for the patients but also as a vehicle of understanding for the staff involved.

Furthermore, the patients were not the only ones who enjoyed the benefits of this program. Staff also participated in the music, as Mitchell explains: "Relationships

typically marked by hierarchy are impacted by music's leveling function" (Mitchell, 2019, p.10). With the staff engaging in performances, not only were the clients able to gain a better understanding of who the staff were, but the staff were simultaneously enabled to express themselves in ways not typical in a normal workspace. This leveling function of the music allowed participants to be heard, which is reflective of McMillan and Chavis' second element of community, *influence*, where members matter to the group and the group matters to the members (1986, p. 9). The level playing ground allowed for bond building through the performance of music, including self-composed songs with hard hitting personal lyrics that cross boundaries. Accordingly, both children and staff reached a deeper understanding of one another. Mutual participation and the removal of labels allowed for the humanization of one another across hierarchical and institutional divides.

Further examples of community music groups being used to promote well-being can be found within the local community around the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While these examples are not gamelan ensembles or a part of my fieldwork, they do serve as an example of what further integration in a university setting could look like for a gamelan ensemble. The Cole Center Therapeutic Singing Program, run by music therapist Cecilia Wright, focuses on creating a space for individuals with Parkinson's where they can "engage in group singing, breathing, and vocal exercises, as well as movement to music, all while building a strong sense of community and support" (Wright, 2024). This program utilizes music's community building potential, to create a safe space and community for its members.

Another example in the University of Tennessee, Knoxville area can be found in the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC), where there is an active student recital group. Timothy Bullard (2016) interviewed members of the UTHSC student recital group and found that participants expressed a desire to continue playing the music they had directed so much time to in middle and high school. Euphonium player, Peter Duden, for example, expressed how the ensemble rehearsals served as a fun activity when taking breaks from studying (Bullard, 2016). This ensemble facilitates a third space for its members, that serves as a haven of mental rest away from their studies, while also promoting continued participation in music.

The ensembles highlighted in this section excel in the creation of a third space, where within this space the beneficial effects on mental wellbeing become available to participants. From drum circles to air guitar performances each ensemble places an emphasis on delivering experiences that are catered to the participants—not potential audiences. In the next section, I highlight examples of gamelan being used with similar aims within communities not connected to institutions of higher learning, saving my analysis of gamelans associated with institutions of higher learning in the American South for chapter three.

Gamelan Outside Academia

Gamelan outside of Indonesia has found homes in many places outside of academia, such as prisons, literacy programs, and accessibility programs for children on the autism spectrum. In these contexts, gamelan allows individuals to participate in the neutralizing level playing field created by community music ensembles that were described in the previous section.

Music therapist, Helen Loth (2014) identifies qualities that gamelan music can offer to the field of music therapy. To examine these, she engaged with gamelan communities around the United Kingdom and concluded that gamelan,

> is naturally a group-playing activity, offers a range of musical pieces and styles of different levels of complexity, can develop a wide range of communication skills amongst participants, can improve self-confidence, self-esteem and give clients a sense of satisfaction, can improve mood and general well-being, can develop a sense of community amongst participants. (p. 182)

The benefits listed by Loth bear a resemblance to the ones associated with community groups discussed previously.

Gamelan music's further capacity within the medical field has been noted in projects and acknowledged by scholars. In England and Scotland, for example, the Good Vibrations program aimed to "[pilot] gamelan workshops in prisons to assess their effectiveness in enhancing prisoners' self-esteem and developing certain basic and key skills including communication, listening, team working, numeracy, problem-solving, concentration, and motor skills" (Eastburn, 2003, p. 6). During the Summer of 2003, gamelan workshops for prisoners were run in five prisons. Following the short workshop, participants were then allowed to choose to sign up for longer, more in depth sessions. Cathy Eastburn, the project coordinator, states in the results that "89% of participant questionnaire respondents spontaneously reported feeling better about themselves, feeling a sense of achievement or pride, or increased self-confidence" as well as 57% of the participants responding positively to the activity and enjoyed learning something new.

The educational managers of the prison also informed Eastburn that participants of the Good Vibrations program displayed improved behavior in other educational activities, as well as participants signing up for other non-related educational activities (2003, p. 8). Participants also stated that they "enjoyed being respected enough to play expensive instruments" as well as "we were treated like normal people" (2003, p. 28).

In this case, we see gamelan music's capacity for bringing people together as well as placing everyone on an even playing field. Gamelan ensembles outside Indonesia are in a unique position because they subvert preconceived notions or fears that an individual may have about music making. The music is new to everyone involved. Eastburn highlights this trait too, stating, "Unlike Western musical forms (e.g. opera, pop music), gamelan does not have any particular connotations that might alienate people" (2003, p. 6). This contributes to one of the many reasons I believe that gamelan ensembles have the capabilities to address students' well-being in a university setting.

Further exemplifying the unique accessibility of gamelan music, Michael Bakan at Florida State University runs the Music-Play Program (MPP), which focuses on creating accessible opportunities for playing music for children on the autism spectrum. One way they create these opportunities is through their Exploratory World Music Playground (E-WoMP). This playground contains gamelan instruments modified to accommodate the needs of children on the autism spectrum (Bakan et al., 2008, pp. 1-2). Parents who responded to the program's effect on their children reported that participation in the project has helped them better understand their child and feel more confident in playing with their child at home, outside of the program (Bakan et al., 2008, p. 13). Not only have the parents benefited from building a deeper connection with their

child, but the children have benefitted from being in an ensemble that enables them to be creative, while not being limited by means of verbal or visual communication (Bakan et al., 2008, p. 14). For example, while direct eye contact and speaking directly to a performer are commonplace in standard Western and academic ensemble rehearsals, in which leadership trickles down from a conductor, gamelan ensembles can offer a more accessible and less confrontational learning style. In gamelan, a common learning technique involves watching someone play, a technique we use here at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's gamelan, and one that proves beneficial for the children in Bakan's group. Michael Bakan further explains the benefits created by the environment in the E-WoMP, stating,

> These kids are constantly being defined by other people's agendas at school, in therapy sessions, on the playground, and even at home. They're under so much pressure; there are so many demands on them. And the parents, they're under that constant weight too. But in the E-WoMP that all goes away for a while. (Bakan et al., 2008, p. 19)

Similar to the Good Vibes project, here a gamelan ensemble allows for bonds to be formed by placing everyone on an even footing. By taking away or subverting normal societal expectations, the participants are free to express themselves in ways that work well for them.

Overall, participation in these ensembles creates what Ray Oldenburg refers to as "The Third Space, a space that is neither work nor home but a neutral space with zero expectations on its occupants (1997, pp. 23-24). The third space allows for an escape from the duties of being home or work and the mind is allowed ease from the presence of

work and domestic worries while allowing and promoting socialization. Bakan articulates the benefits of this space well for his project participants.

This third space, while essential in everyday life, signifies something much more in the field of education. McIntosh (2012) highlights this in an article that details how gamelan music was used in professional development meetings for the Literacy and Equality in Irish Society project (LEIS). In the LEIS project, illiterate adults have the opportunity to learn literacy, a task that may be daunting for a student who may face many social stigmas surrounding an inability to read. Here participation in gamelan provided a way for adult literacy educators to better understand their students. According to McIntosh, the outcomes of this professional development:

> enabled tutors to gain deeper insights into their own learning processes, as well as the learning processes of their peers. Second, by reflecting upon their experiences of learning gamelan music, tutors were better able to relate to the sometimes pressurized situations that challenge students when they return to adult literacy education. (McIntosh, 2012, p.22)

Similar to the Good Vibrations and E-WoMP programs, educators were taken out of the role of authority and placed on even footing with the students. In these programs educators and students are both faced with something unfamiliar and new, thus stripping away any of the stresses found in the standard education model.

Utilizing gamelan ensembles to create this space is ideal for use in North American academic institutes, where students face similar stressors in systemized educational environments. By participating in an environment, stripped of any hierarchal-norms, students can receive the same benefits found throughout the programs discussed

above. Teachers who employ the neutralizing of typical classroom hierarchies also enjoy these benefits through being able to better connect with their students.

Conclusion

The rise of depression, anxiety, and loneliness are just some of the primary symptoms evident in a decline in mental health in the United States. These symptoms, especially in college-aged students, are more prevalent than ever, with millennials and Generation Z struggling to find footing in the chaotic world around them. For the generation that grew up in the tumultuous times of post September 11 terrorist attacks, multiple conflicts in the Middle East, the housing market crash of 2008, and now the global pandemic, the world seems unforgiving and unstable. Members of millennials and Generation Z are more isolated than ever. They are also less likely to participate in community organizations such as churches and lack roots in local communities by being more geographically mobile (Cox et al., 2019, p. 11). These tendencies contrast with the attitudes of the generations before them, further contributing to the mental distress of millennials and Generation Z.

I believe that secular community ensembles can be the next bastion of mental health for these young adults. Gamelan ensembles, due to their entwinement in North American universities and close proximity to college students, have the potential to serve the demographic that may need community the most. At the core of these participatory ensembles is the community of support that grows around them. In the next chapter, I highlight the communities that have formed around three North American gamelans in the American South, engaging with the field of music therapy and ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork.

Chapter 3: Promoting Mental Wellness in Institutions of Higher Learning Through Participation in Gamelan Music

> As students entered the room their eyes were immediately drawn to the Balinese four-tone *angklung* (a specific type of Balinese gamelan with four keys). We informed them to take off their shoes and sit at an instrument. William Peebles then shared a few details about the instruments, including where they came from, as this was the first time many of the students had seen a gamelan. He then walked around showing students the melody, while I made sure the gong, *kajar* (gong with a sunken boss primarily used to keep time), and *ceng-ceng* (small cymbals attached to a wooden base) remained together. Once we finished, several students, ecstatic with what they had just experienced, approached Peebles to inquire about joining the group. Several approached me too, eager with questions about my thesis. (fieldnote, November 8, 2023)

Every time I have assisted with a gamelan workshop, I have noticed that the student response is overwhelmingly positive. This has stuck with me and served as a constant reminder of my initial excitement and passion for gamelan, a passion that would eventually lead me to engage with three gamelans in the American South and write this thesis. In this chapter, I explore some of the reasons that students react to gamelans in this way. I believe it is indicative of their capacity to support positive mental well-being and stems from the low stress music making environment made possible by the nature of the instruments and the experiential goals of the instructors tasked with teaching students how to play them To support this conclusion, I dive further into my fieldwork and the communities that surround three gamelans at institutions of higher learning in the American South, which are unique communities with underlying similarities in how they operate. To better understand how that came to be, I contextualize them within the historical processes that supported the emergence of gamelans in the United States, and how that has influenced the types of communities that have formed around them.

I am particularly interested in North American university gamelans that focus on experiential learning outcomes because I believe they foster communal values and promote positive mental well-being. To identify the presence of communities surrounding the groups that I worked with I utilize Chavis and McMillan's (1986) four elements of community, then turn to Szahaj's (2016) aspects of a good community to demonstrate how the communities benefit their members. Lastly, I describe the benefits that many of the individuals who participate in these ensembles enjoy. My conclusion is that experientially-focused gamelan ensembles at North American institutions of higher learning excel in establishing communities of support for their members by providing mental relief in a time of increasing mental distress.

Intraregional Gamelan Networks in North America

In North America, several intraregional gamelan networks connect groups in ways that allow them to support one another. These networks are composed of university gamelans as well as independent gamelans, and within this intraregional network, individuals can choose between groups, each with their own goals and values. In North American universities gamelans generally provide students with an opportunity to make music in new ways while also learning about another music culture. This serves broader pedagogical goals that contribute to a well-rounded education. Independent gamelans, on the other hand, are freed from needing to support broader academic interests. Instead, they may focus on a multitude of goals that go beyond those that are pedagogical, which also vary from group to group. Despite these differences, both independent and university gamelans benefit from their presence within an intraregional network of support. Of these networks, Clendinning states,

> A gamelan network […] suggests a type of potential for the impact and relatedness of an academic world music ensemble that transcends the boundaries of the classroom, a type of symbiosis that allows gamelans as organisms to flourish to a much greater extent together than on their own. (Clendinning, 2020, p. 92)

These intraregional networks allow groups to share members and resources with groups that are nearby. This includes guest artists from Indonesia who come to teach in North America. Clendinning specifically mentions California, Colorado, and the urban Northeast as examples of intraregional communities, and notes that such networks are yet to form in the American South (2020, p. 92).

University Ensembles

Gamelans within North American institutions of higher learning do not represent a monoculture and vary greatly from location to location. Clendinning (2020) invokes a spectrum to differentiate between what she calls “experiential” and “pre-professional” ensembles (p. 56). Experiential ensembles “focus on their potential for cultural and artistic enrichment for students planning to pursue a wide range of professions after graduation, rarely positioning them as pathways for future career development” (Clendinning, 2020, p. 56). In contrast, pre-professional ensembles “can be directly paired with the educational goal of proficiency in specific musical styles” (Clendinning, 2020, p. 56). The difference between pre-professional and experiential approaches lies in the pedagogical aims of the instructor and the expectations of members of the group, with the resulting goals greatly influencing where the ensemble falls on Clendening’s spectrum. While the instructors of university gamelans may be bound by the curriculum

of the institution in which they work, there is room to decide exactly how the ensemble will be run and taught. For example, they have the liberty to decide how, and which values or goals are introduced to students, and therefore they play a large role in determining the nature of the communities that form around them.

These goals affect the benefits that are made available to their members. In experiential university gamelans, Clendinning claims that the primary goal is "cultivating a baseline musical competency for students pursuing deep study of the art form at the same time as they provide recreational or exploratory musical opportunities for other students" (2020, p. 57). These ensembles emphasize the act of creating music together, as opposed to end-of-year concerts, and thus are better positioned to support the formation of communities around them. The nature of these communities also makes them better positioned to provide mental health benefits to their members. While technique and virtuosity are still important in experiential ensembles, they are not the end goal or how the group measures their worth.

In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the experiential side of Clendinning's spectrum and show how experiential university gamelans excel in creating communities of support. This is not to say that pre-professional and independent groups fail to create similar communities of support. Individuals who seek a sense of accomplishment in virtuosic playing might indeed enjoy similar benefits in such groups. In fact, I suspect that every gamelan in North America has a supporting community that helps keep the ensemble running and can provide these benefits, however, I argue that these benefits are more accessible to members of experiential university gamelans.

Gamelan in the "Deep South"

Clendinning describes the unique cultural milieu surrounding gamelans in the "Deep South" as "contain[ing] too low a density of gamelans of similar types to make regular intraregional artistic exchange viable" (2020, p. 97). Indeed, the ensembles I worked with in the "Deep South" have little or no interaction with one another. Further, the artistic exchange that Clendinning associates with intraregional gamelan networks in other parts of the United States, which often includes Indonesian musicians who engage with multiple groups in a particular geographic location, is not present in the South.

In addition to sharing the absence of a well-defined intraregional network, the ensembles I worked with demonstrated similarities in the ways they operated. They are relatively young, ranging from seven to twenty years—some groups on the West Coast have been running for more than 45 years. The three universities that house these ensembles are also in smaller towns or cities when compared to groups in the intraregional network Clendinning identifies on the California coast. Being secluded in smaller cities means they provide opportunities to individuals who might not otherwise have the chance to make music in ways that are different from what they are used to, which are more readily available to people in cosmopolitan environments because they are more diverse and international. These groups also have a similar approach to repertoire, with each playing a wide variety of types of gamelan music. All three also have a local supportive community that helps keep the group running.

While there is little interaction between these ensembles, all share communities of support, including ones that extend beyond the South. Although an intraregional network of gamelans is yet to manifest, there is a larger network of support influencing their

activities that transcends the South. This is the pedagogical lineage of the instructors running these ensembles, and it shapes and informs their rehearsal practices. All three leaders of the groups I worked with spoke to the value of this support. When discussing the importance of pedagogical lineages Clendinning includes a poignant metaphor she learned from her teacher that captures the spirit of this support:

> the phrase *air mengalir*, which [Lasmawan] borrowed from his teacher Martopangrawit, to describe the process of transmission between teachers and students. Literally meaning "running water," the concept can be visualized more as water running over, running through—information passed down that has the same stylistic lineage but also carries the traces of change from each generation of teachers and learned. (2020, p. 78)

In these ensembles, pedagogical lineages serve as a backbone of support in the absence of an intraregional network. Though these ensembles are separated by three-to-five-hour drives, and there is currently very little interaction between them, I suspect that will change in the future.

Wake Forest University

Gamelan Giri Murti (Gamelan of the Enchanted Forest) is directed by Elizabeth Clendinning at Wake Forest University in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Clendinning serves as an associate professor of music specializing in ethnomusicology. The gamelan is a *kembang kirang* inspired by northern Balinese five-tone *angklung*, but with an extended range to play repertoire from different styles of Balinese gamelan. The ensemble is stored within a dedicated room in the music building, a room that is just large enough to store the instruments. However, one wall of the room can be folded away to

connect with an adjoining room, creating enough space to set up the instruments and rehearse. The group consists of a wide variety of individuals, about half students and half community members, with one dedicated community member commuting two and a half hours from Charlotte for rehearsals.

Clendinning's pedagogical lineage consists of every Indonesian musician she's worked with to date. She cities I Made Lasmawan and I Putu Hiranmayena as two particularly important individuals who have helped shape the way she runs the ensemble at Wake Forest University. In a conversation discussing how she arranged for the purchase of the instruments, she described the role that Lasmawan had in determining the type of instruments, in particular, the importance that versatility played in their decision:

> I was working with my teacher I Made Lasmawan, thinking about what to get for this space at Wake Forest and Lasmawan was just like "I have this idea for you, this is going to be so great." I think his hope for me was that I would be here for a long time and that I would be working on a lot of different kinds of projects. So, I needed something that could fit with me for a long time, and he was right. You can play four tone *angklung*, you can play five tone *angklung*, you can play *gong kebyar*. We have had both students here and composers in Bali write for the gamelan or arrange things, and I've of course arranged things from time to time. So, it has been very versatile. (personal communication, October 10, 2023)

As Clendinning mentions, a *kembang kirang* can play multiple repertoires making it especially useful for the experiential values of her group. This creates opportunities for members to learn about Balinese music more broadly, as opposed to focusing on a

particular style. Clendinning suggests that some of her approach to repertoire, specifically improvisation and collective compositions, also results from her pedagogical lineage, in this case, Hiranmayena "because he does a lot of group composition and interactive things. He has a Balinese sound ensemble, he doesn't call it a gamelan because of all the different things they do" (personal communication, October 10, 2023). I highlight Clendinning's references to Lasmawan and Hiranmayena as indicative of the role that her pedagogical lineage plays in shaping her teaching as well as a broader example of American gamelan instructors crediting Indonesians for their methods, which is something I encountered frequently during fieldwork.

Western Carolina University

Located in Cullowhee, North Carolina, Western Carolina University (WCU) houses a Javanese *degung* ensemble (a specific type of gamelan, consisting of metallophones and drums) and a Balinese four-tone *angklung* (a specific type of gamelan with four keys) run by William Peebles. The four-tone *angklung* is only played briefly by students enrolled in the World of Music class during the gamelan unit, while the *degung* has its own class. The latter is currently comprised of only students, a lasting effect of the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, Peebles is excited to reopen community membership: "I'm looking forward to getting that going again cause that's more of a community orchestra and it's kind of nice to bring in people from different walks of life" (personal communication, November 9, 2023). With community involvement presently on hold, the student group has grown larger every semester. One member expressed excitement about this growth when I visited, telling me "Dr. Peebles has never been able to do a fall semester of gamelan but we're flourishing and now we have enough people to

do it" (Participant Two, personal communication, November 9, 2023). The group rehearses in an ensemble rehearsal room on the fourth floor of the music building. The instruments are also stored in this room but must be put aside after rehearsal as the room also serves as a rehearsal space for other groups.

Peebles serves as the bassoon professor at Western Carolina University and teaches a wide variety of courses, ranging from music theory and aural skills to gamelan ensemble. Peebles's pedagogical lineage is not immediately connected to an Indonesian, but rather Peebles is further down in the transfer of knowledge to North Americans embodied by the concept *air mengalir*. When discussing the process of starting the gamelan at Western Carolina University, Peebles cited Professor Han from Northern Illinois University for his help in arranging the purchase of the instruments as well as teaching Peebles songs that he could later teach students. Han's knowledge of this music comes from his experience teaching the Asian Music Performing Group at Northern Illinois University, an ensemble Han formed after studying at the Center for World Music in 1974 and 1975 (Wang, 2014, p. 101). The Western Carolina *degung* ensemble plays a wide variety of pieces. During my fieldwork I observed the group play *kunang kunang, sang banjo,* and *galatik mungut*. In conversations with members of the group, I discovered that in the past they have also played compositions by students or Peebles himself.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) is home to a *semar pegulingan* (a type of seven-tone Balinese gamelan) augmented by two *gender rambat* (an instrument with bronze keys spanning multiple octaves), which allows the group to play *pelegongan*

(an ensemble that often accompanies *legong* dances). This ensemble is run by Jonathan Adams and consists of both community members and students. I have been a member of this group for the past two years. Although I am enrolled in the gamelan as a class, it lacks the normal stress associated with many other university ensembles, a sentiment shared by fellow members. The ensemble consists of mostly community members with only a few students enrolled in the class. However, some community members are in fact students who may not be able to enroll due to credit limitations or schedule conflicts that prevent them from being present for the entire rehearsal. The instruments are neatly stored in a practice room with shelves and carts. Before rehearsals, the instruments are moved to one of the larger classrooms down the hall.

Adams serves as a Lecturer of Musicology at UTK and has taught the gamelan since arriving in the fall of 2020. The gamelan itself has been at UTK since 2018 and was taught by several teachers before Adams arrived. Adams' pedagogical lineage includes the many Indonesian musicians he has studied and worked with, including I Made Subandi and I Wayan Sinti, who are just a few of the artists who have inspired Adams' approach to gamelan music (personal communications, April 17, 2024). In sharing how his experience in Indonesia has shaped how he runs the ensemble at UTK, he comments:

> I make sure that there's plenty of time for people to get to know each other. Even though it takes away from rehearsal time, it makes the rehearsals better because people like playing music with people they enjoy being around, and in order to know if you enjoy being around people you have to know them a little bit…. In other ensembles that I've participated in, there's been some pushback for taking time and allowing socialization

> to happen, people just want to show up and play the music. But people shouldn't have to hang out outside of rehearsal to get to know each other. A lot of that is inspired by things I witnessed in Indonesia. (Adams, personal communications, April 17, 2024)

As a member of this ensemble, my experience allows me to speak more about how the influence of these artists manifests here. Many of the rules of the UTK Gamelan consist of silly inside jokes and important values that older members let new members in on during their first rehearsals. Some of these are funny, for example, "Do not open the portal," which essentially means, do not open your phone, with the term portal coming from Adams, who refers to phones as "portals that suck energy out of the room." There are also rules that come from Adams' Balinese mentor, I Wayan Sinti. "Sinti's rule," for example, is "When loud, **LOUD**. When soft, *soft*" and was something that Sinti would often say when teaching foreigners. Employing Sinti's rule in rehearsals at UTK serves as a sentimental reminder of the international influences at work in our local community. One of the other rules is "just because it is played right doesn't mean it feels right," which serves as an effective reminder to bring the music to life with appropriate dynamics and other types of expressivity, another aspect of Sinti's teachings that Adams aims to instill in the group. After getting a glimpse into how Pak Subandi ran his group *Ceraken* during a trip to Bali with Adams in 2023, I noticed several similarities in their teaching philosophies, specifically in how they interacted with members of their groups. Both took an active interest in the well-being of members. Subandi presented himself humbly and cared deeply for those around him. His easygoing attitude towards music making and humility are values that are present within the UTK Gamelan too.

Community in Experiential University Gamelans

The three experiential university gamelans I worked with during my fieldwork excel at creating community. I can say this confidently by invoking Chavis and McMillan's (1986) four elements of community, which were all present in the ensembles I worked with. These are: membership, influence, integration or fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (Chavis and McMillan, 1986, p. 9). The communities that form around experiential university gamelans are not merely byproducts of the way these groups are taught, but necessary for them to achieve their experiential learning objectives as students rotate in and out of the group.

Membership

The focus on the experience of participants within experiential university gamelans resonates with Chavis and McMillan's first element, membership. Chavis and McMillan describe membership as a sense of belonging to the community and having a personal investment in being a member of the community (1986, p. 10). Throughout my fieldwork, this manifested in all three gamelans. Every member expressed excitement for being in the ensemble as well as a sense of belonging to the community that surrounds it. Also, as Chavis and McMillan note, membership must be especially important to both the instructor and members (1986, p. 9). This was observable in all three ensembles too, and especially clear in comments by a student at WCU, who expressed the following, only to be further supported by Peebles.

> It reminds me why I like music, cause it's fun, it's collaborative, and it's unique, and it's an experience that I know most people in the world won't have, especially someone born and raised in North Carolina. It's one of

> those sources of joy, it's just being here together and making music, and that's nice to have. (Participant Two, personal communication, November 9, 2023)

For this member of the group, gamelan serves as a reminder that music-making does not have to be stressful. Playing in the gamelan provides them with a unique experience that they recognize most individuals in Cullowhee, North Carolina do not have access to.

The experiential nature of these ensembles also caters to the expectations of members, which includes the opportunity to be an active member in a music making community. The environment created by an experiential university gamelan is uniquely situated to provide a sense of membership. One student cited the "collaborative" aspects of gamelan music as indicative of this, a thought that Peebles shares too:

> We have to listen for the drum and be aware of what everyone else is doing and know when someone plays something different that it is ok and that's when it's supposed to happen and that's what the cues are. There's kind of a shared leadership component that doesn't happen so much in conducted ensembles. (personal communication, November 9, 2023)

These comments reveal a dynamic wherein the musicians consider themselves members of a community in which they have equal say and perform on a level playing field. Much like when students work together to take out the instruments and put them away, when playing the instruments, each member is a cog in a larger machine—a community—wherein their part may not be the primary focus of the music but is nonetheless important to bring it to life. The sense of belonging that is crucial to Chavis and McMillan's definition of membership can manifest differently from individual to individual. Some

members might feel a sense of belonging due to their musical contributions to the group, while others may experience it when bringing food in to share with other members during snack time.

Influence

By valuing the contributions of every member equally, experiential university gamelans manifest the second element of community, "influence" (Chavis and McMillan, 1986, p. 9). The presence of influence means that the ideas of members have an impact on the community around them (Chavis and McMillan, 1986, p. 12). All members of experiential university gamelans enjoy influence, whether they are students at the university or community members from the surrounding area. Regardless of background, each member is a valued and important part of the group capable of shaping what it does and how it does it. In many gamelans, members are even given responsibilities that allow them some degree of control over how they operate. For example, a member may be tasked with the responsibility of planning a performance and subsequently play a role in making important decisions. Additionally, members can contribute to the flow of rehearsals, because there are opportunities for them to express what they need help with.

During my time with the UTK Gamelan, leadership roles often fell upon community members or more experienced members of the group, allowing them to further influence the growing community around the group. That influence was not dependent on the skill or experience of the player. As Adams commented in an interview:

> I'm not the biggest fan of transporting this gamelan out and putting it on a stage somewhere and being like hey come check us out. But this is something that matters to some people in the group and with respect to

> where these performances might take place, I usually leave it up to people in the group to nurture those opportunities and help organize them. (personal communications, April 17, 2024)

Adams recognizes that members of the group value playing in front of their friends and family and by allowing members to schedule events for the group, Adams creates opportunities for Chavis and McMillan's influence to manifest. This is just one way that Adams ensures that members feel valued as individuals and that they have opportunities to influence the goals and actions of the group.

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

By meeting the needs of individuals and the community, experiential university gamelans display Chavis and McMillan's second element of community, "integration and fulfillment of needs." This element is present when an individual's membership is beneficial to them, and their presence in the community is beneficial to the group (1986, pp. 12-13). There are many clear examples of how these groups benefit their members. For example, in interviews with individuals from all three groups that I worked with, members expressed an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards their participation, often explaining that gamelan is a source of happiness or joy for them. Not only does this align with Chavis and McMillan's second element, but it also parallels Gauntlett's maxim "making is connecting" (discussed in depth in chapter two): "Through creative activity, where making is connecting, we can increase our pleasure in everyday life, unlock innovative capacity, and build resilience in our communities so that we can face future challenges with confidence and originality" (2011, p. 245). In these ensembles, working

together to create a musical experience that is available to all members further instills a sense of integration within the community.

At the UTK Gamelan, a clear example of integration and fulfillment of needs manifests in “community contribution projects.” Students enrolled in the ensemble for class credit must complete a project that supports the community surrounding the group. This project was created by Adams as a way for students to give back to the community in a way that is meaningful and rewarding to the student too. It also aims to support the creation of a community that transcends semesters, deepening bonds between members while also providing students with full liberty as to how they contribute to the community. Adams comments on this project stating,

> Going back to the community contribution project, that [a sense of community] was important as I conceived what this [class] was going to look like. The point here being, because I knew students would be coming in and out of the ensemble, meaning that people would take it then they’d leave and graduate, knowing that there constantly would be this turnover, I thought “How do you create a sense of community in that environment?” which is what I was sort of tasked with doing. The community contribution was a way for me to try and encourage people in the group to think about the group and interact with other members of the group that transcend the semester in which they are in the group. (personal communication, April 17, 2024)

Examples of these projects include student-composed pieces, organizing performances for the group, or other contributions that benefit the longevity of the community

surrounding the gamelan. One suggested avenue for these projects involves building upon previous community contribution projects, encouraging current students to interact with former students and their contributions, either adding onto them or changing them to fit the current needs of the group.

The community contribution project is relevant to me personally as I prepare to graduate, leading me to ponder about what lasting impact I will have on the community. One possibility pertains to my efforts to play the *terompong* (an instrument with horizontally suspended gongs that typically plays the fully realized melody), a skill I learned during my trip to Bali in 2023. I have been worried about this knowledge leaving with me when I graduate, and to mitigate this I have provided lessons to individuals in the group who have expressed interest in learning the technique while also leaving recordings of the elaborated melody I play in hopes of that this knowledge will remain after I leave.

Shared Emotional Connection

Each of the experiential university gamelans I worked with has a unique history. This history, coupled with the presence of a pedagogical lineage, contributes to establishing a better sense of community, as identified in Chavis and McMillan's final element, "shared emotional connection" (1986, p. 9). Chavis and McMillan explain that a shared emotional connection represents "the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences" (1986, p. 9). Shared emotional connections are something that occurs frequently in these ensembles, and snack time is perhaps one of the most common and poignant examples of an activity that supports it. Snack time provides members opportunities to socialize and

share stories during official rehearsal time. The history of these groups may not be long, but they include interesting stories full of international communication and collaboration that the members find exceedingly interesting and important. One member of WFU noted that they feel "a deeper bond to the community here, I guess because here we have breaks and there would always be someone who brings snacks or drinks and we'd have time to talk" (Participant One, personal communication, November 6, 2023). This highlights that the time spent socializing outside of playing is a reason for the formation of deep bonds. Having a consistent time dedicated to socialization and eating encourages members to spend time together and bolsters these bonds.

Shared emotional connections are also supported by longstanding community members, who were present in all three ensembles I worked with and important to the experiential directives of these groups. These members serve as a foundation for the ensemble and often take on more involved or complex roles in the music-making process. Importantly, these members serve as a bridge between the present and the past. By sharing experiences or stories with new members these longstanding members serve a vital role in perpetuating the group's collective knowledge as students rotate in and out of the ensemble.

Another opportunity for shared emotional connection that I witnessed results from a stable repertoire, which is a feature of the UTK Gamelan. Adams expressed that he prefers stable repertoire because it allows members who have already learned the overarching structure of a piece of music to focus on technique or learning new instruments in subsequent semesters. This also means that pieces begin to form their own identities over time, where each iteration becomes unique to the current group, as parts

change or individuals switch instruments to learn new ones. When discussing the reasons he prefers maintaining repertoire, as opposed to starting from scratch every semester, Adams stated,

> A lot of the gamelans I have witnessed in Indonesia do that [maintain repertoire]. They have this set repertoire, and they play this stuff over and over again for a long time. I don't think the music is disposable necessarily, and I think it creates an opportunity for the students to grow. The first time they learn the piece they're just learning the notes, maybe they don't even have the technique yet. Then the second time we play [a piece] they know the notes, so they can spend the rest of the semester working on technique and expressivity, which are both crucial to the music. Then, maybe the semester after that, they can help me teach it to other students. I've seen how we get better at playing the same pieces over time collectively as a group, by virtue of that invitation for everyone to participate in the teaching process. (personal communications, April 17, 2024)

Adams cites his experience in Indonesia as one of the reasons for maintaining repertoire for the group. While he did not speak on the reason ensembles in Indonesia may maintain stable repertoire, he mentions that in the context of experiential university gamelans, repeating repertoire facilitates group leadership and identity. It also reduces stress on the students and allows the group to spend more time socializing. A long-time community member of the UTK gamelan expressed their thoughts about this during an interview:

> I'd say having that comfort whenever I start playing is definitely really nice. *Kompyang* [a piece composed by I Wayan Lotring] is a lot of fun. Familiarity I guess, I've been here long enough so it's starting to become a familiar piece and something I can just relax and do. (Participant Three, personal communication, March 19, 2024)

Familiarity with the piece provides this member with a sense of comfort, throughout their longtime membership in the group. Specifically, this member cites the piece *Kompyang*, one of the first pieces the group learned, which now also serves as a staple in the group's repertoire and provides a sense of familiarity to those in the group, despite members rotating in and out each semester.

Chavis and McMillan's four elements are indeed present in the communities surrounding the three experiential university gamelans I worked with. As previously stated, it is extremely beneficial for an experiential university gamelan to have a surrounding community of support. These communities are beneficial to the ensemble itself, as they ensure the collective knowledge of the group will be maintained as students come and go. These communities also support the mental well-being of their members, which I will turn to now through a discussion of *good* community.

Aspects of a *Good* Community

With Chavis and McMillan's elements as framing, it is evident that these groups are surrounded by communities. Furthermore, I would argue that these are *good* communities as defined by Szahaj (2016). Szahaj explains that a good community is "constructive, just, inclusive, pluralistic, and participatory" (pp. 213-215).

Constructive

All three experiential university gamelans I worked with harbor constructive communities, which Szahaj defines as "a result of the free choices of constitutive individuals and not a necessity resulting from some inherent bonds" (2016, p. 213). A constructive community forms from the conscious effort of its members. There is no external force, such as familial bonds, bringing the individuals together. This manifests in the communities in which I worked in a multitude of ways. One clear example is the composition of members. As previously mentioned, these communities typically consist of students and community members who choose to participate in the group. The community members choose to be there and while in some cases students may be satisfying a degree requirement, other courses are available that would satisfy the requirement. Furthermore, students of any program are free to enroll. This highlights the fact that members are there because they want to be there.

Just

All three ensembles I worked with were also just in how they treated members. As Szahaj notes, a just community "gives everyone equal chances for self-enhancement and does not mete out penalties or rewards undeservedly" (2016, p. 3). The just environment created in these experiential university gamelans stems in part from the ensemble's classroom setting, in which the instructor cannot favor individuals. However, there are other ways these communities practice being just. One such example is that members are allowed to rotate to different instruments for different pieces. This freedom to change roles in the ensemble was present across all three groups. This mobility ensures that every member gets an equal opportunity to play what they want to play.

Inclusive

Experiential university gamelans create an inclusive environment for members, which Szahaj defines as accepting "anyone who freely wishes to become one and who declares a willingness to accept responsibility for upholding the bonds of the community, and not excluding anyone arbitrarily" (2016, p. 214). These ensembles do not discriminate against members on any basis. Two of the groups I worked with had no monetary fee to join, with the third only requiring a small one-time payment, allowing members to join with no discrimination based upon socio-economic class. Another example of how these ensembles create an inclusive community lies in the fact that in all three ensembles I worked with, auditions were not required. New potential members were not expected to have any prior experience or knowledge of gamelan music. Furthermore, these groups allow for individuals from outside the university, thus building a diverse community that consists of students and people from the surrounding area.

During my fieldwork, one student at WCU expressed that the inclusivity of the group is one of the things they tell friends when trying to convince them to join. This student explained that they tell them:

> it's this cool percussion ensemble, and it's not like going into other music ensembles in the school where you're expected to know everything about it when you go into it. It's one of those things you can go in not knowing anything about, and as you learn more, [you] get the harder stuff down. (Participant Eight, personal communication, November 9, 2023)

This student notes that within experiential university gamelans, the expectation for entry is minimal and the environment is inclusive. Of course, once exposed to the possibilities

of virtuosity that gamelan music offers, a member can work to play more technically challenging instruments, practice alone, or set goals to play more difficult repertoire. Still, experiential university gamelans excel as a model of participatory music making, with low initial expectations for members that still yield great benefits.

Pluralistic

The three communities surrounding the experiential university gamelans I worked with are also pluralistic, which Szahaj defines as an environment in which "a variety of viewpoints is not suppressed in the name of achieving a stipulated unity but is positively encouraged and innovative thinking is warmly received" (2016, p. 214). This manifests in many ways, though a few interesting examples include group members composing new music for the ensemble, opportunities to take on greater responsibility within the group, and even mistakes at times being praised as new elaborations of parts.

The everchanging interpretations of repertoire within the UTK Gamelan are an excellent example of one of the ways an experiential university gamelan can be pluralistic. Through creating an open space for creative thinking and new ideas, members of this community openly share thoughts and contribute to the group around them. Adams describes an interesting example of this process, as it occurs in the UTK Gamelan,

> Sometimes in a piece, someone will play something different and I'm like, "Hey, I like that, let's keep it, let's do it that way. We're going to make it our own." And I think that invites everyone to participate. We're not trying to reproduce what folks are doing there [in Indonesia] necessarily, this is our version of this piece and so some subtle differences

> happen more and more over time. (personal communication, April 17, 2024)

Regarding his inspiration for this Adams states,

> In Indonesia and Bali, you see the same piece played by different groups, they all do it a little bit differently. Part of that is intentional, another part of it is, maybe, somebody forgot it or misremembered it. Or that's just part of their musical system, these opportunities for change and transformation of certain things. Maybe for us, it's a big idea that the piece is different. In that [Balinese] music culture, generally, I think things are a little bit looser in that respect, and that gives rise to this rich variation in the way pieces are interpreted and performed across the island. (personal communications, April 17, 2024)

As stated earlier, the repertoire of the UTK Gamelan is stable, encouraging the accumulation of group knowledge. However, the way the group plays these pieces is not the same every season, with parts being changed based on group input over time. Sometimes this change manifests through an individual misremembering their part and playing something new and interesting. This instills greater agency in group members and emboldens them to contribute to what they are playing, with mistakes even being praised as a new elaboration of a part.

Participatory

All three ensembles are participatory communities, which Szahaj defines as a community that "encourages everyone to take an active part in the life of the community as a whole" (2016, p. 215). Furthermore, a participatory community rewards members

who spend personal time on the affairs of the group, but also does not expect members to spend their personal time on group matters (Szahaj, 2016, p. 215). In the three experiential university gamelans I worked with members were not expected to practice outside of group rehearsal time. However, should members wish to practice they are encouraged and supported in their endeavors. Typically, these endeavors consist of individuals who seek technical proficiency on more challenging instruments in the gamelan. In other cases, the participatory aspect manifests by encouraging more experienced members to participate in teaching the rest of the group.

One example of the participatory aspect of these communities came up in an interview with a member of Gamelan Giri Murti who described the process of learning the *kendang* (drum):

> I started two years ago, and it was the hardest thing I've ever done. Every morning I'd wake up and play it. Then finally, one day it's like magic, I know it all and it just makes sense and I'm listening to the music as I'm playing and I'm like oh my god it's all working (Participant Four, personal, communication, November 3, 2023).

Despite expressing how difficult learning the *kendang* was, this member confessed "I forget all the hard work I put in. I know I worked on it for a long time but now that it's there it's just beautiful" (Participant Four, personal communication, November 3, 2023). In this example not only did this member devote private time to learning to play the *kendang*, but in doing so he has not only gained a better sense of the musical environment around him but also gained a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

In the UTK Gamelan, the participatory aspect of a good community manifests when more experienced members are encouraged to help teach the group. Group director Jonathan Adams shared his thoughts on this practice, stating,

> I think it's great in this group that some people have been playing some of the pieces for a while now and they know them well enough that they're ready to flip the instrument around backwards so they can show each other how to play. I think that's going to happen more and more over time, and what's going to happen is the increasing quality of the group is going to become more and more reliant on that. (personal communications, April 17, 2024)

Members are not expected to know their parts well enough to teach other members, but members who have been in the group long enough to accumulate this knowledge are rewarded by being given the opportunity to share what they know. Longstanding community members are encouraged to take on a support role by playing on the other side of the instrument to show newer members their parts. The group refers to this as "playing backwards" since the keys of the instruments are reversed. Having participated in this ensemble for two years I can confirm that the act of "playing backwards" is seen as a rite of passage for members who now share the knowledge they have gained through long-term engagement with the music while simultaneously supporting other members as well as Adams. Longtime members who may not be as proficient in playing the music are also encouraged to contribute to the group on their own time in several ways. In my experience with the UTK Gamelan, these have manifested in opportunities to help with the maintenance of the instruments, helping move the instruments before and after

rehearsals, and other more ambitious projects, such as when the group re-tuned the gamelan in the Spring of 2023.

A Good Community

Szahaj's aspects of a good community have helped us identify some of the many features of experiential university gamelans that members respond to positively. It has also helped us better understand how members benefit from their participation in these groups. The examples mentioned so far serve as a bird's eye view of the complex group dynamics at play within these communities. A community that is constructive, inclusive, pluralistic, and participatory aids the experiential values of these ensembles and is fundamental in creating the low stress music making environment that surrounds them. As stated earlier, these groups do not discriminate against new members based on any criteria, including prior knowledge, meaning that these communities demonstrate not only inclusivity but are also constructive. These ensembles demonstrate being pluralistic and participatory by encouraging new members and ensuring that they get the support and knowledge they need to be an active member of the group.

Addressing Mental Health in Experiential University Gamelans

Participation in experiential university gamelans creates a supportive community, in which members receive benefits that support positive mental well-being. They do this by providing members with opportunities to engage in Masi et al.'s four strategies for reducing loneliness: "Improving social skills, enhancing social support, increasing opportunities for social interaction, and addressing maladaptive social cognition" (2011, p. 6). In all three groups, members also improve their social skills by socializing in the supportive community that forms around the ensemble. Furthermore, members enhance

their social support through the bonds formed with other members of the group. Participation in the group also facilitates opportunities for social interaction through having set rehearsal times, dedicated time for socializing during rehearsals, and opportunities to spend time together outside of rehearsal. Lastly, through meaningful face-to-face interaction members of these groups address maladaptive social cognitions.

Masi et al.'s four strategies overlap, meaning that where one is present, the others will most likely be present too. This manifests through the nature of reducing loneliness using these strategies. An individual who increases their opportunities for socialization by participating in these ensembles will also begin to form closer bonds with other members. Members of these groups also gain access to enhanced social support through the bonds formed during opportunities for social interaction. Furthermore, by engaging with the *good* communities that surround these ensembles, members are able to practice socializing in a safe space. The comfort of a good community means social *faux paus* are forgiven and do not result in ostracization from the rest of the group. Members who suffer from maladaptive social cognition, wherein one base their perception of themselves negatively because of the feelings of loneliness they are experiencing, may also benefit from opportunities to engage in these strategies through participation in an experiential university gamelan.

Addressing Loneliness in Experiential University Gamelans

During my fieldwork, multiple participants expressed the value of the sociality provided to them through their participation in the ensemble, which reflects the presence of Masi et al.'s strategies. Participant Five from WCU, for example, expressed that,

> In the other music groups, I'm in, they're larger so it's hard to get to know everyone on a close basis. With gamelan, there's just a handful of us in there and we're in that room twice a week for an hour each day so we're able to connect and get to know more about each other one-on-one. (Participant Five, personal communication, November 9, 2023)

In the same interview, this participant stated:

> It's really calming to play [in the gamelan] with my friends. I've been in this class three semesters now, and it's nice having a little breather in the day just to play music and be with my friends, it's a lot more casual [than wind ensemble]. It's not like you just sit in your seat for the entire class and not talk to each other. We talk to each other every rehearsal. (Participant Five, personal communication, November 9, 2023)

This idea is mirrored by the previously discussed comments of Participant One at Gamelan Giri Murtri, who referenced the time spent sharing food and talking during the ensemble's snack time as a reason for their bonds with other members. Participant Two also commented on the quality of the bonds they have with members, explaining that they "feel way closer with people in this [gamelan] compared to wind ensemble. I feel like I don't make connections in wind ensembles cause there's like 50 people, this ensemble is like a sort of safe space" (Participant Two, personal communication, November 9, 2023). One might attribute being much closer with peers in the gamelan ensemble to the number of participants in the gamelan, which is smaller than a wind ensemble. However, while I believe the number of participants certainly impacts the bonds formed between members,

I position the experiential and participatory nature of the ensembles as the primary factor supporting the bonds being formed.

Other participants from each ensemble also expressed similar sentiments, further highlighting the presence of Masi et al.'s four strategies. Participant Three shared with me that being in the ensemble "has been my rock and it's very nice having that interaction with others that isn't at work" (Participant Three, personal communication, March 19, 2024). Participation in a gamelan serving as a member's rock was not exclusive to Participant Three, either. In an online survey, Participant Six shared that

> Although this is the first time, I've ever been in a gamelan group, it has benefitted me greatly by being an outlet for all the mental health related things that bother me daily. Three hours to just relax and make music without distractions like my phone have been very, very good for me, honestly the hours go by quickly when I need it the most. (Participant Six, personal communications, March 24, 2024)

Participant Six has only been participating for one semester and recognizes that participation in the group grants them access to the benefits provided by the community and the third space created by an experiential university gamelan. This response resonates with my own experiences in gamelan. Through engaging in the equalizing third space created by these ensembles members are praised as integral parts of the community while in a space that serves as an escape from the stress of daily life.

I have already provided a myriad of reasons that might explain why gamelan music supports social bonds and cohesion. However, Participant Seven specifically notes the sociality provided through participation, explaining that:

> It's [gamelan rehearsal] something to look forward to and it's a great community of people. Playing music in a group helps instill a sense of collectivism and build social and teamwork skills. Many of the guidelines we have for gamelan rehearsals help empower musicians to get out of their comfort zone and develop skills that they may not have the chance to in other spaces. (Participant Seven, personal communications, March 24, 2024)

This sense of collectivism is not unique to gamelan, but as I have argued above, there are many ways in which gamelan makes community bonds especially accessible, particularly in gamelan groups with an experiential focus.

Each of the anecdotes above is from a member of an experiential university gamelan. This shows that members of such groups are aware of the sociality they gain through participation in these ensembles, with each anecdote also speaking to Masi et al.'s strategies for reducing loneliness. The members are acutely cognizant of the social benefits they receive through participation in each of their respective groups. The instructors of these ensembles also demonstrate this same awareness, and in some cases, have aimed to utilize the sociality of these ensembles for the benefit of the individuals in these groups, such as providing a space where these four strategies are present to members.

Addressing Maladaptive Social Cognition in Experiential University Gamelans

Maladaptive social cognition refers to one's own negative perception of themselves based on extenuating feelings of loneliness. In essence, individuals who experience loneliness are more likely to perceive themselves negatively. Possible ways

this can manifest is through individuals thinking "I am lonely because I am not an interesting or fun person." In most cases, these thoughts create a loop of negative emotions that focuses on one's own loneliness and makes one place unnecessary blame on oneself. This issue has been further exacerbated in younger generations following the social isolation legislation passed during the COVID-19 global pandemic, as I discussed in chapter two. However, as I have argued, experiential university gamelans create an environment where members can engage in Masi et al.'s strategies for reducing loneliness. Further, they can also combat maladaptive social cognition.

At Wake Forest University, Clendinning realizes Masi et al.'s strategy for reducing loneliness. Her Performing Arts in Bali class is one such example. She notes the accessibility and meaning of the course for students who do not consider themselves musicians:

> All these people, a lot of them who are not self-identified musicians at all, we just played, and they had to learn how to deal with being in a group. There are still people in my classes who grew up in Zoom school and spent years not playing sports or music with any other people. Because of that, they don't know how to discuss with their neighbor, and I think this will be something with us for a while. So, I think that niche, whether it's the ensemble itself or somewhere else in the curriculum, is a draw for people. (Clendinning, personal communication, October 10, 2023)

Clendinning also identifies the effect the global COVID-19 pandemic had on individuals, who, post-pandemic, continue to harbor feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety, as identified in chapter two. Having researched gamelan in North America, Clendinning is

aware of the community-building properties that are often present in these ensembles. Accordingly, she recognized the lack of social skills in her students that followed periods of isolation during the pandemic. Thus, she now emphasizes the social aspect of experiential university gamelans to help students build communication skills. Just as she states, the loneliness and lack of communication skills brought on by social isolation and video classes during the pandemic will be with us for some time, but through socializing and building communities, we can act to mend these issues.

As stated before, the three groups I worked with have little interaction with one another. Despite this, each ensemble values the possibilities of experiential university gamelans and the capacity they have for building a community of support. These values are instilled in the ways these instructors run their groups, with the instructors' values coming from their own experiences with gamelan. Sharing these values with their students ensures the continuation of their own pedagogical lineage.

Conclusion

All three experiential university gamelans I worked with support good communities that promote positive mental well-being and decrease loneliness. Having lost five of my loved ones to suicide and struggled with my own mental health for my entire life, I have always cared about the mental well-being of myself and those around me. Through my participation in the UTK Gamelan, I have received the benefits I have discussed thus far and participated in the surrounding community of support. This community consists of individuals from every walk of life, but through our participation in playing gamelan, we connect with one another and support each other. I would argue that members are able to participate and receive the benefits I have discussed in this

chapter because of the experiential nature of the ensemble. Thus, I am confident in saying that given experiential university gamelans' close proximity to students, they could be especially advantageous to slowing the mental health crisis among college students.

The benefits I have presented in this chapter are products of how these gamelan ensembles are run at institutions of higher learning in the American South. As previously stated, each instructor's pedagogical lineage shapes their values and how they run their group. I highlight pedagogical lineages because the benefits, which are manifested by the way these ensembles are run, might be, at least in part, traced through an instructor's pedagogical lineage back to Indonesia.

As for my own pedagogical lineage, Adams attributes some of the pedagogical values of his ensemble to values he experienced studying with his teachers. As discussed, one way this is evident is in I Wayan Sinti's rule "When **loud**, loud. When soft, *soft*," which now rings through the head of every UTK Gamelan member during rehearsals. Further reminding members of Sinti's influence on what happens during rehearsals, his picture hangs in the storage room where the instruments are kept when not being played. Other pictures hang on the wall too, including another important figure in Adams' lineage, I Made Subandi. In the summer of 2023, I was fortunate to meet Subandi, and his lighthearted nature and care for those around him reminded me of the same light-heartedness and care found in the UTK Gamelan. As part of my volunteering with Insitu Recordings during the summer of 2023, I helped record Subandi's group Ceraken. The session was the last one that day, and the sun was beginning to set. As I hurriedly checked microphone cords and musicians set up instruments, Subandi was right there with us helping too. Despite being a recording session, the stress normally associated

with recording was absent. Throughout the session, Subandi cracked jokes to keep the mood up for everyone involved, and at the conclusion of the recording session, Subandi had everyone gather around before beginning to pack up. He thanked everyone for their participation in the session and expressed his gratitude not just to members of Ceraken who had been playing all day, but also to everyone involved in the recording process. Having met Subandi and witnessed the values he holds as an instructor in Bali; I can now sense these values present within the UTK Gamelan.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In August of 2022, I moved into a one-bedroom apartment in Knoxville, Tennessee, still processing the emotions associated with finishing my undergraduate program and whether graduate school was the right choice for me. I had no friends in Knoxville, but one of the musicology professors reached out to see if I would want to meet before classes started. Knowing I had played gamelan in my undergraduate studies, he invited me to meet with some of the community members of the UTK Gamelan. This interaction would in turn snowball into many new friendships formed throughout my two years at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The interest in gamelan that was nurtured here has also supported friendships in gamelan communities that cross state lines and transcend national borders. I may not have been aware of it in August 2022, but that first interaction planted the seeds for the web of friendships that inspired this thesis and set me out into the field exploring this phenomenon in other gamelan communities.

Chapter Summary

In the first chapter of this thesis, I presented the groundwork and inspiration that led to that fieldwork. I argued that there exists a wide gap in gamelan scholarship, pertaining specifically to how these ensembles have the potential to serve as bastions of mental well-being. I also introduced the frameworks that would help me better understand the potential that gamelan ensembles have in this regard and provided an overview of the methods I used to explore it in three groups. Further, by bringing attention to the mental health crisis in the demographic of college students, which is within close proximity to the institutions of higher learning that house these gamelans, I provided context for the significance of this research.

In the second chapter, I explore the ongoing mental health crisis within the demographic of college students. First, I deconstructed the American Dream and engaged with scholarship that identifies younger generations' disillusionment with it. I argued that this disillusionment is a major contributing factor to the mental health crisis plaguing young adults. After identifying the crisis and potential causes, I then examined capitalism's harmful effect on participatory music making experiences. I ended the chapter by arguing that more support for community ensembles is needed and could begin with removing the stigma that presentational music making creates around it, thus, allowing the benefits of community music making to be more readily available to North Americans.

Lastly, in the third chapter, I argued that gamelans' benefits in North American universities have grown beyond delivering the pedagogical aims that brought them there. To support this, I engaged with the elements of community and aspects of good community as defined by Chavis & McMillan (1986) and Szahaj (2016), which revealed that the communities surrounding these ensembles are indeed good for their members. To demonstrate this, I engaged with Masi et al.'s strategies for reducing loneliness, showing that members of the ensembles are presented with the benefits of socialization. I also noted that the social benefits of these ensembles can and should be more widely acknowledged within the context of North American institutions of higher learning. By bringing in examples from my fieldwork, I highlighted the potential that these ensembles have by acknowledging the benefits members are already gaining through participation. This has led me to believe that gamelan ensembles should be examined in the same light

as other community music making practices, specifically through the lens of catering to mental wellness.

Implementation for the Future

As for the implementation of these ensembles, I believe that university mental care centers should work alongside gamelan ensembles or other community based ensembles on their campuses. In an interview with the director of multiple gamelans at the University of Richmond, Virginia, Andy McGraw, he shared with me his thoughts on the sociality and benefits provided through participation in these gamelans, even in ensembles not tied to universities. McGraw explained that:

> within a context in which we are increasingly alienated from one another, that kind of direct interaction can be very very impactful and meaningful. In the UK they're starting to recognize this, and doctors have started to prescribe activities like this to patients. So, some of the gamelan ensembles there work to get on the list of prescribed activities that doctors might assign a patient who is suffering from social isolation. (personal communication, November 15, 2023)

The United Kingdom has begun to address its loneliness epidemic and has identified innovative ways to treat it through musicking. In the United States, this collaborative effort would not only increase the number of members in these ensembles but also provide supportive communities to the individuals who need them most. Within my own experiences, I have witnessed student care centers organize similar activities, such as wellness hikes or movie nights, so the addition of community music making is not far out of the realm of expectation.

While these ensembles were brought to these institutions with the pedagogical benefits of bi-musicality in mind, it is time to move beyond this. Bi-musicality was coined by Mantle Hood in 1960, and, although the idea has limitations, scholars continue to develop and adapt the concept in their curriculums. As recently as 2016, Elizabeth Haddon utilized bi-musicality as a premise for examining its musical effects on Western-trained musicians. Haddon states that "Javanese gamelan participation can influence Western instrumental learning. Students generally learn music from other cultures alongside the practice of Western music, which allows for the potential development of a symbiotic relationship in which each can inform the other" (2016, p. 232). While there are pedagogical benefits to participating in these ensembles, I believe there remains a plethora of additional benefits that scholars have yet to acknowledge.

Potential Future Routes of Research

This project is only a beginning. Multiple avenues of research could expand our understanding of gamelan beyond the scope of bi-musicality. For example, the formation of global communities around them warrants further research. On this topic, Clendenning states, "From my work, conducted primarily in Bali and the United States, I have come to consider transnational gamelan communities as interlocking like *kotekan*, a technique of melodic elaboration used in Balinese gamelan" (2020, p. 25). These transnational gamelan communities are of great value to Americans and Indonesians, and the dynamics of these communities remains a topic for further study.

One potentially limiting factor of my research lies in my engagement with exclusively experiential university gamelans. Future studies may be able to remedy this

by broadening the scope to include ensembles of a pre-professional nature. I speculate, in chapter three, that many benefits found in experiential ensembles are still present in pre-professional ensembles, albeit these may not be as accessible to their members. Following suit, another avenue for greater research remains in communities that lie beyond my geographical limitations. My fieldwork was mostly conducted within North Carolina and East Tennessee, due in part to my proximity and familiarity with these locations. Yet, as Clendinning states, "approximately five hundred gamelans have sprouted roots in communities outside Indonesia, of which about 150 reside in the United States. It is striking that half of these are primarily supported by institutions of higher education" (2020, p. 13). With the number of communities being so large, it would be a herculean feat to contact and work with each group. This however remains a topic for further study, as scholars can slowly put together the puzzle pieces of the greater American gamelan community.

Additionally, this project has also been limited to the demographic of college students. I believe the issues of mental health and the potential benefits of gamelan extend beyond traditionally college-aged people. There is certainly further research to be done around the longstanding community members who serve as a backbone for these ensembles. As Clendinning identifies, "having community members involved, either as a consistent presence in a student ensemble or playing in a parallel group close by, adds security and longevity to the collegiate group" (2020, p. 207). These community members are a part of the broader local community around the university and are key players in building communities around these ensembles.

Beyond the scope of gamelan, also lies a diverse world of community music making ensembles. I urge scholars to reflect on these other community making music groups. There are numerous possibilities to consider within the musicscape of the United States alone, and all participatory ensembles contain a unique community borne from making music together, thus the benefits I have identified may also be present within them. While in this thesis I argue for gamelan as a bastion for mental well-being, other scholars may add to this conversation by speaking on a multitude of other music making practices in their own respective fields. It is also my hope that this project serves as a springboard for future scholars to tackle the ongoing mental health crisis, and to engage more deeply with the diverse world of community music groups that can alleviate it.

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Vita

Ethan Rohl is a 24-year-old graduate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, studying musicology and ethnomusicology. Ethan has participated in the gamelan ensemble at UTK for two years and traveled to Bali, Indonesia in the summer of 2023, funded by the Student Faculty Research Award provided by the university to conduct research with Dr. Jonathan Adams. Ethan's research interest includes gamelan, rap music, and mental health studies, all topics that helped fuel his passion for his thesis. In March of 2024, Ethan presented at the Society of American Music national conference on Kendrick Lamar's political and theological lyricism. Future plans for Ethan include traveling to Tabanan, Bali for the Darma Siswa program to study Indonesian and to continue playing gamelan locally. After completing this program, Ethan is excited to return to the United States to complete a doctoral program in ethnomusicology.