While *Focus on Gamelan Music of Indonesia* is not a textbook per se, it is quite useful as either the central text for college-level courses focusing on Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese gamelan music, or as a supplementary text for courses with wider scopes. It is certainly sufficiently technical for music courses, and the wealth of cultural information it contains makes it a suitable ancillary text for courses in dance, anthropology, cultural studies, and other fields as well. The goal for the accompanying CD was to provide complete examples of most of the genres that the book discusses in detail, especially those that are difficult to obtain elsewhere, and to illustrate technical points made in the book with detailed listening notes that are keyed to the recordings. Of course, teachers and students should supplement their listening experiences with additional recordings; the copiously annotated “Additional Resources” section at the back of the book will provide some guidance in selecting them.

**How This Book Is Organized**

*Focus on Gamelan Music of Indonesia* is a revision of a book originally published under the title *Gamelan: The Traditional Sounds of Indonesia* (ABC-CLIO, 2004). For this new edition, I have reorganized the book’s contents into shorter, more manageable chapters, which are grouped into three parts. *Focus on Gamelan Music of Indonesia* begins with an introduction to some Southeast Asian musical processes in Part I (Chapters 1 and 2); these processes are, I argue, particularly Southeast Asian because they are
intimately related to Southeast Asian geography and history. Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) discusses a sampling of gamelan ensembles and repertories on the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali, all of which bring those musical processes to bear on different social systems with different values. Part III focuses on Sundanese music and dance from the western third of the island of Java. Chapters 5 and 6 present two rather different Sundanese gamelan ensembles (gamelan salendro and degung), their music, and their social contexts in some depth. At times these discussions present minute technical details; these can be skimmed or skipped by readers more interested in the social and cultural aspects of gamelan music. Chapter 7 explores the role of dance in Sundanese society and addresses issues of change, authenticity, and meaning in the performing arts of West Java; I argue that some of the most traditional sounds of Indonesia are those that do not necessarily fulfill the Western expectation of exoticism. Chapter 8 revisits the musical processes introduced in Chapter 1 and reflects once again on what it means for music to be traditional in a changing world. The revised edition includes all the material from the first edition, updated to reflect some recent developments and to correct a number of factual and typographical errors.

A Word About Languages

Out of necessity, this book includes many terms in several foreign languages. Foreign terms are italicized at their first appearance, and thereafter presented in ordinary roman type. Readers may refer to the glossary for brief definitions of these foreign terms. Since there are quite a few words in various Indonesian languages, it is worth taking a moment to mention a few salient facts about some of these languages. Virtually all Indonesians speak the Indonesian national language (called bahasa Indonesia, which English speakers usually render as “Indonesian”). Most English speakers can pronounce Indonesian words passably well if they learn a few simple rules. Most of the consonants are pronounced more or less as they are in English, with the exception of “c,” which is pronounced “ch,” and “g,” which is always hard, even when followed by an “e” or and “i.” Most Indonesian “r” sounds are rolled (as in Spanish). Indonesians pronounce “a” as English speakers do in the word “father,” “e” as in “bed” (or sometimes as in “batter”), “i” as in “pizza,” “o” as in “poker,” and “u” as in “dude.” If the same vowel appears two times in a row, it is pronounced twice with a glottal stop in between. An “h” at the end of a word calls for an audible aspiration (forceful exhalation of breath); a “k” at the end of a word is pronounced as a glottal stop.

Many Indonesians speak a regional language other than Indonesian among their families and friends, saving Indonesian for official situations or to speak to Indonesians from other parts of the country. The two most
widely spoken regional languages in Indonesia are Javanese and Sundanese. Both of these languages have a few pronunciation peculiarities. Javanese distinguish between dental “d” and alveolar “dh” sounds; for the dental version, the tongue is right on the upper teeth, while for the alveolar version, the tongue is behind the upper teeth on the alveolar ridge, resulting in a slightly less explosive attack. Javanese make a similar distinction between dental “t” and an alveolar “th”; a Javanese “th” is not pronounced as in “the,” but rather more like the “th” in the name “Esther.” Sundanese language includes a special vowel that is spelled “eu” and pronounced like the “eu” in French (as in “Pasteur”). A schwa sound, like the “e” in “the,” approximates the correct pronunciation; English speakers are not used to saying this vowel except in unaccented syllables, and so find many Sundanese words difficult to pronounce. A Sundanese word that ends in a vowel is pronounced with a glottal stop at the end.

Indonesian, Javanese, and Sundanese (along with many other Southeast Asian languages) belong to the Austronesian language family, and share many words and grammatical constructions between them. They also have borrowed many words from the languages of other cultures with whom they have come into contact, including Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch, and English. Americans are frequently amused to come across an Indonesian word that has clearly been borrowed from English, but whose pronunciation and spelling have changed.

One common feature that many English speakers find startling about Austronesian languages is that they often make no adjustment to a noun to indicate whether it is singular or plural. Thus, the word gamelan might mean “one bronze percussion orchestra” or “many bronze percussion orchestras.” Native speakers rely on the word’s context in a sentence to figure out the meaning. Readers of this book will also have to rely on context, too; a sentence beginning with “the gamelan is” obviously is about one gamelan, while “the gamelan are” is clearly about more than one gamelan.

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