

TECHNIQUE

Beginning Gambang

by Widiyanto S. Putro

When Widiyanto gave permission to print his “two cengkok” method, he called it “Gambang 101.” This was followed by “Gambang 102.” “Gambang 103 and 104,” he said, “are recordings, because in gamelan music, if you want to know the authentic garap, you have to learn by listening, not reading. What you read is not what you are going to hear. That’s my 3 cents on gambang playing. Gambang 105? We’ll need to talk.”

This method was invented by Widiyanto to “teach my students to understand the concept of playing gambang.” It provides a chance for the beginner to learn the layout of the keys and become adjusted to the tempo and character of the gambang’s elaboration. The gambang actually plays in a much more complicated and melodically extended way; this method should be understood as a first step only.

The gambang part is made up of *cengkok*, which might be generally described as melodic patterns or phrases used to create musical parts for voices or instruments in Central Javanese classical music, or *karawitan*.

Widiyanto’s method consists of two *cengkok*: *gantung* and *seleh*. *Gantung* is a “hanging” pattern that moves around a particular pitch. *Seleh* is a “goal” oriented pattern that moves toward and arrives at a particular pitch. Both are “aimed” at a particular pitch in the *balungan*, and coincide with that pitch on their final beat.

Transposition

An important aspect of this method is that the *cengkok* can be transposed to arrive at different pitches, while their contour remains essentially the same. Due to the careful construction of Javanese melodic form, the end of one *cengkok* is often only a note or two away from the beginning of the one that follows. In this method, one of two variations in the *seleh cengkok*—starting either above or below the goal tone—are chosen with this in mind. The *gantung cengkok* maintain their contour.

The player will start the *gantung cengkok* two notes

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below the *gantung* note, and then determine which *seleh cengkok* is the closest to the end of that *gantung*.

The Basic Cengkok: gantung and seleh

The *gantung* (“hanging”) *cengkok* is used for the weak beats, like the second note of a *gatra*. The *cengkok* here is “gantung 3.” The right hand is on the top line, the left hand is on the bottom. Below are two variations; the symbol “x” above a note indicates an optional doubled stroke on that beat.

x x
• 1 • 3 • 123 • 1 • 3 • 123
• 16 16 123216 16 123

x x
• 1 • 3 • 123 • 1 • 3 • 123
• 16 • 6 123216 • 6 123

The *seleh* (“goal”) *cengkok* start either on the note above or below the goal tone, depending on which would make the smoothest transition from the end of the previous *cengkok*. Below is a “*seleh 6*” *cengkok* starting *above* the goal tone, and one starting *below* the goal tone.

• i32i653 33356356
• 1321653 33356356

• 5i6565 333356356
• 516565 333356356

While each of these begin in a different place in relation to the goal tone, the second half of each *cengkok* is the same. Other variation are possible. The *seleh cengkok* below begins above the goal tone. The first half is the same as the example above; the second half is different.

• i32i653 35356i26
• 1321653 35356126

As with the *gantung cengkok*, rhythmic variations may be applied to these as well.

x
• i32i653 3 • 356356
• 1321653 • 5356356

