

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 35356i26

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

x
• i32i653 3 • 356356
• 1321653 • 5356356

Garapan, the “working out” of the part

The gantung and seleh cengkok are of equal length, and will be used to anticipate and coincide with the important tones of a piece. The player must decide on the combination of the two kinds of cengkok. In the example below, I chose the seleh cengkok that started below the goal tone, because it started on the same tone as the end of the previous gantung cengkok. This makes the smoothest possible melodic contour, which fits both the character of the instrument and the fast motion required in playing gambang.

LANCARAN RICIK-RICIK, LARAS SLENDRO, PATHET MANYURA, IRAMA I

$\cdot \overset{\wedge}{3} \cdot \overset{\wedge}{5} \cdot \overset{\wedge}{6} \cdot \overset{\wedge}{5} \cdot \overset{\wedge}{6} \cdot \overset{\wedge}{5} \cdot \hat{i} \cdot \textcircled{6}$
 $\quad \quad \quad \times \quad \quad \quad \times \quad \quad \quad \times$
 $\cdot 2 \cdot 5 \cdot 235 \cdot 2 \cdot 5 \cdot 235 \cdot 5i65653 \cdot 5 \cdot 56356$
 $\cdot 21 \cdot 1235321 \cdot 1235 \cdot 5i656533 \cdot 356356$
 [*gantung 5*] [*seleh 6*]

The density of the gambang is 4:1, showing that it is being played in Irama I (*tanggung*). If the same piece were played in Irama II (*dados*), the garapan would be adjusted to double the length of the gambang part, making the density of gambang to balungan 8:1.

$\cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 6 \cdot 5 \cdot 6 \cdot 5 \cdot i \cdot 6$
gantung 5 *seleh 5* *gantung 5* *seleh 6* or
gantung 5 *gantung 5* *gantung 5* *seleh 6*

When applying this to a piece with balungan *mlaku*, each gatra will generally be half gantung and half seleh, unless the entire gatra can be interpreted as gantung.

$2 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 6$
gantung 1 *seleh 3* *gantung 1* *seleh 6*

 $2 \quad 2 \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 5 \quad 6$
gantung 2 *gantung 2* *gantung 3* *seleh 6*

Gambang 102

This is the next lesson in Widiyanto’s approach to beginning gambang. He adds additional transposable gantung cengkok, as well as several more extended seleh cengkok. These are all in Irama II (*dados*), and can be used to go to the note at the end of any gatra.

Gantung 6 (these can be transposed for any gantung pitch)
 22235656 · 5635656 or · 666 · 666 5i535i56
 Seleh 1 *Dualolo*
 · 2312323 12653333 33333333 33356561
 Seleh 2 *Jarik Kawung*
 35612356 356i2i32 63653216 · 1612612

 61235356 356i2i32 63653216 · 3612612

Seleh 3 for balungan 5653

$5 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 3$
 22235656 · 5635656 33226655 22666123

Seleh 6 *Tumurun*

· 2312323 62636261 · 1321653 · 5356356

Special Seleh Cengkok

Some cengkok are specific to certain sequences in the *balungan*, the melodic framework of a piece. Their names also apply to cengkok played by other instruments at the same time, including *gender*, *rebab*, and vocal cengkok for the *pesindhen*. For the beginning student, these will initially be associated with passages in familiar pieces like the two below.

LADRANG WILUJENG LARAS SLENDRO PATHET MANYURA, IRAMA II

Putut Gelut for the second kenongan.

$3 \quad 3 \quad \cdot \quad \cdot$
 · 2312323 · 1616123 · 1321653 · 5356356

 $6 \quad 5 \quad 3 \quad 2$
 35612356 356i2i32 63653216 · 1612612

LADRANG PANGKUR LARAS SLENDRO PATHET MANYURA, IRAMA III

Putut Gelut at the beginning of the second kenongan,

$\cdot \quad \cdot \quad \cdot \quad 3$
 66612323 · 3356i23 332i6666 356i2i23

 $6 \quad 5 \quad 3 \quad 2$
 22i26633 · 3653216 · 3653216 · 3612612

followed by *Debyang-Debyung*,

$3 \quad 2 \quad 5 \quad 3$
 · 321232 · 2321232 · 2321232 · 23216666

 $6 \quad 5 \quad 3 \quad 2$
 35612356 356i2i32 63653216 · 1612612

then *Ayu Kuning* for the first of the last kenongan.

$\cdot \quad 6 \quad \cdot \quad i \quad \cdot \quad 3 \quad \cdot \quad 2$
 22235656 33356i6i · i32i2i6 · 356i6i2

 $\cdot \quad 6 \quad \cdot \quad 3 \quad \cdot \quad 2 \quad \cdot \quad 1$
 · 1632i63 2i632i63 · 2532163 · 3356561