



Composing using the Gamelan Room app

Composing music is not easy to sum up in a single document, the list is endless in terms of how you can be inspired to make a piece of music. There are some suggestions and details at the end of this document if you are looking for ideas

What this doc hopes to share is what to do when you are on your own or have had little or no experience in composing music for Javanese gamelan.

How to get your ideas down on paper

You have been playing with the Gamelan Room app, maybe you were trying out the damping guide and came up with a tune or rhythm you liked. There are many ways to write down what you have been playing. Either to help you remember or to share it with others who can then play it too.

- Write down the numbers
- Use a graphic score
- Use western music notation

These are a few of the ways you can get your ideas down.

Writing down the numbers

As you will have worked out. Gamelan notes are named using numbers. In the 5-note 'slendro' scale they are number 1,2,3,5,6 and in the 7-note 'pelog' scale (if you have the full version of the app) 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

The obvious thing then is to write the numbers down that you played e.g., 36363632.

Try playing the notes as they are written above.

- What does it sound like to you?
- How much information have you received?
- Do you know if you are playing it right?

It will help at this point to know what the rhythm is.

Imagine the ticking of a clock;

tick	tock	Tick	tock	tick	tock	tick	tock
------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------

and give each of the sounds a dot to indicate where it is:

.
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Then the notes will fit like this:

3	6	3	6	3	6	3	2
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

That probably seems straight forward. However not all music goes 'tick/tock/tick/tock' or fits easily in to 8 beats like the example above.

Using the example 'Twinkle-Twinkle Little Star'. Just saying the words, you can probably tell it's not a 'tick/tock/tick/tock' rhythm.

tick		tock		tick		tock		tick		tock		tick		tock	
.		
twi	n	kle	twi	n	kle	lit	Tle	star	how	I	won	der	what	you	are

You are going to need more dots

.
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

So each 'tick/tock' beat has another beat half way between. Some people would call that 'and' e.g., tick/and/tock/and/tick/and so on.

Just using that example, you will soon find the varieties are huge in making a rhythm for your notes. E.g.

tick		tock	and	tick		tock	and	tick	and	tock		and	tock
.	

However, this could still be a little bit confusing especially as you do not want to have to write tick/tock all the time! To make it clearer it would help to have some notes

What about the notes?

As described already we are using numbers and as you explore all the instruments in the app you will see and hear that there is often more than one note of any given number.

E.g. 2 or 3 sixes. The most common way of indicating which one you play is by putting a dot above or below it.

6	6	6̇
Low	Middle	high

Using the rhythm above here is a quick melody

tick		tock	and	tick		tock	and	tick	and	tock		and	tock
2		3	3	2		5	5	6	6	i		5	3

If we want to get rid of all the tick/tock stuff, we need a way of indicating what the 'and' is.

The most common way of doing that is to draw a line over the notes that have an 'and'

tick		tock	and	tick		tock	and	tick	and	tock		and	tock
2		<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	2		<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	i		<u>5</u>	3

Note this bit at the end with the '5'

To make it clearer we should add a dot to indicate a 'rest' before the 'and'

tick		tock	and	tick		tock	and	tick	and	tock		and	tock	
2		<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	2		<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	i		<u>.</u>	5	3

Take away all the tick/tock and the previous example ends up looking like this:

2 332 5566i .53

Sometimes you might want to have even more notes in the space between the 'and'. See the example in the 'Ideas' section.

Remember

There are no set rules to this sometimes a phrase or pattern won't fit an 8 beat tick/tock count e.g., "Happy Birthday to you". The feel of the rhythm puts 'Birth' at the beginning of the rhythm so you start at the end!

tick	and	tock	and	tick	And	tock	and	tick	and	tock	and
.		
birth		day		to		you				Ha	ppy

Also 'Happy' doesn't really fit with 'tock/and' It's halfway between the 'and' and the first 'tick' giving it 'swing' feel

What about instruments playing more than one note at the same time?

Some instruments have 2 beaters and of course in the app there's nothing to stop you playing 2 notes together. If you want this in your composition the conventional way to write this is like this: $\frac{2 \ 5}{5 \ i}$ with the higher pitch on the top line

What next

If you are going to work with lots of instruments and other players, then you will need to write a 'score'. When writing contemporary music this is normally done with each instrument in its own row and the notes that happen together in clear columns like this:

Saron .3.6.3.6.3.6.3.2

Gong(.)

Kenong ...6...6...6...2

It helps to put spaces between groups of notes to make it clearer for the other musicians and stop their eyes going funny!

Saron .3.6 .3.6 .3.6 .3.2

Gong(.)

Kenong ...6 ...6 ...6 ...2



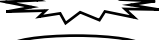
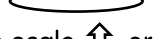
If you are writing in a more traditional style, you can use symbols for gongs and kenongs etc. This is the same as the previous example but with symbols for gong and kenong parts:

Saron .3.6̂ .3.6̂ .3.6̂ .3.(2̂)

This works well if everyone is playing the same notes and knows what the symbols mean. (.) = gong ̂ = kenong

Other ways to get your ideas down

A graphic score. This is quite a fun way to get expressive music the conjures a mood or emotion. You can literally draw anything to represent or remind yourself of what you are playing, some examples being:

- Play fast 
- Play slow 
- Loud 
- Quiet 
- Go up the scale ↑ or down ↓

How fast is it?

This is often marked at the start with what the Beats Per Minute (BPM) rate is.

For example: BPM = 120 would indicate the players would be playing twice as fast as the second hand on a clock.

It may be hard to translate from your head to paper what speed you want. It may be the speed is like some music you could compare it too.

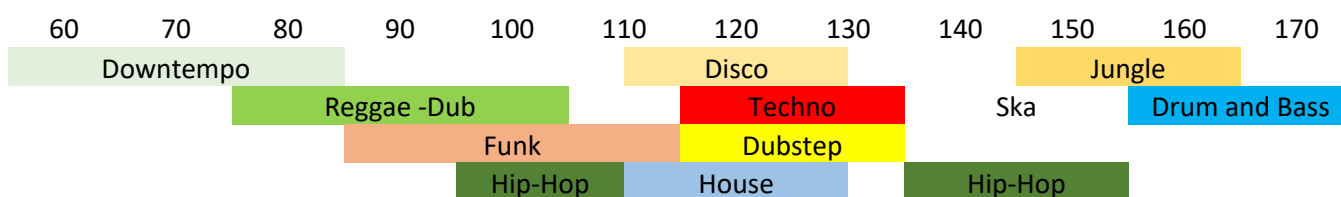
Try tapping the beat with as you hear it in your head as you move around. Does the beat fit with your movement?

A regular healthy walking speed tends to be 130 – 140. Jogging speeds are often 150-160.

You could be hearing at a slower speed too.

It could be you can tap one beat to every two steps when walking which will mean the speed is around 70-80 bpm and so on

Or you can compare it to something you like. A very rough guide



How do I get ideas?

As outlined at the start there are countless ways to develop ideas for a composition.

Get rhythms from phrases

Try writing down a phrase and plying the rhythm e.g., "I'm using the Gamelan App" becomes:

.

Here the word 'gamelan' has more going on than fits with 'tick/and'. So there's a double line to indicate double speed to make it fit.

Play games

If you have access to a pack of cards or dice, then you can use the roll or cut to guide you as to what numbers to use. A six-sided dice works well for the 5 note 'slendro' tuning as you can use 1,2,3,5,6 rolls for the notes and the '4' can be for a space or rest. Alternatively use Ace-6 playing cards or make your own with small scraps of paper.

Play with your eyes shut.

If you feel safe to do so, try playing a tune you know with your eyes shut. Use the 'accidents' as a way of creating something new. Remember to develop it further until it no longer resembles the original tune

Write down some numbers

Then play them backwards

Think in shapes, colours or feelings

A bit abstract but some people think like this. A good way into the process is to play a spiral. Start in the middle and gradually go out left and right. Different colours could indicate play certain notes

If you want to write your ideas down using numbers and have a look at the [How to use the score writing template](#) for more guidance