

American Record Guide

September/October 1995

# The Newest Music

## **Trance Gong**

*Small of My Back; Rain: Trance Gong; Peaches of Immortality: Gending Erhu; CAGE: In a Landscape*

Gamelan Pacifica

What Next? 0016—60 minutes (see above)

Gamelan Pacifica is a fine ensemble based in Seattle. The music is gentle and calm. It has no pretension and it does not over-reach. The group compositions are well-made, and the Cage transfers well from piano (or harp) to gamelan.

## 'Net Prophet

BY BOB TARTE

I'm not the kind of person who gets obsessed about anything. OK, women's open-toe shoes, but nothing else I can think of keeps my pint of blood percolating very long. But my nine miles of nervous ganglia have been suddenly possessed by the idea of the Internet, even though I've yet to go on-line—and despite the level-headed counsel of the pea-sized area of my brain where my consciousness usually resides. There's nothing for you there, the voice cautions. It's a technology in search of consumer usefulness, like CD-ROM. A fad. Still, the idea of logging onto computers in Helsinki and Jakarta, for no other reason than the capability of doing so, clogs the dream content of my waking and sleeping states. When a client at work asks me how best to state the issue of job security in a hospital publication I'm editing about an organizational restructuring process that will cost huge chunks of the support staff their jobs, I hear myself vaguely answer, "Oh, that sounds OK"—because I'm really wondering whether I need both FTP and Telnet software for an Internet SLIP connection, or if I should seek a PPP hook-up instead.

This extended stimulation has put me a bad mood. I'm loathe to share my attention with any subject other than the Internet, including this column. To make matters worse, my blood sugar dipped precariously toward the teeter-totter edge of depression when the postman

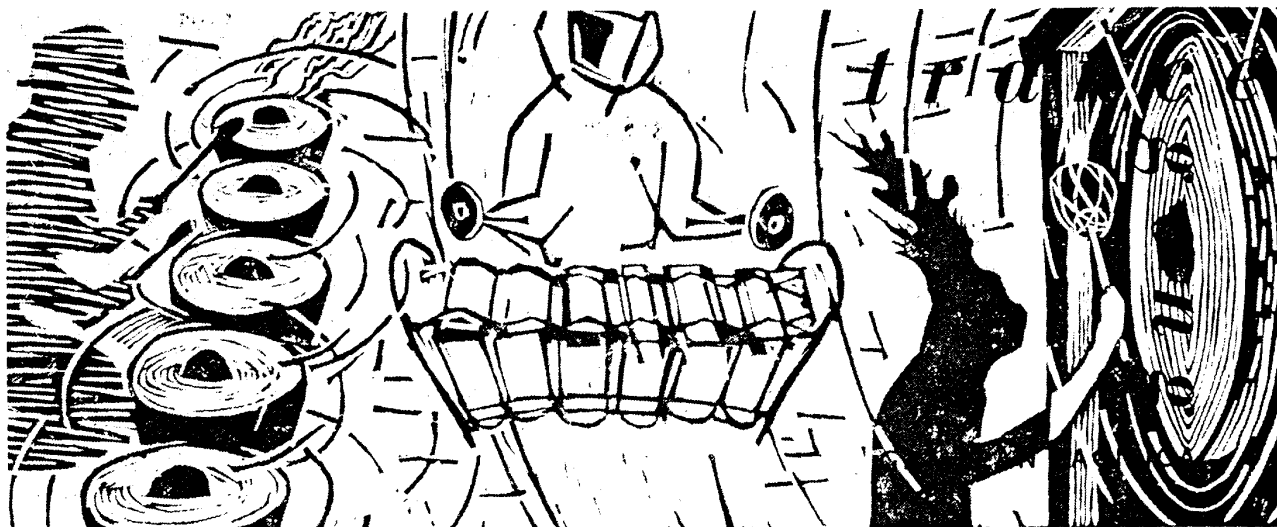
handed me the 37th compact disc in six months heralding itself as "trance music," a term, like "global village," so meaningless as to denigrate the concept of cliché. I meant to throw *Trance Gong* by *Gamelan Pacifica* (¿What Next? Recordings) immediately into the might-listen purgatory pile, but because the baffling relationship between Gopherspace and Archie servers distracted me as I packed up for a quarter-day at the office, I accidentally tucked the disc into my lunch pail instead. At least it will be good for blocking out the incessant prattle around me, I decided an hour later, clapping headphones to ears in the middle of a client meeting. It was much, much better than that.

In no time at all, *Trance Gong* transformed itself from diversion to wrap-around experience, bathing the chilly marble walls of the Michigan National Bank outside the conference room window in awakened meaning. The carved cross-like fleur-de-lis. The huge arched windows only missing the stained glass. The Indian trader sculpture at the cornice standing in for savior or saint. I was seeing, I suddenly realized, an authentic stereotype brought to fruition in stone and grout, an honest-to-God Temple of Commerce so obvious I couldn't believe I'd never noticed it before. How could such a blasphemous edifice exist for decades in Grand Rapids, I wondered, hotbed of fundamentalism, predestined world headquarters of the Christian Reformed Church and home of endless *Grand Rapids Press* editorial page

letters delineating the evils of Sunday supplement bra ads, the pagan perils to the soul Halloween revelry, the Satanic agenda of n age puppet shows performed in elementary schools to teach children to relax (i.e., me tate), and the filth of most non-Biblical literature. But not a word ever appeared in any letter about the abomination on the Moni Mall clearly revealed to me by interlocking *gamelan* puzzle parts of this brilliant contemporary music by a Seattle-based ensemble the Cornish College of the Arts directed Jarrad Powell.

No mere academic exercise is this, ev though the integer-based approach to *iml* and *kotekan* rhythm techniques evokes a E linese computer furiously downloading t catalog of the human genome project. Innov tions include signal-processed harmonizati of the traditional *suling* bamboo flute on t Jon Hassell-flavored "Small of My Back," non-traditional aluminum gamelan used three selections, and the brain-bursting entry Roto-Toms paradiddles over tuned drum clou bursts on the title cut. Still, except for the sw and squeakless *erhu* spike fiddle solo "Gending Erhu," First World smarty-pantsi is subordinated to the all-and-everything c mology of the gamelan itself. It may not p cisely be trance music, but as I focused or single metallophone figure in "Rain" and tri to follow it through all its intricate permu tions, the complexity of the underlying a

overarching layers in one sense intensified I in another shrunk to reveal a peek at the h homogenous structure. I have no idea w makes this complicated music tick-tock, but m tification here is truly bliss. [¿What Next? Reco ings, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103]



# Billboard

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APR 29 1995

★ GAMELAN PACIFICA

**Trance Gong**

PRODUCERS: Jarad Powell & Jon Keliehor  
What Next? 0016

Taking the sounds of Balinese and Javanese gamelan orchestras, Gamelan Pacifica creates a new music without losing any of the original spirit. Aptly titled "Trance Gong," these recent compositions exploit the open atmospheres and contemplative moods these metallophone and gong orchestras can generate. Coupled with chirping flutes and sinewy bowed stringed instruments, the compositions articulate a timeless music, although most of them were written within the last 12 years. The lone exception is a beautifully serene arrangement of John Cage's 1948 work "In A Landscape." Contact: Nonsequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, N.M. 87103.

BOSTON PHOENIX

BOSTON, MA  
WEEKLY 125 CENTS

JUL 7 1995

BURRELLE'S

887  
2000

MS  
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# Complex world

2147  
**Two new series float  
on the trance-music wave**

**by Banning Eyre**

In today's world music, the buzzword is "trance." Ever on the hunt for a marketing masterstroke, world-music labels increasingly prefer to sell mood rather than artists and cultures. And trance, a little word with big associations, finds its way into more and more album titles. Gamelan Pacifica called its recent release of new works for ancient Indonesian gamelan orchestras *Trance Gong* (Nonsequitur). Is the title a reference to musically induced states found in Indonesian ritual, or a calculated enticement to the new-age market? Some of both, as it turns out. Two US labels have also now introduced "trance music" series that illuminate both the sizzle and the substance behind the trance phenomenon.

Triloka's *Trance Planet, Volumes 1 and 2* cherry-picks tracks from a wide variety of offerings along the global folk, traditional, and pop spectrum. Ellipsis Arts' new *Trance 1* and *Trance 2* present

*Ganawa leela* ritual often blurs the line between ecstasy and pain as participants engage in self-flagellation; in the Balinese ritual dancers in a trance state try to stab their well-muscled bellies using long, wavy knives — usually, though not always, without inflicting serious injury. All this and much more emerges from more 60 pages of text, illustrations and photographs built into each release. Ellipsis Arts provides this deluxe packaging for all four releases in its new Musical Explorations series, which includes the two *Trance* volumes as well as *Morocco: Crossroads of Time* and *Echoes of the Forest: Music of the Central African Pygmies*. As you learn about the worlds that produced these remarkable traditions, looking at pictures and paintings and reading poetry and stories, the extended, moody recordings on the discs transport you. Never has ritual music recorded in the field been presented so seductively.

Santa Monica radio DJ Tom Schnabel, the compiler of the two *Trance Planet* releases, offers a decidedly looser take on trance: "A voyage of heart and mind.

# CMJ NEW MUSIC REPORT

## APRIL 10, 1995

### JACKPOT!



#### **GAMELAN PACIFICA**

##### *Trance Gong*

What Next?, c/o Nonsequitur,  
P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM  
87103 505.224.9483

Composers like Philip Glass, Harry Partch and especially Lou Harrison have always been fascinated by the gamelan music and instruments of Indonesia. The repetitive, communal nature of the music is ripe for new interpretations and ideas, and one of the leading American ensembles to bring this music out has been Gamelan Pacifica. This Seattle-based orchestra has commissioned and/or performed works ranging from avant garde to traditional, and on *Trance Gong* they travel in both spheres. There is always an unmistakable Indonesian feel to these mostly original pieces, but the group has ventured into interesting corners to find instrumentation, from the modern control of roto-toms to the ancient scrape of a Chinese spike fiddle. On the John Cage composition "In A Landscape" they use an aluminum gamelan to interpret his 1948 piece for solo piano or harp. Its harp-like tones are magnificent. The energy of the title track is undeniable, and the strange intonations of "Small Of My Back" include an electronically processed bamboo flute. These kinds of experiments don't always work, but Gamelan Pacifica seems to have a better track record than most; this one clearly succeeds.

## CMJ NEW MUSIC REPORT

GREAT NECK, NY  
WEEKLY 2,000

### APR 17 1995

#### **GAMELAN PACIFICA** *Trance Gong*

¿What Next?, c/o Nonsequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque,  
NM 87103 505.224.9483

Gamelan Pacifica is a Seattle-based group playing original compositions for Indonesian gamelan. Most of the material on *Trance Gong* is very faithful to the traditional sounds, with a bit of rhythmic experimentation and electronic processing which doesn't disturb the spirit. American antecedents such as Lou Harrison, Anthony Davis and Harry Partch have borrowed from gamelan but taken it much further away from the original. While I applaud Gamelan Pacifica's very competent display of this demanding discipline, the group is more interesting when it is less faithful and staid. On the title track, an unidentified looping plucked (banjo-like) instrument is joined by deliriously swirling chimes and a vigorous rototom drum orgy. The beautiful and vibrant "Gending Erhu" is composed for a made-in-U.S.A. aluminum gamelan and an erhu (chinese fiddle), which plays a lyrical melody line over a stately gamelan rhythm, much like Harrison's work for gamelan and mixed instruments. John Cage's 1948 piano work "In A Landscape" is nicely re-orchestrated for gamelan. The liner notes are quick to point out that this was done with Cage's approval, but I'd be more interested in hearing an interpretation that Cage *didn't* approve of.

# CREATIVE LOAFING

ATLANTA, GA  
WEEKLY 147,000

**AUG 23 1995**

## **Gamelan Pacifica**

### ***Trance Gong***

#### **What Next**

The clanging textures and quirky rhythms of the Indonesian gamelan have been a draw to European and American avant-gardists for well over a century. Perhaps the first encounter was Debussy's at the 1889 Paris Exposition, an experience he incorporated into his String Quartet. Like many artists from Picasso to Ezra Pound to David Byrne, Debussy found a liberating strangeness in the products of a foreign culture. Such contact brings not simply solutions to technical problems but the knowledge that artistic forms are not natural. For the gamelan, we don't even have a close parallel in the West. It's a set of percussion devices that functions as both an ensemble of individual players, as well as, collectively, a single instrument that generates a chiming drone unlike anything heard in Western music. This album by the Seattle-based Gamelan Pacifica plays up the artistic connections, even using the buzzword "trance" to provide a little commercial appeal. After all, there's a piece by John Cage here and you can't get more officially avant-garde than that. But that's not all there is to this album. It's got an instant appeal to American ears (at least to mine) over recordings of Indonesian gamelan, though at the cost of that strangeness. The rhythms are a bit steadier and since many of their instruments are made of aluminum, the textures aren't quite as odd. Still, the various compositions made especially for Gamelan Pacifica show off the strengths of their approach and to claim that they aren't "authentic" is to miss the point so thoroughly that you might as well become a hermit. The album doesn't need any special pleading; it's an outstanding work. (POB 344, Albuquerque, N.M. 87103). — *Lang Thompson*

DETROIT FREE PRESS

DETROIT, MI  
DAILY 638,083

MONDAY

APR 10 1995

*BURRELLE'S*

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**GAMELAN PACIFICA** — Trance Gong (What Next): ★ ★ ★  
This Seattle group's music, inspired by the gamelan-gong groups of Java and Bali, is sort of New Age music for the percussion set. Repetitive, interlocked rhythms are topped by tinkling, bell-like sounds. The overall effect is soothing and meditative.



# DOWN BEAT

ELMHURST, IL  
MONTHLY 99,214

## DECEMBER 1995

**Gamelan Pacifica: *Trance Gong*** (What Next? 0016; 60:35: ★★★★★<sup>1/2</sup>) Jarrad Powell's Gamelan Pacifica develops contemporary compositions for ancient mallet instruments, influenced by the traditional themes and rhythms. Pristine and accomplished, *Trance Gong* captures the beauty, fragility and meditative aspects of instrumental gamelan music. "The Small Of My Back" offers flowing melodies, intricate rhythms and exquisite suling flute (subject to electronic processing). Powell's arrangement of John Cage's "In A Landscape" for aluminum gamelan shimmers and glows.

## ECHOES

Following are forthcoming Echoes Features with some of your artists. These will be aired on Echoes, a nightly music soundscape from Public Radio International, on 145 affiliate stations from Maine to Southern California.

For more information, contact John Diliberto, 610-458-0780.

October 10

### **Gamelan Pacifica: Bang a Gong**

Gamelan Pacifica is a Seattle based ensemble playing an Indonesian based music. But instead of recreating traditional Balinese compositions, they are writing their own modern works for the Gamelan orchestra of gongs, metallophones, drums and flutes. Their latest CD, **Trance Gong**, makes a statement for ancient music in the modern world. We talk with the ensemble about their global Gamelan sound.



### **Gamelan Pacifica *Trance Gong***

(What Next WN 0016) CD 61 minutes

The Gamelan Pacifica ensemble has been active for 16 years, concentrating on performing new works for their very traditional Javanese instruments. On this album, they concentrate on American composers, with four works from their own members and one each from Jeff Morris and John Cage. If the chiming tonality of traditional gamelan music is ever-present, along with the intricate rhythmic interplay, this is also a cooler, regularised style of music than is traditional. The chimes and gongs are joined by bamboo flute and Chinese fiddle on separate occasions, and the use of roto-toms on another piece points up the ensemble's willingness to depart from convention. For the most part, the music is calm, shimmering and glistening, and although there are more energetic sections the music does tend to beg the description "polite". Even the Cage piece, an adapted *In a Landscape* suits the mood. Still, if you like your rhythm tightly engraved, and your harmonies crystal clear, this should go down well. [What Next, PO Box 2638, Santa Fe, NM 87504, USA] **BD**

# 5/4 MAGAZINE

## JULY 1995

### GAMELAN PA- CIFIC

#### Trance Gong

#### WHAT NEXT/NONSEQUITOR WNOO L 6

One-time Cornish instructor, cause of the single arts (non)riot in the Seattle college's history, and proverbial musical outcat John Cage is infamous for his musical acts of deconstruction. Nary a sound Cage heard was considered unmusical; nary a performative process was irrelevant. Cage "composed" with all manner of "chance" elements, and, in an inflammatorily peaceful moment (or, to be precise, four minutes and thirty-three seconds), with silence.

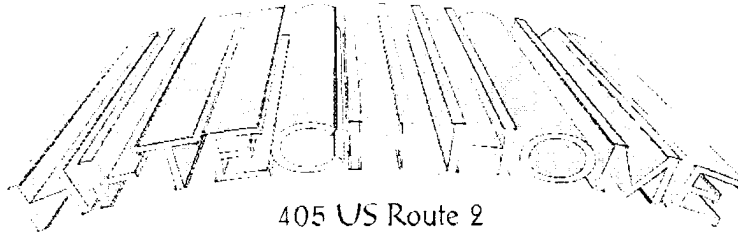
This limitless notion of composition is equally present in Cage's more—dare I say—conventional works. When dancer Sylvia Fort asked Cage in 1940 (while at Cornish) to compose and perform an accompaniment for her dance piece, "Bacchanale," he responded by trying to create a percussion ensemble out of the piano and designed the first "prepared piano" by wedging objects between the piano's strings.

And just as Cage begins at Cornish, so do we return there for Gamelan Pacifica's *Trance Gong*, which plumbs gamelan traditions from Bali and Java. Interlocking and repetitive rhythms sharpen the listener's attention so arrestingly that variations creep up oh-so-swiftly to whoosh away rhythm's customary parameters. Gamelan Pacifica introduces aluminum gamelan to the more traditional bronze and iron styles as well as roto-toms and other non-traditional instruments, such as Warren Chang's erhu (Chinese spike fiddle). A somnolent, délicat transcription of Cage's "In a Landscape" closes the disc.

Cage coincides perfectly with Gamelan Pacifica in a spirited encounter where musics and instruments interweave. The delightful chance operations of Cage may not be so evident on *Trance Gong*, but the music stirs the soul with a melodic/rhythmic/harmonic complexity that makes so much sense after harmolodics.

—Andy Bartlett





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## Reviews

GAMELAN PACIFICA - "Trance Gong"  
What Next? Recordings Nonsequitur

One of the most amazing kinds of music on the planet is made by Gamelan orchestras. Mainly found in Bali and Java, Gamelan orchestras consist of a group of players performing intricate and shifting pieces on chimes and gongs. The scales used in the compositions can be remarkably fractional -- microtonal tuning is extremely common. Gamelan has come to be a major inspiration in the western world during this century, with a number of modern composers creating pieces specifically for Gamelan orchestras -- Lou Harrison is perhaps the best known of these composers (with Harry Partch, endlessly experimenting with new Gamelan-like creations, not far behind.)

### Gamelan

Pacifica, based in Seattle, is dedicated to performing modern works, many of them commissioned for the ensemble, though they don't stay locked solely to the concept of Gamelan -- one of the pieces here, for example, is performed on Roto-Toms and xiao-bo, bringing up more of a connection to Steve Reich's "Drumming" than to Java or Bali. Other pieces involve suling, kendang and erhu, giving these quite a different tone as well. The pieces on TRANCE GONG (the album is titled after the piece using Roto-Toms and xiao-bo) are a mix of group compositions with pieces from Jeff Morris, Jarrad Powell and J Keliehor, along with a Jarrad Powell Gamelan arrangement of John Cage's "In Landscape" that was first performed (with the composer's enthusiastic approval) in 1980.

TRANCE GONG is a beautiful album, sometimes suggesting minimalism, sometimes hypnotic in its intricacy, always engaging and never overdone. The assorted explorations using other instruments (along with an aluminum Gamelan constructed in the United States) provide a very useful and interesting set of variations on the more traditional structures of Gamelan music--even so, there's a timeless, unchanging sense to this music that keeps it firmly grounded in the older materials. (SM)

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# JAZZ

On *Trance Gong* (¿What Next?), by the collegiate and highly academic **Gamelan Pacifica**, listeners can find another reason to doubt the “endangered” tag on Hart’s project. The gamelan has become an important element on the contemporary “serious” music scene, through the works of people like my former instructor at Rutgers, Barbara Benary. You can hear how the field recordings of these instruments inform the works of Steve Reich and other composers. Gamelan Pacifica takes it another step, verging on cultural imperialism. The compositions range from a piece for Roto-Toms to a transcription of John Cage for several gamelans. The ensemble occasionally captures the fire of the original, but its purpose is to use the ancient instruments to make a very modern musical statement.

In other "trance" news, **Gamelan Pacifica's *Trance Gong*** (Nonsequitur/What Next, PO Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) neatly illustrates the virtues of this gamelan group, led by Jarred Powell and based out of Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts. Rather than adhering to strict traditions from Bali and Java, the group focuses on contemporary compositions for gamelan and ancillary instruments. Overall, the music here impresses with its graceful meditations on and tasteful deviations from Indonesian orthodoxy. The most intriguing piece here, though, doesn't descend directly from an Indonesian tradition but from the mind of John Cage, whose 1948 "In a Landscape" becomes an exotic and gently swirling tone poem. Originally scored for piano and harp, the piece, arranged by Powell, makes an elegant translation to just-tuned aluminum gamelan instruments. ⊕



# **KZSU 90.1**

## **SUMMER \*95 PROGRAM**

### **GAMELAN PACIFICA *TRANCE* GONG**

(What Next? Recordings) Seattle's Gamelan Pacifica uses Indonesian gong-chime music as a basis for their own stunning creations. This acclaimed ensemble performs contemporary music taken from American and Indonesian composers and traditions. Here they combine traditional Gamelan gongs and chimes with bamboo flute, Chinese violin and percussion, and the occasional digital processor to create music that's fresh, fascinating, and passionate. Moods and rhythms vary wildly as chimes, gongs, and percussion weave fragile, shimmering veils of sonic lace; explode into jagged shards of glittering sound; or create a quietly radiant interpretation of a John Cage composition.

(Mary)

LA CROSSE TRIBUNE

LA CROSSE, WI  
DAILY 36,167

THURSDAY

APR 13 1995

## **Gamelan Pacifica**

**"Trance Gong," What Next**

■ This Seattle group's music, inspired by the gamelan-gong groups of Java and Bali, is sort of New Age music for the percussion set. Repetitive, interlocked rhythms are topped by tinkling, bell-like sounds. The overall effect is soothing and meditative.

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**Larry Gabriel** / Knight-Ridder News Service

# MANIFOLD 6

**Gamelan Pacifica -  
Trance Gong - cd - What  
Next/Non-  
sequitor**

Gamelan Pacifica are a long running Gamelan style music project in residence at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. This disc is a presentation of six different pieces of extremely differing origin and sound. "Small of My Back" moves deftly through its ten minutes and forty seconds (a typical length for every track on this album), using aluminum

Gamelan instruments as well as those of primitive design - not extremely noticeable - just kind of there. "Rain", however, is nothing if not emotive - its pattern of rhythm catchy in that head-nodding sort of way - very pretty.

"Peaches Of Immortality" has the feel of a North Indian Raga, with joyful-sounding, trancy rhythm. Of particular note is the version of John Cages "In a Landscape" done with aluminum Gamelan instruments...extremely minimal of course. Masterful Gamelan music - a great listen.

MAUI NEWS

MAILUKU, HI  
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# MAUI BEAT

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## Selected sounds

**"Trance Gong"**  
Gamelan Pacifica  
What Next? Recordings

The haunting beauty of Indonesian gamelan music serves as the foundation of this unusual recording. Seattle group Gamelan Pacifica plays contemporary music inspired by the traditional gong, drum and chime orchestras of Java and Bali.

Blending traditional Javanese instruments with American-made aluminum gamelan gongs, the group employs the cyclical structure of the traditional music to create enchanting, extended works that transport the listener into other-worldly realms. Influenced by the flowing, more contemplative Javanese gamelan style (in contrast with Bali's more vital version), Gamelan Pacifica close this fascinating album on an especially tranquil note with a lovely adaptation of one of John Cage's minimalist piano pieces.

# **MOLE #9**

## **M A G A Z I N E**

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**GAMELAN PACIFICA: Trance Gong**  
(What Next, Box 344, Albuquerque, NM  
87103) Avant troupe kicks gamelan to a  
new level of chiming intensity & rising  
tension using other percussion, scientific  
study. Of course, this is deepest space--  
ringing off into the void--a clear space  
bet. stars. Cage collectors not gamelan  
version of "In a Landscape."

## Summer 1995 NAPRA ReVIEW

**TRANCE GONG** by Gamelan Pacifica. What Next? Recordings/Nonsequitur, 505/224-9483. This ensemble performs new and innovative music for the Balinese/Javanese gong/chime collection of instruments. The pieces draw heavily on the sweet-and-sour harmonies and exotic polyrhythms of Indonesia, while having a toehold in the modern world. "Trance Gong" truly lives up to its name; its hypnotic repetitions of notes and rhythmic phrases build to mind-shattering levels as more and more drum layers are added. Other pieces are more delicate, especially "In a Landscape," a glowing 1948 composition by John Cage arranged for aluminum gamelan instruments. -CW

# **NEW REVIEW**

The of Records

## **GAMELAN PACIFICA**

### ■ *Trance Gong*

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(¿What Next?/Non Sequitur) Using the sense of stretched time and meditative qualities without sticking to the strict confines of the traditional Gamelan orchestra, this Seattle ensemble makes music of simple beauty and ease. While bringing in modern arrangements, the trio (with prime composer Jarrad Powell) retains enough of the alienness of the inspiration so as not to lose the otherworldly-ness in a muck of accessibility—yet this is eminently listenable. **BRAD BALFOUR**

MUSIC • CULTURE

0.63 JUL-AUG 1995

# Proposition

## **GAMELAN PACIFICA • Trance Gong**

This group, in residence at Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts, is a leading innovator in contemporary gamelan music, combining Balinese and Javanese traditions with Western influences in original compositions by group members, and an arrangement of John Cage's "In a Landscape." The group extends the already extensive gamelan sounds with the addition of roto-toms, drums, a flute and *erhu* (the Chinese violin). All the pieces highlight the gamelan's delicacy and subtle emotions, with the exception of the title composition, which exhibits too much mechanistic minimalism for my taste. Jarrod Powell's "Gending Erhu," featuring Warren Chang playing *erhu*, is exquisitely beautiful with the instrument's sad, haunting melody. And the Cage piece, originally scored for solo piano or harp, blooms in its adaptation to the gamelan, a reminder of how great a composer Cage was. In all, music of serene beauty. (*Non-sequitur*, Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) — John Baxter.



PULSE!

WEST SACRAMENTO, CA  
11-TIMES/YEAR 175,000

AUGUST 1995

BURRELLE'S

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# Gamelan Pacifica

Bang a gong

2147

Javanese legend credits the creation of gamelan, an ancient type of Indonesian music ensemble, to the third century god-king, Sang Hyang Guru. But Gamelan Pacifica's lineage is of more recent



GONG BANG GAMELAN PACIFICA. JARRAD POWELL IS THIRD FROM

vintage, from such composers as Lou Harrison and John Cage. Harrison is a mentor of Gamelan Pacifica founder Powell, and Cage's 1948 composition "In a Landscape," signals that their debut, *Trance Gong (What/Next)*, isn't typical academic or ethnological gamelan album.

"When I heard 'In a Landscape,' I thought it was quite beautiful and to me it sounded like a gamelan piece," Powell from his home in Seattle. "Even though it's not orchestrated for gamelan, I thought it had a gamelan logic."

The music of *Trance Gong* is at once ancient and thoroughly modern. The ensemble plays the traditional brass iron gongs and xylophones, drums and the suling flute, but they also play rototoms on the energized title track electronically harmonized suling on the contemplative "Small of My Back." That piece also features an alu gamelan, something you won't find in Bali and Java.

"There's a lot of scrap aluminum in Seattle because of the Boeing plant," explains Powell. He says Indonesian musicians were fascinated by this custom-built orchestra when they played together at Expo '86 in Vancouver. "We don't have aluminum because they don't have an aerospace industry there."

Although Gamelan Pacifica plays traditional Balinese and Javanese gamelan music, Powell says they're attempting to be traditional musicians. "There's a modern Indonesian choreographer, Sardono Kusumo, who says 'When you talk about American gamelan, you're not talking about an instrument, but the attitude of a culture,'" Powell. "We're not pretending we're from another culture. We want to see where it goes without putting too many restraints on it." —JOHN DILIBERTO

PULSE

WEST SACRAMENTO, CA  
11-TIMES/YEAR 175,000

FEBRUARY 1996

**BURRELLE'S**

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PULSE!'s writers and editors pick

# The best albums and videos of 1995

## contemporary instrumental

1. *The Mirror Pool*—Lisa Gerrard (4AD). Lisa Gerrard's wordless incantations prove why voice is the original instrument, in songs that sound ancient but are as modern as your next breath.
2. *Last Train to Lhasa*—Banco de Gaia (Planet Dog/Mammoth).
3. *Trust*—Patrick O'Hearn (Deep Cave).
4. *Elements*—Jade Warrior (Island Chronicles).
5. *Feather, Stone and Light*—R. Carlos Nakai, William Eaton & Will Clipman (Canyon).
6. *Trance Gong*—Gamelan Pacifica (What Next?).
7. *All Our Ancestors*—Tuu (Waveform).
8. *The Grassy Knoll* (Netzwerk/Antilles).
9. *Lost in Translation*—Roger Eno (Gyroscope).
10. *A Blessing in Tears*—Robert Fripp (Discipline).

—John Diliberto



2109-144 AVENT FERRY ROAD  
RALEIGH, NC 27606-2133

## The Record Exchange Music Monitor



Seattle is not only the home of grunge music, but of Gamelan Pacifica. In residence at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Gamelan Pacifica is a professional ensemble inspired by the gong/chime orchestras of Java and Bali (collectively known as gamelan). In *Trance* it uses gamelans made of iron and bronze from Indonesia and an American gamelan made of aluminum perform new and innovative music in an international style. Roto-Toms, Chinese cymbals, bamboo flute, Chinese spike fiddle and electronic processing are used for added effect, extending the concept of gamelan. Gamelan Pacifica performs works by Indonesian and American composers, including an arrangement of John Cage's 1948 composition *In a Landscape*.

# Reign of Toads

## ISSUE #4

### **GAMELAN PACIFICA, Trance Gong**

(¿What Next?): When listening to the musics from Java and Bali, I seem to drift into a wandering space. The musical techniques and structures emerge as rolling hills. They have a rhythm, but also an organic sense of wander/wonder. The **Trance Gong** recordings are contemporary explorations, composed primarily within the last 20 years, with the exception of the closing piece which is an adaptation of a John Cage composition. In a time when most popular musicians feel the evolution of tradition is sampling soundbites of indigenous music and homogenizing them into a 4/4 ambient-techno-triphop dance beat, it's great to hear others forging ahead into different, more complex directions. And they do it extremely well. It really is a joyful collection of songs—some of which, especially the title track, make me want to just jump up and dance! [SA]

# Revue

# Corrigée

N°23, trimestriel, mars 95 20 F

**GAMELAN PACIFICA** "Trance Gong" What Next Recordings WN0016. Dist. Metamkine.

L'ensemble Gamelan Pacifica est basé à Seattle, a le regard tourné vers le Pacifique et les oreilles marquées par les percussions de Java ou Bali. Ils jouent des musiques traditionnelles et contemporaines d'Indonésie ou des Etats-Unis. On a par exemple une adaptation de "In a Landscape" de John Cage. L'ensemble est très réjouissant à écouter. J.N.

ROCKET

SEATTLE, WA  
22-TIMES/YEAR 70,000

MAY 17 1995

**GAMELAN PACIFICA** *Trance Gong*

(*What Next?* CD) The operative word in the title is trance. Made up of a number of pieces the Cornish ensemble has performed over the last several years, the music can definitely transport you to another place. It's essentially tuned percussion, but far more precise than the banging on saucepans you did as a kid. There's everything from a programmed piece ("Small of my Back") which echoes early Terry Riley and "Tubular Bells" to an adaptation of a John Cage composition. In other words, we're obviously not working completely within the tradition here. Instead, Gamelan Pacifica have taken the instrument and used it for their own purposes, but in a way that still offers respect to its Indonesian heritage—a fine line to walk, but one that they manage with apparent ease. If you like what's currently being touted as ambient, the synthetic blips and beeps that just lie there, take a listen to this. It'll fill your headphones with sound and enrich your mind. A real pleasure.

—CHRIS NICKSON

(*What Next?* c/o Nonsequitur, PO  
Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103)

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Gamelan Pacifica: *Trance Gong* ¿What Next? Recordings (WN0016)

Quoting from the liner notes: "Gamelan Pacifica is a professional ensemble in residence at the Cornish College of Arts in Seattle. Inspired by the gong/chime orchestras of Java and Bali (collectively known as gamelan), the ensemble performs new and innovative music in an international style ..." To my western ears, traditional gamelan music is enjoyable, but a little goes a long way. *Trance Gong* contains music that has more stylistic and sonic variety than traditional gamelan, however, and the net result is an hour of unmitigated pleasure for the listener. Because this may be a hard CD to find, let me give an address: ¿What Next? Recordings, c/o Nonsequitur, PO Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103. (Music A-, Sound A)

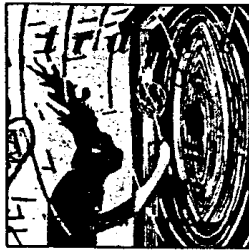
**SOMA**

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## **GAMELAN PACIFICA**

### **Trance Gong**

#### **What Next? WN0016**



The title is misleading; far from being a compilation of static gamelan patterns designed to hypnotize and/or tranquilize, *Trance Gong* is a half a dozen of the more interesting and engaging non-traditional gamelan

compositions I've heard. First of all, it is extremely well-recorded. The distinctive harmonic signature of each *gong*, *kenong*, *demung* and *bonang* rings true and beautiful, even in the midst of the most dizzyingly resonant diapason. But more importantly, Gamelan Pacifica—a professional ensemble in residence at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle—takes an active role in what it sees as the “evolving concept of gamelan.” What this means to the average listener is: Whatever your previous gamelan experience, be prepared for some unusual sound combinations and unexpected rhythms.

From the start, Gamelan Pacifica breaks with tradition in “Small of My Back.” Conventional Javanese rhythm patterns are twisted and molded to create an intense, unpredictable drama for gongs, skinned drums and the bamboo *suling* flute. As the drums and gongs weave a vibrant and fascinating musical texture that would be an effective piece in itself, the incisive *suling* cuts in and takes the music to another level entirely. Toward the end, a signal processor is used to generate simultaneous harmonies for the *suling* that leave you out of breath.

*Trance Gong*, collaboratively composed, is a work of tremendous excitement and energy. The trance here is one that involves every fiber of the body and spirit, not just the mind. Just when you feel like you're settling into its groove, roto-toms and Chinese cymbals explode into your consciousness like an atom bomb. The experience is riveting.

In contrast is the searingly gorgeous “Gending Erhu.” *Erhu* refers to a Chinese spike fiddle, played by Warren Chang, a respected master of the instrument. Composed specifically for Chang, “Gending Erhu” floats pristine and diaphanous where “Trance Gong” thundered.

Gamelan purists may have a problem with this CD, but I didn't. I find it fascinating to hear what can happen when a group of accomplished and creative musicians put their heads together to push the envelope. Modern, but with an air of timelessness, Gamelan Pacifica has done an unparalleled job of taking gamelan music to new heights, while remaining respectful to the roots and cultural significance of its instruments. —Jamie Allen



JUL 9 1995

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WORLD BEAT



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It's a fine line between being entranced... and just being put to sleep. Gamelan Pacifica teeters right there.

■ **Gamelan Pacifica**  
■ **"Trance Gong"**  
(What Next?)  
■ **Rating: ★★**

The 15-year-old "ensemble-in-residence" at Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts presents an hour's worth of so-called trance music, a soporific sort of background sound that is trying real hard to be the current rage. (More-familiar names in the budding genre are Mike Oldfield and Brian Eno.) In this case, the instrumentation is inspired by the gong/chime orchestras of Bali and Java (collectively known as *gamelan*, the liner notes tell us) that are marginally more melodic than wind chimes (a cassette of which random chaos I also recently acquired). Instruments of iron, bronze and aluminum — and a smattering of electronic sampling — offer a perceptible difference in tonality. There's even a stringed instrument called an *erhu* at work in one tune, but trying to follow a melody ultimately proves to be an exercise in frustration.

As a fan of percussion, the idea here is really quite intriguing. But an hour of this is really too much. Even as background music, it gets to be more annoying than enjoyable. It's the same problem I have with the Japanese drum group Kodo. But then, I've never understood what John Cage and minimalism were all about, anyway (Cage's 1948 "In a Landscape," originally written for solo piano or harp, closes this collection).

For me, less is simply less.

— James M. Tarbox

# the Stranger

FREE WEEKLY      APRIL 12 THROUGH 18, 1995      VOL. 4, NO. 28

**the stranger** April 12, 1995

**GAMELAN PACIFICA AREN'T KIDDING** when they call their new CD *Trance Gong*. It's slightly slumber-some but beautiful Balinese and Javanese-derived music for gong/ chime orchestra. Intricate, multi-layered, and quietly euphoric, it's also about the trippiest, most absorbing musical web you'll ever want to get caught in. You probably won't need any substances to enjoy.

## **CLUB GUIDE DANNY HOUSMAN**

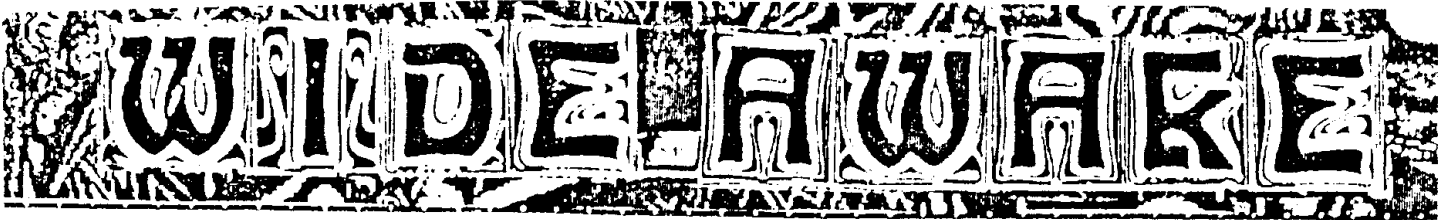
Formed in 1980 by composer/ Cornish prof Jarrad Powell, the ensemble plays both traditional and modern pieces—their own arrangements—and even some original works. The folks sit in different geometric configurations and tap mallets on iron, bronze and aluminum pots and funky bowl-things, creating a lovely ruckus of percussive yet meditative bell-like sounds. Instruments that get “solos,” however, might include *suling*, a bamboo flute, or *erhu*, a two-string Chinese spike fiddle. The group even branches out into a John Cage composition, “In A Landscape.”

# Victory Review

ACOUSTIC MUSIC  
VOL. 20 NO. 5  
MAY 1995

## **GAMELAN PACIFICA: TRANCE GONG CD**

WN0016 What Next?, c/o Nonsequitur, POB 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103  
Gamelan is a traditional gong/chime percussion orchestra familiar from Java and Bali. Here, though, Gamelan Pacifica takes off from that Southeast Asian tradition using Central Javanese bronze and an American-made aluminum gamelan to produce an extraordinary recording. This is exciting music to listen to. It's also exciting that Gamelan Pacifica is a professional ensemble in residence at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. Each of the six tunes on this CD leaves me amazed. After the last cut I've found myself hitting the play key for another go through. In "Small of My Back" a suling (bamboo flute) is woven in to harmonize with traditional gamelan by a digital signal processor. The title cut "Trance Gong" brings in Roto-Toms and xiao-bo (Chinese bronze cymbals) that I swear will speed up your brain waves. Also prominent is "In a Landscape," a John Cage composition reworked by Gamelan Pacifica director Jarrad Powell for Gamelan. "Gending Erhu," is a showcase for Warren Chang, a master player of the erhu, a Chinese spike fiddle played with the bow hairs threaded between the two strings, producing, to my ear, a Chinese music feel. Incredible! Get this CD. Then get tickets for the next performance of Gamelan Pacifica. This is too good to miss. (*Richard Dorsett*)



**A QUARTERLY NEWS & MUSE JOURNAL 4 AZ & BEYOND  
SPRING 1996 : FREE WITHIN REASON ; VOLUME 17**

**GAMELAN PACIFICA - TRANCE GONG  
(NONSEQUITUR)**

In 1980 JARRAD POWELL formed GAMELAN PACIFICA, a professional ensemble in residence at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle which POWELL directs and composes for. They claim to be 'Inspired by the gong/chime orchestras of Java and Bali (collectively known as -gamelan-), the ensemble performs new and innovative music in an international style, drawing the repertoire from various composers and traditions...' what ever they say. They use three different sets of instruments on the album: one of iron and bronze like the style of Central Java, one of bronze in the Cirebon style, and one in aluminum or American style gamelan (isn't it ironic that America's contribution to the gamelan efforts would be out of aluminum...let's all recycle). There are also many flute players drummers on the CD that are too numerous to list in such limited space. I was taken away by the Chinese fiddle (traditionally called a erhu) on a track called 'Gending Erhu'. It is a compelling combination of Indonesian and American artistry, put this one on your wish list quickly. Before they disappear into the mist.



Issue 136 June 1995

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**Balinese: Gamelan Gong**

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**Sundanese: Degung-Mojang  
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**Gamelan Pacifica**

**Trance Gong**

NONSEQUITUR/WHAT NEXT WN0016 CD

The unmistakably intoxicating sounds of gamelan musics have seduced Western composers for at least the last hundred years. Olivier Messiaen, Colin McPhee, Peter Sculthorpe, Peter Maxwell Davies and Steve Reich all absorbed the influence to varying degrees. More

recently, Steve Shehan's gorgeously lush *Arrows* and Kenneth Newby's excellent *Ecology Of Souls* have transposed the characteristic angular rhythms and mesmeric shoals of microtonal resonance into digital contexts which share a surprising common ground with these ancient instruments. The gamelan generally (and this covers some very diverse music across South East Asia) shares, with much Indian music, an emphatic, self-referential homogeneity which makes it difficult to dilute/pollute; and has, in a sense, helped it to resist the persuasive, levelling influence of modern Western music. During the British occupation of India, portable harmoniums were introduced, which because of their inflexible tuning forced the indigenous instruments to limit their range. The banality of current Bollywood film scores owes a lot to this physical intervention in the musical culture. The gamelan, on the other hand, consists almost entirely of percussion instruments with fixed and unique tunings. This makes it very difficult to accommodate different musical traditions.

## soundcheck

*Trance Gong* presents no such ambiguity. It is performed by a Seattle ensemble, Gamelan Pacific, on various different gamelans including a modern American aluminium one. This ensemble is dedicated to extending the repertoire of the gamelan into a modern international context, and performs works by contemporary Asian composers such as KRT Wasitodiningrat and Western composers including Ingram Marshall, John Cage and the ensemble's founder, Jarred Powell. The range of the pieces is impressive; the gamelan is expanded where necessary to accommodate various new instruments. They do however strive to retain the acoustic feel of the original music and continue in a more classical tradition rather than the electronic mutations mentioned earlier. To me, the sublime multi-dimensional glow of the best Javanese music has more in common with the spirit of pop appropriations than with this reverent, yet rather dry work. Still, it is highly recommended to anyone following the development of gamelan.

**PAUL SCHÜTZE**

32

# YOUR FLESH

\$4.50 US  
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## GAMELAN PACIFICA *Trance Gong* CD

An appetizing mix of traditional Indonesian gamelans, American aluminum gamelan and added flavors like rototoms, Chinese spike fiddle and electronic processing. Some of the tracks like "Rain" and "Peaches of Immortality" veer close to Western pop in their melody lines and a version of John Cage's "In A Landscape" is added. The result is a very enjoyable record that manages to update a traditional music form without sounding forced or awkward. The debt most recent "ambient" music owes to Gamelan music (not to mention forefathers like Eno, Hassell and others) is obvious—it's reassuring to see that somebody is working within the discipline of Gamelan instrumentation. [What Next?] *Bruce Adams.*