

# Ensemble performs traditional Indonesian music

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Quartz Hill High School students took a break from the traditional curriculum earlier this month to experience the trance-inducing music of the Indonesian island of Bali.

Two musicians from a Los Angeles-based performing arts company traveled to the band room on October 10 to give an hour-long concert and presentation of gamelan, a percussion-based Indonesian musical ensemble that consists of xylophone-like instruments, drums, gongs and flutes.

Over 200 students and faculty members looked on as Maria Bodmann and Cliff DeArment sat cross-legged on the floor and performed several songs, some of which dating back to over a thousand years.

Bodmann, who was a Fulbright Scholar to Indonesia, and DeArment first demonstrated the interlocking melodies that result when two [*gender*] middle-register metallophones that lack damper pedals, are played simultaneously.

“Gamelan is a little like playing a game,” said DeArment, who also plays guitar, piano and drums.

The instruments are tuned without perfect synchronization such that small wobble-like [beating or tremolo] can be heard throughout gamelan pieces, a characteristic that adds to the trance-like feeling of the music.

Whereas music in the Western world is characterized by right-hand harmony, gamelan utilizes complementary harmonies in the higher octaves and low-pitch melodies. Gamelan’s purpose is to attract people to religious ceremonies, so the music emphasizes far-reaching rhythms.

After discussing the creatures that are engraved on the sides of the instruments, which are meant to protect the instruments, Bodmann and DeArment played excerpts from a few other songs using some of the other instruments that the two had brought with them.

Puffing her cheeks in and out as she played a recorder-like instrument, Bodmann demonstrated a circular breathing method that allows a musician to take in air through his or her nose while blowing out air stored in the cheeks, a technique that was used by jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie.

To conclude the presentation, DeArment ask for several volunteers to try out some of the drums and gongs.

According to Bodmann, it took at least three years for her and DeArment to become confident enough to play for an audience.

“You have to imitate what your teacher does,” she said. “It’s very time-intensive to study.”

DeArment has even tried to compose his own gamelan pieces, but the complexity of Indonesian music makes notation on paper very difficult.

“It’s a little hard to write something that holds up to a thousand-year tradition,” he said.

DeArment was attracted to the fact that Indonesian percussion has been around for much longer than that of the United States.

“This is the original heavy metal,” Bodmann said as she placed a large cymbal into its case.