



# **Javaphilia: American Love Affairs with Javanese Music and Dance (Music and Performing Arts of Asia and the Pacific)**

*Henry Spiller*

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Fragrant tropical flowers, opulent batik fabrics, magnificent bronze gamelan orchestras, and, of course, aromatic coffee. Such are the exotic images of Java, Indonesia's most densely populated island, that have hovered at the periphery of North American imaginations for generations. Through close readings of the careers of four "javaphiles"—individuals who embraced Javanese performing arts in their own quests for a sense of belonging—*Javaphilia: American Love Affairs with Javanese Music and Dance* explores a century of American representations of Javanese performing arts by North Americans. While other Asian cultures made direct impressions on Americans by virtue of firsthand contacts through immigration, trade, and war, the distance between Java and America, and the vagueness of Americans' imagery, enabled a few disenfranchised musicians and dancers to fashion alternative identities through bold and idiosyncratic representations of Javanese music and dance.

*Javaphilia's* main subjects—Canadian-born singer Eva Gauthier (1885–1958), dancer/painter Hubert Stowitts (1892–1953), ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood (1918–2005), and composer Lou Harrison (1917–2003)—all felt marginalized by the mainstream of Western society: Gauthier by her lukewarm reception as an operatic mezzo-soprano in Europe, Stowitts by his homosexuality, Hood by conflicting interests in spirituality and scientific method, and Harrison by his predilection for prettiness in a musical milieu that valued more anxious expressions. All four parlayed their own direct experiences of Java into a defining essence for their own characters. By identifying aspects of Javanese music and dance that were compatible with their own tendencies, these individuals could literally perform unconventional—yet coherent—identities based in Javanese music and dance. Although they purported to represent Java to their fellow North Americans, they were in fact simply representing themselves.

In addition to probing the fascinating details of these javaphiles' lives, *Javaphilia* presents a novel analysis of North America's first significant encounters with Javanese performing arts at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. An account of the First International Gamelan Festival, in Vancouver, BC (at Expo 86), almost a century later, bookends the epoch that is the focus of *Javaphilia* and sets the stage for a meditation on North Americans' ongoing relationships with the music and dance of Java.

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