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From *Musik Seriosa* to *Tembang Puitik*: A History of Indonesian Art Songs

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Abstract

The arrival of the Europeans in the 16th century at the Indonesian archipelago has influenced many aspects of Indonesia. In music, the Portuguese have influenced the birth of *Keroncong* music, whereas the Dutch have brought European popular and dance songs to Indonesia. In the early 20th century, access to the education system has somehow led to the sparks of the independence movement. During this era, the first generation of Indonesian composers was born and patriotic songs were composed. After gaining independence, the first radio station in Indonesia, *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI), was established, and the *Bintang Radio* (Radio Star) became one of the most popular programs. The popularity of *Bintang Radio* contest has urged the birth of second-generation Indonesian composers, who mostly composed vocal songs, or then called *Musik Seriosa*. In the 21st century, the term for Indonesian art songs shifted to *Tembang Puitik*, and the term *Musik Seriosa* was not as familiar as before. This study aims to uncover the general history of Indonesian art songs, from *Musik Seriosa* to *Tembang Puitik*. The paper will firstly elaborate on western music dissemination and the establishments of music academies in Indonesia, followed by a historical study about the development of Indonesian modern music. Then, the paper will conclude with the analysis of the shifting terms, *Musik Seriosa* and *Tembang Puitik*, mainly through literature review.

Kata Kunci: Musik Seriosa, Tembang Puitik, Radio Republik Indonesia, Bintang Radio

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Dari Musik Seriosa Menuju Tembang Puitik: Sejarah Perkembangan *Art Song* di Indonesia

Abstrak

Kedatangan orang Eropa di kepulauan Indonesia pada abad ke-16 telah berdampak pada banyak aspek di Indonesia. Dalam aspek musik, kedatangan orang Portugis telah memberi dampak dalam kelahiran musik Keroncong, sedangkan orang Belanda telah membawa lagu dansa populer Eropa ke Indonesia. Pada awal abad ke-20, terbukanya akses terhadap sistem pendidikan bagi orang Indonesia telah berujung pada pergerakan atau perjuangan mencapai kemerdekaan dari pemerintah kolonial Belanda. Pada saat ini, lahirlah komposer Indonesia generasi pertama yang menciptakan karya musik yang bersifat patriotik. Setelah Indonesia merdeka, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI, stasiun radio pertama di Indonesia) berdiri dan Bintang Radio menjadi salah satu acara terpopuler pada saat itu. Popularitas kontes Bintang Radio telah mendorong kelahiran komposer musik generasi kedua, yang pada umumnya banyak menciptakan lagu vokal yang disebut sebagai Musik Seriosa. Pada abad ke-21, istilah dari lagu vokal klasik (*art song*) bergeser menjadi Tembang Puitik, dan istilah Musik Seriosa mulai ditinggalkan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan tentang sejarah umum dari *art song* di Indonesia, dari Musik Seriosa menuju Tembang Puitik. Penelitian ini pertama-tama menjelaskan tentang sejarah masuknya musik barat dan berdirinya sekolah/akademi musik di Indonesia, yang dilanjutkan dengan studi historis mengenai perkembangan musik modern di Indonesia. Kemudian, melalui studi literatur, karya tulis ini ditutup dengan analisis singkat mengenai istilah *art song* Indonesia yang telah bergeser, yakni Musik Seriosa dan Tembang Puitik.

Keywords: Musik Seriosa, Tembang Puitik, Radio Republik Indonesia, Bintang Radio

Introduction

Since the prehistoric era, songs have been sung by humans as a form of expression or communication. In Western music history, songs have evolved throughout the centuries: from the Hymn to Nikkal in the Ancient Mesopotamia era, The Epitaph of Seikilos in the Ancient Greek era, Gregorian chants, and vernacular songs in the Middle Ages, motets in the Renaissance, to operas in Baroque and Classical era (Burkholder, Grout, & Palisca, 2014). Art songs became popular in the Romantic era, as composers made musical interpretations for the rising lyrical poetry during the era (Muns, 2017). Public performances of professional singers delivering art songs in concert settings in the 19th century had made art songs become gradually popular to the western public (Muns, 2017). The musicalization of poetry has become prevalent ever since and has

triggered many composers–including composers outside the western world–in composing art songs.

Indonesia gained its independence in 1945. Since the reign of the earliest kingdoms in the prehistoric era until today, the country of Indonesia has encountered many influences from the outside world: the Hindu-Buddhist Indian dynasties, the Islamic traders, the Europeans, the Japanese, and many more. The long encounter with different people from various parts of the world has resulted in a dynamic culture and society in Indonesia. This parallels with music in Indonesia, in which many parts of them have experienced enculturation throughout history.

Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language) was proposed to become the official language in Indonesia by young Indonesian nationalists in 1928. Since then, Bahasa Indonesia has been utilized as one of the instruments in unifying Indonesia. Indonesian poets and composers began to compose/create works using Bahasa Indonesia – one of the most representational forms were art songs/poetic songs. These songs served not only as the tools for promoting nationalism in the new nation, but also served as the nation's new cultural/musical identity.

Although in general there are many studies done about Indonesian music, the study focusing on Indonesian art songs is still scarcely conducted. Indonesian art songs may contain historical, ideological, political, or religious values, which may be necessary for interpreting the present time. This study aims to gain a better comprehension of the development of Indonesian art songs. This study also hopes to promote Indonesian modern/contemporary/art music to the world.

Western Music Dissemination in Indonesia

Western Music dissemination in Indonesia can be traced back to the 16th century when the Europeans began their exploration to the East in search of gold and spices. The Portuguese conquered Malacca in 1511, and this was followed by the Dutch in the late 16th century (Sumarsam, 1995). The arrival of the Europeans had influenced Indonesian society in many aspects, linguistic and religious enculturation for instance. Many Indonesian words are derived from Portuguese and Dutch languages (Ricklefs, 1981). The Portuguese had brought missionaries and succeeded in establishing Christian communities in Indonesia (Rickelfs, 1981). The Portuguese and the Dutch had also brought a mixed culture in Indonesia. Mestizo is a Portuguese word to

refer to people with Asian and European mixed blood (Sumarsam, 1995). The Mestizo culture had resulted in a dynamic and interrelating community, which also had affected the musical aspect.

The introduction of western musical instruments by the Europeans in the era had generated new musical genres in Indonesia. The Portuguese are thought to have a significant influence on *Keroncong* music (Sumarsam, 1995). *Keroncong* music is usually played by an ensemble, which consists of mostly European chordophones (guitar, violin, flute, cello, and light percussion) and a vocalist, and has a typical characteristic of medium-paced quadratic rhythm (Manuel, 1988). Employing diatonic major-minor scales with simple harmonies, *Keroncong* songs are sung with a vocal style that resembles Western bel canto style in its use of vibrato but less ornamentation (Manuel, 1988). On the other hand, the Dutch are thought to have brought European social dances such as waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and other popular dance songs to be performed in the house of the Dutch residents, as well as in the Javanese courts (Sumarsam, 1995). The Javanese courtiers and the Dutchmen held close friendships that European popular music was heard on many court occasions, played at times in turn or together with the Javanese gamelan (Sumarsam, 1995).

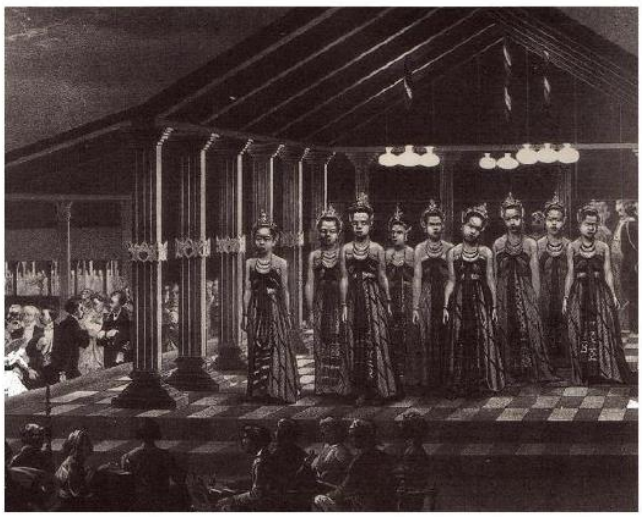


Figure 1. A picture of Javanese dancers performing Bedhaya dance, accompanied by the gamelan, in a party attended by Javanese courtiers and the Dutchmen in Yogyakarta (Sumarsam, 1995)

The Europeans are also thought to have brought military music to Indonesia. *Prajuritan* (military) music in the Yogyanese court was an adaptation of European military music, with the combination of western musical instruments (fifes, trumpets, and tenor drums) and Javanese musical instruments (*gong, bendhe, kecer, kendhang, ketipung*), (Sumarsam, 1995). In the late 19th century, there were already string ensembles found in the courts (Sumarsam, 1995).

The Establishments of Music Academies in Indonesia

The Ethical Policy endorsed by the Dutch in 1902 aiming to raise the living standards in Indonesia (focusing on education, irrigation, and emigration) has initiated the establishment of the education system in Indonesia (Ricklefs, 1981). The Dutch divided schools into First Class and Second Class schools according to the financial level of the students' families (Ricklefs, 1981). Students at the First Class schools were trained with European systems, and some could even continue their studies at universities in the Netherlands (Ricklefs, 1981). Music classes were held weekly, but it was not certain what kind of songs were sung (Mark, 2007).

The independence movement sparked during the 1920s was initiated by several educated Indonesians (Mark, 2007). Some of them were regarded as the first-generation Indonesian composers: Wage Rudolf Supratman, Cornel Simanjuntak, and Ismail Marzuki (Mark, 2007). They were taught the basics of western music at school, and it has influenced their works: Western music compositional techniques but with lyrics in the Indonesian language (Mark, 2007). As the music was composed during the struggle for independence, most of the songs written were patriotic songs.

Several accounts stated that many musicians from Europe came to Jakarta (then Batavia) to conduct performances and taught music lessons. Musicians were highly demanded as there were no high qualified Indonesian musicians yet then (Sitorus & Pasaribu, 2009). In the 1900s, Italian musicians had come to perform at some streets in Batavia by singing, playing violins, flutes, and wind organs (Sitorus & Pasaribu, 2009). A Russian opera troop arrived in 1920, along with four Russian musicians: Sheychulk, Neudachin (clarinetist), Vondrace (cellist), and Nicolai Varfolomeyef (cellist) in 1925 (Sitorus & Pasaribu, 2009). Amir Pasaribu – one of the Indonesian pioneer composers – learned to play cello, piano, and composition from Nicolai Varfolomeyef (Russian) and James Zwart (Dutch), (Sitorus & Pasaribu, 2009). These arrivals were continued until the 1950s, and classical music has expanded its wings to a broader range of Indonesian society. The first music school established in Jakarta is *Yayasan Pendidikan Musik* (YPM) in 1952, by a Hungarian pianist named Frans Szabo. In 1961, the Indonesian government established the first music academy for western music, *Akademi Musik Indonesia*, in Yogyakarta. Later, the government established *Akademi Seni Karawitan Indonesian* (ASKI, Indonesian Karawitan Academy) in 1964 in Solo. This is followed by the establishment of *Institut Kesenian Jakarta* and Jakarta Arts Center

(*Taman Ismail Marzuki*/TIM) in 1968. Since then, western music gained gradual popularity in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java.

Modern Music Development in Indonesia

The arrival of the Europeans brought western music into Indonesian archipelago. Firstly, spread among the upper-class Dutch and Mestizo communities in the urban areas, the radio systems developed in the early 20th century held an important role later in music distribution in Indonesia (Hardjana, 2003). Major radio broadcasts from London, Melbourne, Washington, Moscow, and many more, were transmitted in Indonesia, and this access has made Indonesians becoming more familiar with Western music (both popular and classical) than before (Hardjana, 2003). The only radio station in Indonesia back then, *Radio Republik Indonesia* (RRI, Radio of The Republic of Indonesia), broadcasted regular music programs, such as Top 10 Music Charts and *Bintang Radio* (lit. Radio Star), (Hardjana, 2003).

Bintang Radio is an annual singing contest of RRI, which consists of three categories: *Musik Seriosa* (serious music/classical vocal music), *Musik Hiburan* (music for entertainment), and *Musik Keroncong* (*Keroncong* music), (Hardjana, 2003). A full orchestra of thirty to forty players will accompany the contestants who managed to reach the final round, and it was a major breakthrough in the history of modern Indonesian music (Hardjana, 2003). The popularity of *Bintang Radio* has thus influenced the birth of first-generation Indonesian composers influenced by the West, such as Ismail Marzuki, RAJ Soedjasmin, Cornel Simanjuntak, Binsar Sitompul, Amir Pasaribu, Iskandar, Koesbini, Syaiful Bachri, Mochtar Embut, F.X.Sutopo, and many more (Hardjana, 2003).

These first-generation composers (1930s-1940s) contributed in composing patriotic songs, such as "*Indonesia Raya* (lit. Great Indonesia)", "*Maju Tak Gentar* (lit. Moving Forward without Fear)", "*Gugur Bunga* (lit. The Fallen Flower/Hero)", and "*Satu Nusa Satu Bangsa* (lit. One Homeland One Nation)" (Hardjana, 2003). The song "*Indonesia Raya*" has since then become the national anthem of The Republic of Indonesia. Whereas other notable songs are regarded as *Lagu Nasional* (National Songs). Today, these national songs are taught at public schools and are sung during flag-raising ceremonies and Independence Day celebrations. Indonesia eventually gained independence on 17th August 1945.

The second-generation composers (1950s-1960s) were categorized as "*Bintang Radio* Generation", as most of these composers were recognized by the public as

composers/arrangers/conductors/accompanists at the most famous radio program during the era, *Bintang Radio* (Hardjana, 2003). Important composers of this generation include Amir Pasaribu, Binsar Sitompul, R.A.J. Sudjasmin, Ismail Marzuki, Koesbini, Soebronto K. Atmodjo, Soedharnoto, Syaiful Bachri, and Iskandar (Hardjana, 2003). Unlike the compositions of the first-generation composers which focus on expressing devotion to the country, the second-generation composers mostly composed vocal works inspired by poetry. During this era, vocal compositions were largely composed mainly due to the high demand for new vocal repertoires for *Bintang Radio*. This has resulted in poetic songs/art songs flourishing in this era. One prominent example is the song "*Awan* (lit. Cloud)" composed by Binsar Sitompul, musicalizing the poem of Sanusi Pane about nature and human emotions.

Awan	Cloud
Awan datang Datang Perlahan	The cloud comes slowly
Seraya Bermimpi Seraya Berangan	While dreaming while daydreaming
Berat Tambah Lupa Diri	Gaining weight forgetting yourself
Bertambah Halus Akhirnya Seri	Getting soft eventually beautiful
Dan Bentuk Menjadi Hilang	And it loses its shape
Dalam Langit Biru Gemilang	In a bright blue sky
Demikian Jiwaku Hilang Sekarang	My soul is also lost now
Dalam Kehidupan Teduh Tenang	In a shady quiet life
(poem by Sanusi Pane)	(translated by the writer)

Figure 2 The poem "Awan" by Sanusi Pane, translated by Olivia Evelin Sundari, 2014.
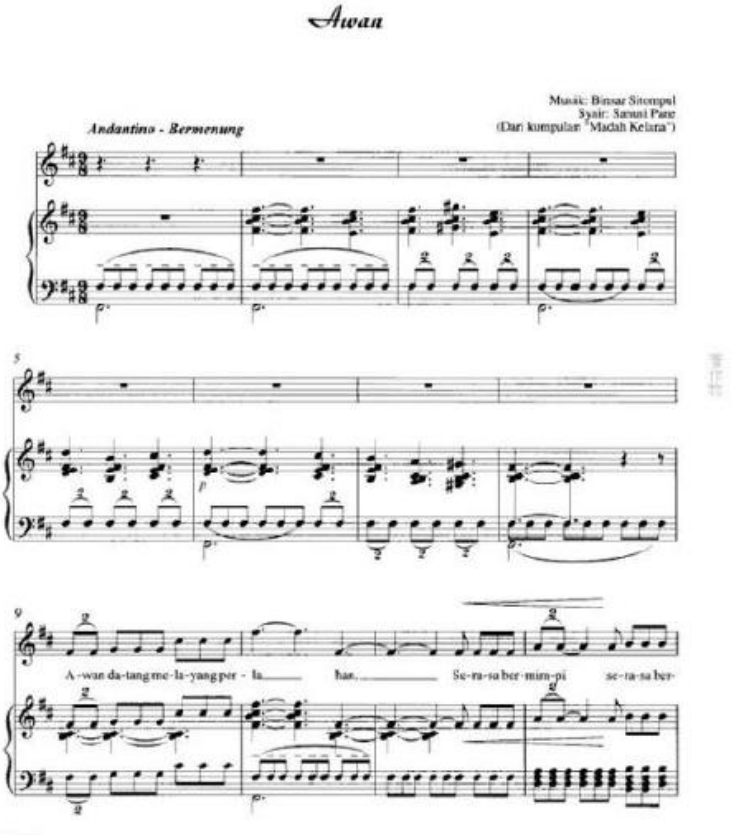


Figure 3 Excerpt of "Awan (lit. Cloud)" by Binsar Sitompul (Katamsi, 2008)

After the second-generation composers, the composers active in the 1960s and 1970s were categorized as the Post *Bintang Radio* generation (Herdjana, 2003). Notable composers included in this generation are F.A. Warsono, Mochtar Embut, and F.X. Soetopo (Hardjana, 2003). During this era, composers did not merely focus on producing vocal works, but they also began to compose instrumental music. Mochtar Embut, a pianist, also a prominent composer of poetic songs, composed "*Varia Ibu Kota* (lit. The Capital City Variation)", "*Suite untuk Piano* (A Suite for Piano)", "*Suite untuk Biola dan Piano* (A Suite for Violin and Piano)", "Sonatina", and many more (Herdjana, 2003). Composers began to explore their creativity beyond vocal compositions.

Some composers also had the chance to study overseas, including Paul Goetama Soegijo (b. 1934) who has studied in Amsterdam and Berlin, Slamet Abdul Sjukur (b. 1935) who learned composition from Olivier Messaien in Paris, and Trisutji Kamal (b. 1936) who has studied in three different places (Amsterdam, Paris, Rome) in Europe. These composers have contributed to creating Indonesian modern music compositions while implementing Indonesian ethnic musical elements in their music. One of the most representative composition is Trisutji Kamal's "*Persembahan* (A Worship)". Kamal employs Indonesian traditional instruments and religious

elements in her work written for a Western flute, two poetry reciters ("Dekl" in the notation), two Qori (Quranic chanters), solo soprano, mixed choir (SATB), percussion ("Perk"), a set of Sundanese *Kendang* (double-headed drums), a set of *Rebana* (frame drums), a piano, a bass guitar ("B.Git"), an acoustic guitar ("A.Git"), and a violoncello (Harnish & Ramussen, 2011).

The encounter of European professional musicians and Indonesians has influenced modern music development in Indonesia. Today, especially in the globalization era, many of Indonesian composers' works are well-accepted by the international world.

From *Musik Seriosa* to *Tembang Puitik*

Pembahasan Musik Seriosa was a popular genre among the upper-class Dutch and mestizos in the early 20th century (Hardjana, 2003). It reached its acme of popularity in the 1950s when the singing contest of RRI, *Bintang Radio*, became one of the most favorite programs among the nation. "A Comprehensive English-Indonesian Dictionary" defined the term "*seriosa*" as "semiclassical (music)" (Stevens & Schmidgal-Tellings, 2004). Weintraub also concurred by defining musik seriosa as a European-influenced semi-classical vocal genre accompanied by Western musical instruments. However, some accounts refer to the term "*seriosa*" as a term derived from the English adjective "serious" and argue that *musik seriosa* should not be regarded as semi-classical music, but the same stance as that of classical music (Katamsi, 2018). In addition, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI, The Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language) (The Language Center of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.) also defines "*seriosa*" as "a genre of music which is regarded 'serious' and requires high technical skills. This term is created to differ it from *musik keroncong* (lit. *Keroncong* music) and *musik hiburan* (lit. entertainment music)." *Musik Keroncong* and *Musik Hiburan* were two out of the three categories (including *Musik Seriosa*) competed on the *Bintang Radio*.

In the *Musik Seriosa* category, the contestants would sing art songs (lieder) in foreign languages, such as German and Italian, as well as vocal works by Indonesian composers. Mochtar Embut (1934-1973) is one of the most notable Indonesian composers for art songs. His works include "*Hidup* (lit. Alive)", "*Jika Kau Tahu* (lit. If You Know)", "*Cita-Cita* (lit. Ambition)", inspired by Usmar Ismail's collection of poems "*Puntung Berasap* (lit. The Smokey Stump)", and many other works. Below is the excerpt from Mochtar Embut's "*Jika Kau Tahu*".
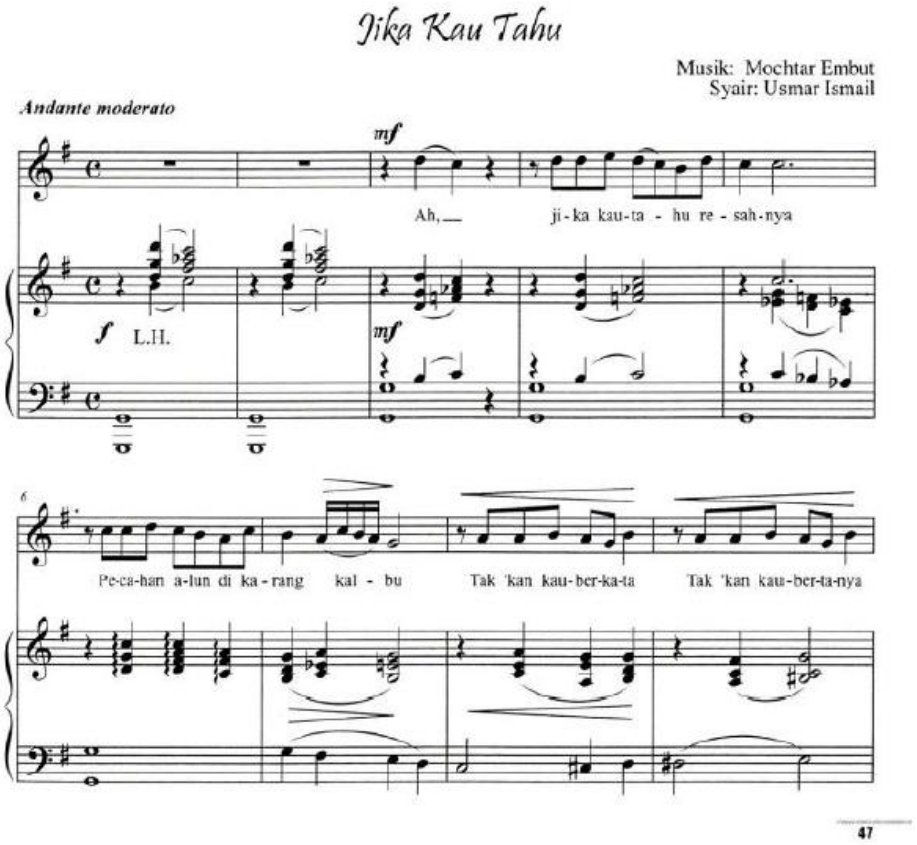


Figure 4 An excerpt of Mochtar Embut's "Jika Kau Tahu", inspired by Usmar Ismail's poem (Katamsi, 2008)

From the excerpt above, we can see that Mochtar Embut composed this song with Western classical music manner – can be noticed from the use of dynamic markings, tempo markings, and ornamentation. The melody is also lyrical, just like the art songs composed by western composers flourished in the Romantic era in western music history. After the cease of the *Bintang Radio* program, *musik seriosa* (especially vocal art songs) has declined popularity and the term was not generally known anymore.

Entering the 21st century, some Indonesian musicians/vocalists tried to regain the popularity of Indonesian art songs. Concerts were held to introduce Indonesian art songs/poetic songs to the public, and organizers began to reevaluate the appropriate term for Indonesian art songs. In 2007, pianist and composer, Ananda Sukarlan, published 25 Indonesian poetic songs and performed them at the concert "*Tembang Puitik Indonesia bersama Ananda Sukarlan dan Binu D. Sukaman* [Indonesian Tembang Puitik with Ananda Sukarlan and Binu D. Sukaman]" in Jakarta

(Fadjar, 2007). In 2009, soprano Binu D. Sukaman and baritone Joseph Kristanto held a concert entitled Liederabend (art song recital) and proposed "*Tembang Puitik*" as the Indonesian term of lieder (Kompas, 2009). In 2010, the first Ananda Sukarlan's *Tembang Puitik* National Vocal Competition was held, followed by the second one in 2013 (Amadeus Enterprise, n.d.).

Aning Katamsi (2014) asserted that it was presumably those musicians/organizers who had come out with the new term "*Tembang Puitik* (poetic songs)". According to KBBI (The Language Center of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.), "*tembang*" means "song, verse to be sung" or "poem". In Javanese literature, there are poems called *Tembang Cilik, Tembang Gede, Tembang Kawi*, depending on the number of lines and syllables per verse, also the last vowels used each line. "*Tembang*" can also serve as a verb, with "*menembang*" meaning "to sing a song". Whereas "*puitik*" derives from the word "*puisi* (lit. poem)", and serves as an adjective meaning "poetic". Thus, *Tembang Puitik* can be defined as poetic songs or songs that are lyrical like poetry. Notable Indonesian composers of *Tembang Puitik* include Ananda Sukarlan, Trisutji Kamal, Guruh Soekarno Putera, Johannes Sebastian Nugroho, and many more.
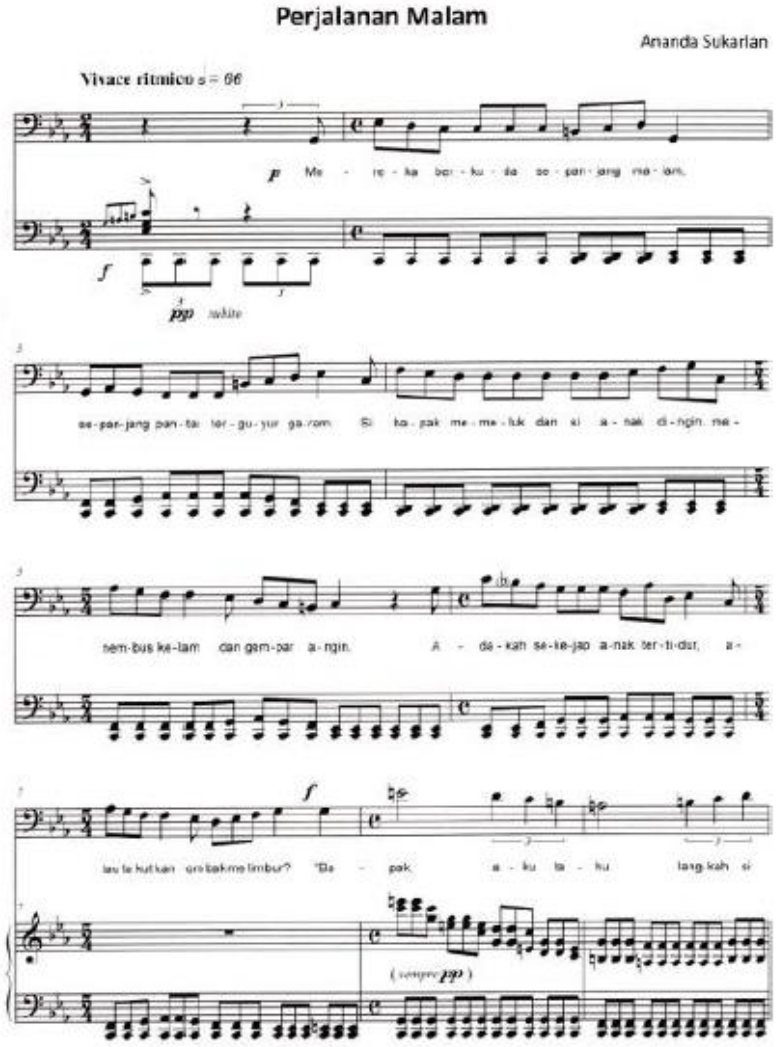


Figure 5 An excerpt of "Perjalanan Malam (lit. Journey of The Night)" by Ananda Sukarlan, utilizing Goenawan Muhamad's poem. Inspired by Schubert's "Der Erlkönig", Ananda Sukarlan also uses repetitive notes to depict the sound of a running horse (Ananda Sukarlan, 2007).

Conclusion

The arrival of the Europeans in the Indonesian archipelago has influenced the development of Indonesian modern music (Indonesian music with Western compositional style influence). Starting from the Portuguese in the first half of the 16th century, and the Dutch later in the second half, the culture brought by the Europeans to the Indonesian islands have resulted in a mixed and new modern culture of Indonesia. Since the establishment of education systems in

Indonesia in 1902, many Indonesians had the chance to access education, and the growing numbers of the literates had thus led to the urge in gaining independence from the colonists.

Music is indispensable to the independence movement sparked during the 1920s. Suka Hardjana, an Indonesian senior musicologist, in his book, *Corat-Coret Musik Kontemporer Dulu dan Kini* (lit. Scratches on The Now and Before Contemporary Music), has categorized Indonesian composers according to their era and the content of the songs. First-generation composers composed patriotic songs to raise awareness of nationalism in Indonesia. After Indonesia gained independence and became a Republic, the radio systems became significant means in music distribution. The popularity of the then most famous program show, *Bintang Radio*, has influenced the rise of the second-generation composers and on the flourishing vocal music throughout the nation. "*Musik Seriosa*" was one out of three categories competed on the *Bintang Radio* contest, and was believed to be the predecessor of the term "*Tembang Puitik*" mainly used today in Indonesia.

The term "*Tembang Puitik*" is a new term to replace the deserted term "*Musik Seriosa*". Defined as poetic songs or songs that are lyrical like poetry, *Tembang Puitik* was introduced in the 21st century by a group of Indonesian musicians/vocalists who seek to regain popularity of Indonesian art songs. The term for Indonesian art songs might change again over time, depending on the current issues the country is facing. I hope this research have provided better understanding about the development of Indonesian art songs from the historical perspective. I also hope that more thorough researches regarding Indonesian art songs can be done in the future.

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