



## Javanese Karawitan as a Reinforcement of Dramaturgy in *Wayang Kulit* Performance at Ngampel Wetan Village, Ngampel Sub-District, Kendal Regency

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### Article Info

### Abstract

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*Wayang kulit* (a shadow puppet) is a traditional Javanese performing art that combines elements of music, literature, and spirituality. Within this art form, *karawitan* serves not as mere musical accompaniment but as a vital element that shapes the dramatic atmosphere and depth of meaning in the performance. This study aims to understand the role of *karawitan* in strengthening the dramaturgical structure of the shadow puppet performance, *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida*, by Ki Bayu Aji in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal Regency. Using an ethnomusicological approach, this research employs participatory observation, in-depth interviews with the *dalang* (puppeteer) and *pengrawit* (gamelan musicians), and musical structure analysis. This study comes from the context of a performance held within the *merti desa* ritual, a social space where traditions, religiosity, and aesthetic expressions of rural communities meet. The intuitive interaction between *dalang* and *pengrawit* creates a balance between structure and spontaneity, musical form and inner experience. Therefore, *karawitan* not only enhances the dramaturgy of the performance but also reflects the values of harmony, togetherness, and spirituality in Javanese society.

## INTRODUCTION

*Wayang kulit* is a traditional Javanese performing art that embodies philosophical, religious, and social values while serving as a medium of communication between humans, nature, and God (Priyanto, 2019). Beyond entertainment, *wayang kulit* is frequently performed during communal and ritual events such as circumcisions, *mitoni* ceremonies, and *merti desa*, where it functions as a cultural medium for transmitting ethical values and strengthening social cohesion (Pandini, 2020). Within this performance tradition, *karawitan* plays a central role through *gending*, *sulukan*, and *sabetan*, shaping the dramatic atmosphere and reinforcing the aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the performance (Junaidi & Sugiarto, 2018).

This phenomenon is interesting to study because it demonstrates a new shift in traditional arts practices at the local level, particularly in the context of *wayang kulit* performances, which are being revived through the *merti desa* tradition. This performance reflects the continuity of ritualistic and communal Javanese cultural values. On the other hand, this performance also presents challenges in terms of presentation form, playing *karawitan* instruments, and adapting to contemporary societal tastes. In this context, dramaturgical theory (Schechner, 2004) becomes relevant because it views performance as a form of behavior that is continually being updated, where tradition and improvisation converge to create new meanings for the audience. *Wayang kulit* and its *karawitan* can be seen as a living dramaturgical practice, constantly renegotiated through feelings and social interactions on stage.

In the *wayang kulit* performance, *karawitan* serves a function that not only accompanies the flow of the scene but also shapes the overall dramatic dynamics and dramaturgical structure. Changes in tempo, dynamics, and the choice of specific *gending* not

only enhance the dramatic atmosphere but also serve as symbolic markers reflecting the spiritual and moral values within the play (Hadiprayitno, 2021). Benamou (2010) also emphasized that the core of Javanese musical experience lies in the concept of taste, namely the unity between intuition, affection, and collective consciousness that regulates the relationship between time, emotion, and meaning. Thus, *karawitan* in *wayang kulit* performances can be understood as a dramaturgical structure based on the taste, which can connect musical expression with the spiritual and social experiences of Javanese society.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of *karawitan* in *wayang kulit* performances, such as Junaidi and Sugiarto (2018), who highlighted the relationship between *wayang* and *gending* in creating a dramatic atmosphere. The choice of *gending*, tempo, and dynamics plays a crucial role in bringing characters to life and emphasizing emotional transitions between scenes. Therefore, *karawitan* functions not only as accompaniment but also as a dramaturgical element that unites narrative, puppet movements, and audience perception. Similarly, Sukistono (2014) emphasized that *karawitan* plays a crucial role in shaping the overall expression of the puppeteer (*dalang*) when performing *wayang kulit*. By regulating the rhythm, tempo, dynamics, and choice of *gending*, *karawitan* helps the puppeteer create a dramatic atmosphere, control the storyline, and emphasize the characteristics of each character. The harmonious collaboration between the puppeteer and the *pengrawit* (*gamelan* musicians) creates a complete aesthetic harmony, so *karawitan* not only functions as a technical part, but also becomes a major influence in motivating the expression and dramatic flow of the performance. A similar view is expressed according to Nugroho (2019), who asserted that the function of *karawitan* in *wayang* performances is not limited to scene accompaniment but also serves to emphasize atmosphere,

characterization, and dramatic transitions. Through changes in tempo, dynamics, and rhythmic patterns, *karawitan* assists the puppeteer in building the dramatic intensity of each act. This demonstrates that *karawitan* has an active dramaturgical function and determines in shaping of the emotional and narrative structure of the performance.

Conceptually, this view aligns with the theory of *garap karawitan* proposed based on the concept of musical interaction by Supanggah (2002), in which musical elements such as rhythm, *balungan*, and *pathet* serve to determine the mood and dramatic direction of the performance. In the book *Metodologi Penciptaan Seni* (the Graduate Program of Institut Seni Indonesia, Yogyakarta), written by Bandem (2001). He also added that in the context of traditional Javanese performing arts, *gamelan* music and the puppeteer's theatrical movements form an inseparable dramatic unity, making *karawitan* the core of aesthetic and meaningful construction.

Meanwhile, Harpawati et al. (2014) found that in the performance of *Lakon Sudamala*, a new work form emerged, demonstrating the harmony of dramatic and musical aspects. This finding demonstrates that *karawitan* does not simply follow traditional patterns, but it is part of the puppeteer's creativity in constructing contextual dramaturgy structures to the needs of today's audiences.

In the context of contemporary developments in the performing arts, research on the Setabuhan music group indicates a tendency for contemporary artists to create musical performance forms that emphasize rhythmic and collaborative aspects across arts, such as the combination of percussion and *pencak silat* (Sejati et al., 2022). This study demonstrates that musical creativity does not always rely on melodic instruments but also on the exploration of rhythm, vocals, and body movement as a medium of musical expression. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of

dramaturgy in the *karawitan wayang kulit*, where rhythmic dynamics and musical structure shape the dramatic flow of the performance.

Overall, various studies and observations indicate that *karawitan* plays a very complex role in *wayang kulit* performances. *Gamelan* music serves not only as accompaniment, but also as a dramatic rhythmic arranger, an emotional mood builder, and an amplifying characterization. Through its musical structure, *karawitan* helps shape the storyline, enlivens the dynamics of scenes, and creates a balance between narrative and expression of feeling. The relationship between *dalang* and *pengrawit* is the core of this process, where their interaction creates a form of musical communication that builds tension and resolution in the performance.

However, most existing research and documentation still focus on the context of performances within the palace or large-scale institutional performances. Studies that highlight the function of *karawitan* in local community contexts, such as *merti desa* rituals or community-level cultural activities, are relatively rare, whereas these contexts often display more spontaneous and interactive *karawitan* dynamics, where the relationship between *dalang*, *pengrawit*, and the audience is more open. Therefore, this study tries to examine in-depth the function of *karawitan* in shaping the dramaturgical structure of *wayang kulit* performances in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal Regency, to understand how the aesthetic values of *karawitan* are alive and adapt within the cultural practices of the village community.

Based on the background and research focus described above, the main problem in this study relates to the role of Javanese *karawitan* in strengthening the dramaturgical structure of *wayang kulit* performances in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal Regency. The first question is how the dramaturgical structure of the *wayang kulit* performance of *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida* is formed through the system of Javanese *karawitan*,

which involves the arrangement of the melody, *pathet*, and the function of the *gending* in dramatically setting the storyline. The second question is how the role of Javanese *karawitan* strengthens the dynamics of interaction between the puppeteer (*dalang*) and the *gamelan* musicians (*pengrawit*) as part of an active dramaturgical element that creates unity in the dramatic and emotional aspects of the performance. The third question is how the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of *karawitan* contribute to the formation of aesthetic and religious meanings so that *wayang kulit* performances are not merely considered entertainment but also considered cultural events with deep spiritual and contemplative values.

This study aims to analyze the dramaturgical role of Javanese *karawitan* in *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida* and to explain how its musical, philosophical, and social dimensions reinforce the structure and meaning of the performance. The findings are expected to contribute to ethnomusicological and dramaturgical studies while supporting the preservation of Javanese performing arts.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an ethnomusicological approach because *karawitan* in *wayang kulit* performances is understood not only as a musical phenomenon but also as a cultural phenomenon imbued with symbolic, social, and spiritual meaning. According to Merriam (1964), ethnomusicology examines music not only from its sound structure but also from its function and cultural context. Therefore, the analysis focused on the relationship between musical form, dramatic structure, and the socio-ritual context of the performance.

This research is descriptive-analytical. The purpose is to describe and interpret the dramaturgical function of *karawitan* in the *wayang kulit* performance of *Wisanggeni Krida* by Ki Bayu Aji and the *karawitan* group of Abdi

Solo in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal, Central Java, as part of the *merti desa* ritual. The researcher acted as a participant-observant, directly involved in the two-day fieldwork, covering the preparation, implementation (9:00 PM–4:00 AM WIB), and post-performance stages.

Data sources were obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted non-intrusively to record the sequence of scenes, types of *gending*, tempo, dynamics, and the relationship of the music to dramatic events. Interviews were conducted with *dalang* Ki Bayu Aji, *pengrawit* Aris Murtopo, and several local residents as key informants to explore the musical functions, *garap* concepts, and symbolic values of *karawitan*. Documentation in the form of audio-visual recordings, figures, and *pakeliran* scripts was used to strengthen the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and thematically through stages of reduction, classification, interpretation, and verification. Musical data were categorized based on types of *gending*, *pathet*, emotional function, and correlation with dramatic intensity. A hermeneutic approach was used to interpret the symbolic meaning of the *karawitan* based on the musical text and the performers' experiences, while an ethnomusicological approach emphasized the social and performative context of the performance (Al Munir, 2021). Meanwhile, dramaturgy and vector semiotic theory (Taylor, 2005) were used to examine the function of *karawitan* as a signifying element that reinforces the narrative and emotions of the performance.

Through this approach, *karawitan* is interpreted not merely as accompaniment, but as a musical narrator that creates dramatic continuity and symbolic meaning within a *wayang kulit* performance. The interpretation process is reflective to reveal the integration

between music, narrative, and Javanese cultural values.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Dramaturgical Structure and the Role of *Karawitan* in *Wayang Kulit*

The *wayang kulit* performance of *Lakon* "Wisanggeni Krida" by Ki Bayu Aji in Ngampel Wetan Village, Ngampel Sub-District, Kendal Regency, demonstrated that Javanese *gamelan* plays a key role in supporting the dramaturgical structure of the performance. *Gamelan* music serves not only as background accompaniment, but also as an active dramaturgical element that regulates the dramatic rhythm, builds emotional bridges, and serves as a medium for symbolic communication between *dalang*, *pengrawit*, and the audience.

As stated by Purwanto (2012), *karawitan* is not only understood as a traditional musical form but as a musical system integrated with the performance context and aesthetic behavior of Javanese society. Every change in sound, tempo, and *laras* is not only an acoustic phenomenon, but also a manifestation of feeling communication, and a symbol of philosophical values that exist within the community. Therefore, *karawitan* can be viewed as an autonomous dramaturgical structure because it has a musical logic that inherently determines the dramatic dynamics of a *wayang kulit* performance.

This view is reinforced by Benamou (2010), who stated that the core of the Javanese musical experience is feeling, a form of collective affection and intuition setting how time, emotion, and meaning are shaped in *karawitan*. Therefore, the dramaturgical structure of *karawitan* is essentially a structure of feeling that moves from one level of affection to another, creating a unique dramatic and spiritual journey.

#### 1.1. General Description of the Performance

Ki Bayu Aji's performance of *Wisanggeni Krida* was held on October 11, 2025, at the Ngampel

Wetan Village Hall field, which also serves as the site of Ngampel Wetan State Elementary School. The performance lasted approximately seven hours, beginning at 9:00 PM and lasting until 4:00 AM, just before dawn. *Pengrawit* consisted of approximately twenty-five *pengrawit* and female *sindhen* with distinctive coastal vocal colors.



Figure 1. Photo of Dalang Ki Bayu Aji  
(Source: author's documentation)

The people of Ngampel Wetan attend this performance not merely as spectators, but as cultural participants engaged in a shared experience. In a social context, *wayang kulit* is not just entertainment, but also a collective ritual that fosters harmony between humanity, art, and spirituality. *Karawitan* serves as a bridge between these dimensions by regulating social rhythms while simultaneously bringing a sense of religiousness to the performance space.



Figure 2. The atmosphere of the *wayang kulit* stage for the *merti desa* event in Ngampel Wetan Village, Ngampel Sub-District, Kendal Regency  
(Source: author's documentation)

### 1.2. *Lakon* Wisanggeni Krida Structure, *Gending* Structure, and Dramaturgical Function

The musical structure of the Wisanggeni Krida performance by Ki Bayu Aji in Ngampel Wetan Village displays a strong integration between the play's dramatic plot and the *karawitan* structure. Based on field observations and interviews with *dalang* and *pengrawit*, it can be concluded that the composition of the *gending* is not accidental, but follows a dramatic logic that sets the atmosphere, intensity, and spiritual meaning of each section of the performance.

Based on interviews, Ki Bayu Aji explains that each *gending* specifically represents a puppet character to regulate their inner feelings and emotions. For instance, Duryudana is associated with *Gending Kabur*, Puntadewa with *Gending Kawit*, and Kresna with *Gending Karawitan*. Sometimes, a *gending* is deliberately chosen to contrast with a character's personality to balance dramatic energy; for example, the aggressive Banowati is accompanied by the gentle *Gending Gamarkeli* to maintain harmonious emotional expression.

According to Ki Bayu Aji, spontaneous changes of *gending* in the mid-performance are common in puppetry practice. He believes that a puppeteer must be sensitive to the stage situation and can adjust the dramatic direction according to the evolving scene and the audience's response. He exemplifies that in sudden tense situations, the *gending* can be altered mid-song to continuously maintain dramatic tension. This practice demonstrates that the structure of *karawitan* is dynamic and situational, always following the changing emotions emerging on stage. This aligns with the taste theory proposed by Benamou (2010), which views Javanese music as a system of collective affection and intuition that continuously flows within the musical consciousness of the performers. Meanwhile, *Pengrawit* Aris Murtopo explains that communication between the puppeteer and the musicians occurs through intuitive musical cues and body movements, such as *ngelik* (pitch

elevation), *inggah* (changing tempo), and *suwuk* (*gending* ending). Rather than showcasing technical proficiency, a shadow puppet performance serves as a platform for cultivating shared emotional expression. Consequently, musical dramaturgy in *karawitan* is driven by inner harmony and collective sensitivity among the performers, rather than mere technical coordination.

Dramaturgically, *Lakon* Wisanggeni Krida is included in the *carangan* category, a fictional play developed from the Mahabharata epic. The word *krida* means action or struggle so this play tells the spiritual struggle of Wisanggeni, son of Arjuna and Dewi Dresanala, to conquer his fiery nature. Its central theme is the search for identity and the balance between strength and wisdom, between the elements of heat and coolness.

The structure of *Lakon* Wisanggeni Krida has five main dramatic stages, like the tradition of Surakarta-style puppetry:

**Table 1.** Structure of *Lakon* Wisanggeni Krida

| Dramatic Stage | Scene Name (General)             | Function               | Atmosphere                                                                       |
|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I              | <i>Jejer / Kawitan</i>           | Opening and exposition | Amarta kingdom setting: dialogue between Pandawa and spiritual advisors.         |
| II             | <i>Jejer Kahyangan / Patekan</i> | Initial conflict       | Batara Guru orders Wisanggeni's destruction due to his excessive human strength. |
| III            | <i>Kembang / Brubuh War</i>      | Climax / main conflict | The battle of Wisanggeni against Duryodhana                                      |

|    |                                    |                                   |                                                                                                                                               |
|----|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                    |                                   | and the heavenly soldiers.                                                                                                                    |
| IV | <i>Gara-gara / Limbukan</i>        | Social resolution / comedic break | <i>Punakawan</i> (traditional Javanese characters) offer advice, interspersed with humor, dolanan songs, and money-giving ( <i>saweran</i> ). |
| V  | <i>Jejer Panutup / Umbul Donga</i> | Spiritual closure                 | Wisanggeni achieves self-awareness, ascends to heaven, and merges with the divine fire element. The scene concludes with prayer and serenity. |

The dramatic structure above runs by aligning with the following plot, which forms the musical framework of the performance:

**Table 2.** Structure of the *Wayang Kulit* Performance of *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida* in Ngampel Wetan Village

| <i>Gending Type</i>  | <i>Pathet/Laras</i> | <i>Dramaturgical Function</i>              | <i>Atmosphere</i>    |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Ayak Abdi</i>     | <i>Slendro Nem</i>  | Opening, before starting the story.        | Loud and attracting. |
| <i>Gending Kawit</i> | <i>Slendro Nem</i>  | The beginning of the Amarta country scene. | Soft and majestic.   |
| <i>Ayak-ayakan</i>   | <i>Slendro Nem,</i> | Scene transition.                          | Soft and calm.       |

|                                 |                                                         |                          |                             |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                 | <i>Slendro Sanga, and Slendro Manyura.</i>              |                          |                             |
| <i>Sampak &amp; Srepeg</i>      | <i>Slendro Nem, Slendro Sanga, and Slendro Manyura.</i> | Scene transition.        | Loud, fast, and tense.      |
| <i>Dolanana song</i>            | <i>Slendro Sanga</i>                                    | Entertainment interlude. | Light, agile, and cheerful. |
| <i>Ayak Panutup Umbul Donga</i> | <i>Slendro Manyura</i>                                  | Closing of the show.     | Soft and majestic.          |

The musical flow depicts an integrated dramatic journey. The opening *Ayak Abdi* uses a fast, forceful tempo to attract attention and open the *Jejer Amarta* scene, symbolizing Wisanggeni's wild divine energy. Subsequently, *Gending Kawit* accompanies the Amarta palace scene with a calm, majestic rhythm to reinforce royal prestige. The subtle accompaniment of *rebab* and *gender* emphasizes this majestic atmosphere during the exposition stage.

When the narrative shifts to the trial of the gods and the conflict between Wisanggeni and the heavenly powers, *Gending Ayak-ayakan* serves as a dramaturgical transition. The change in pathet from *Slendro Nem* to *Sanga* reflects the increasing dramatic tension and presents a flow of feeling that transports the audience from a peaceful atmosphere to a tense one. Within the framework of taste theory (Benamou, 2010), this moment marks a shift from a feeling of *ngrasuk* (calm) to a feeling of *nggegirisi* (tense and energetic).

The performance climaxes with the *Sampak* and *Srepeg* plays in the *Brubuh War* scene. The fast tempos, the intense beats of *kendang*, and powerful sound dynamics depict the climax conflict between Wisanggeni and *Duryudana*. The music here serves not only as accompaniment but as a direct expression of the

performance's dramatic energy. This aligns with the view of Purwanto (2012), who explained that *karawitan* conveys a sense of movement that connects the emotions between the characters and the audience. Therefore, *gamelan* music not only builds atmosphere but also conveys the living inner dynamics within the play.

Following the climax, the puppeteer inserts *dolanan* songs in the *Gara-gara* scene for humor and social familiarity, where the audience often participates in *saweran* (money-giving) and requests specific songs, such as *Ladrang Pangkur* or *Gundul-Gundul Pacul*. This interlude serves as a social and emotional catharsis, providing a pause before the audience returns to the main storyline. From the perspective of living dramaturgy (Schechner, 2004), these interactive moments demonstrate that puppet performances are a space continually negotiated between tradition and spontaneity.

After the folk entertainment ends, the puppeteer returns the atmosphere to the dramatic realm through *Ayak-ayakan Manyura*, a transition to the story's conclusion. The change in tempo from fast to soft serves to restore a sense of calm and prepare for the spiritual climax when Wisanggeni attains enlightenment.

The performance concludes with *Ayak Panutup Umbul Donga*, a gentle and solemn *gending* to *Laras Slendro Manyura*. This musical composition serves as a ritualistic conclusion and creates a prayerful atmosphere symbolizing the unification of Wisanggeni with his original source of power, the divine fire element. Symbolically, *Pathet Manyura* represents the spiritual maturity and the return of cosmic balance after an intense and dramatic journey. The prolonged *gong* accompaniment at the end of playing emphasizes the achievement of a sense of completeness, calm, and peace as the culmination of the musical and spiritual experience of the performance.

### 1.3. Musical Dramaturgical Analysis

The sequence of changes from loud *gending* (*Ayak Abdi*) to majestic (*Kawit Amarta*),

soft-intense (*Ayak-ayakan* and *Sampak*), then light-joyful (*dolanan* songs), and finally soft-sacred (*Umbul Donga*) demonstrates a spiral dramaturgical pattern: the rise and fall of emotions flowing like waves of feeling. This pattern simultaneously depicts Wisanggeni's spiritual journey from wild energy to inner balance.

Thus, *karawitan* functions as a dynamic musical dramaturgy, where the journey of emotion and time is not determined by the puppeteer's verbal narrative but by the flow of feelings created by sound. From the perspective of Becker (2004), *gamelan* creates an affective contour, a contour of affection arranging how the listener feels the music as a series of interflowing atmosphere.

In *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida*, each change in the music presents a shift in collective feeling: from heroic enthusiasm at the opening to tense conflict, and finally to spiritual peace at the closing. This process is in accordance with the view of Benamou (2010) that feeling acts as an inner structure that guides musical experience, where changes in *pathet* are not only technical, but also mark changes in shared affection and intuition.

## 2. The Dynamics of the Interaction between *Dalang* and *Pengrawit* as an Active Dramaturgical Element

One crucial aspect determining the success of a *wayang kulit* performance is the quality of the interaction between *dalang* and *pengrawit*. In the performance of Wisanggeni Krida by Ki Bayu Aji in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal Regency, this relationship forms a dynamic, mutually influencing dramaturgical system. Rather than mere accompaniment, their musical communication is an integral part of building the performance's dramatic structure. The *pengrawit* respond to every gestural and vocal cue from the *dalang*, creating an organic musical dialogue. This process demonstrates that *wayang kulit* dramaturgy is a non-linear expression emerging from collective, creative



collaboration, blending musical, emotional, and narrative elements into a unified aesthetic.

### 2.1. Field Interaction Patterns

Field observations indicate that Ki Bayu Aji establishes communication with *pengrawit* through a series of musical codes and body movements. These include *ngelik* (raising the ambitus of a tone), *ingguh* (tempo changes), *suwuk* (ending of *gending*), and changes in the intensity of the *kendang* beats that mark dramatic transitions. This interaction occurs without explicit verbal commands, but through subtle cues interpreted based on a shared emotional experience.

In an interview, Ki Bayu Aji explained that the relationship between *dalang* and *pengrawit* is like a mutually shared sense of breath. Each *pengrawit* understands *dalang's* dramatic direction not through words, but through a shared musical sense. This intuitive understanding enables the performance to be lively and spontaneous. This concept aligns with the idea (Benamou, 2010) that places feeling at the heart of musical communication in *gamelan*. According to him, feeling is not only an individual emotion, but a collective affective space that allows all players to connect through a shared musical awareness. Therefore, the interaction between *dalang* and *pengrawit* is a form of actualization of collective feeling that arranges the dramatic flow of the performance.

### 2.2. Spontaneity and Balance in *Karawitan* Practice

The musical process in Wisanggeni Krida also demonstrates the importance of well-managed spontaneity. Ki Bayu Aji often spontaneously changes *gending* in response to dramatic situations on stage and audience reactions. He explained that when the performance becomes tense, he usually inserts a *dolan* song to create a pause and ease the tension before returning to the main flow of the play. This practice illustrates the unique dramaturgical flexibility of the Javanese *karawitan* tradition, where elements of

improvisation are present without abandoning the traditional rules forming the main foundation of the performance.

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of living dramaturgy (Schechner, 2004), which states that every traditional performance is a restored behavior, an inherited practice that is continually renewed in new contexts. In *karawitan*, this renewal is evident when the *pengrawit* adapts the rhythm to the *dalang's* emotions or the audience's spontaneous requests (*saweran* and song requests).

However, spontaneity in Javanese *karawitan* is not unlimited freedom but an expression rooted in traditional aesthetics. It is governed by the concept of *rasa* (taste), an aesthetic awareness demanding harmony between creative freedom and inherited musical structures. As Aris Murtopo explains, while *pengrawit* and *dalang* can improvise based on the dramatic situation, they must not break the rhythm or disrupt the continuity of the *gending*. Thus, spontaneity serves as a living musical discipline where freedom is balanced by a collective awareness of order and harmony.

Therefore, improvisation in Wisanggeni Krida can be understood as a manifestation of the balance between spontaneity and order, between individual expression and group harmony. This is why each *wayang* performance feels unique, even though the play is the same. The difference is the collective feeling.

### 2.3. Musical Ethics and Collective Awareness

The interaction between *dalang* and *pengrawit* also provides unique social and ethical values. No single instrument dominates. Each player adapts to the overall ensemble. Ki Bayu Aji called this value "*tata titi lan tentrem*," meaning orderly, precise, and peaceful. This principle aligns with the view (Purwanto, 2012) that the aesthetics of Surakarta-style *karawitan* emphasizes collective harmony as a reflection of the social order of Javanese society. In this context, *karawitan* is not only a performing art but also a model of social harmony. *Dalang* and

*pengrawit* embody the principle of togetherness through musical discipline, self-awareness, and respect for the space of others. *Karawitan* reflects the Javanese philosophy of *srawung tanpa nguwung-uwung*. It means to socialize without dominating.

### 3. Philosophical and Spiritual Dimensions of *Karawitan*

The philosophical and spiritual dimensions of *karawitan* in *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida* demonstrate that *gamelan* music functions as a medium for inner transformation and emotional balance. In an interview, Ki Bayu Aji also emphasized that *gamelan* is "Heavenly Music," because its sounds can lead humans to inner calm and balance. For Ki Bayu Aji, *gamelan* is a living spiritual vibration, not just the sound of metal. When played with full awareness, *gamelan* paves the way to clarity of heart and inner unity. This view aligns with the findings of a study (Gumawang & Lokanantasari, 2025), which states that within the *pakeliran* structure, *karawitan* is not only background music, but also the breath that brings each *wayang* scene to life, building psychological depth within the audience through the power of feeling and dramatic atmosphere. This means that music in *wayang* contains a spiritual dimension connecting the world of sound with human consciousness.

#### 3.1. Feeling as the Core of Spiritual Experience

The concept of feeling in Javanese *karawitan* is key to understanding the spiritual dimension. According to (Benamou, 2010), feeling is the inner ability to regulate timing, form, and affection within a performance. In the context of *Wisanggeni Krida*, feeling becomes the spiritual axis that unites *dalang*, *pengrawit*, and the audience in a single field of musical consciousness.

Ki Bayu Aji views *rasa* (feeling) as an inner force guiding the sound and reviving the musical process. In his view, playing *gamelan* is not merely a technical act of producing notes, but a surrender to the inner flow between sound and

silence. *Rasa* connects bodily awareness with sound awareness, transforming musical activity into a sound meditation. Consequently, each vibration guides the players to achieve serenity, clarity of thought, and refined sensitivity toward their surroundings.

#### 3.2. *Karawitan* as a Mirror of Javanese Life and Ethics

From a Javanese philosophical perspective, *karawitan* is a reflection of human life, a miniature representation of the order of the universe. The repetitive and layered patterns of *gamelan* notes reflect the balance between body, mind, and soul. Each layer of sound creates a harmonious structure, which not only sounds beautiful but also reflects the cosmic and moral order believed by the Javanese people.

Each instrument carries symbolic meaning: *gong ageng* symbolizes wholeness, *kendang* regulates the life rhythm, while *gender* and *rebab* balance the soul. All instruments work together to create harmony, like the elements of life that balance each other to create inner and social order.

For Ki Bayu Aji, the harmonious sound of *gamelan* music is a tangible manifestation of *tata rasa urip*, or the inner rules of living. He believes that the balance between loud and soft in the music reflects the inner state of a person in harmony with nature. When the *gamelan* sounds harmonious, it indicates that the player's heart and mind are in a state of clarity and order. Conversely, if there is an imbalance in the playing, it is considered a reflection of inner disharmony. In this context, *karawitan* functions not only as a sound art but also as a tool for self-reflection, guiding people to maintain a balance between feelings and actions.

This thinking aligns with the idea (Purwanto, 2012), which asserts that the aesthetics of Surakarta-style *karawitan* are based on social and spiritual harmony. The beauty of *gamelan* music lies not in its complexity, but in the ability of each sound element to harmonize within a unified feeling. In this context, *karawitan*

functions as a mirror of life, guiding people toward moral and spiritual awareness through the beauty of harmony.

### 3.3. *Gamelan* as Healing Music and a Path to Self-Balance

Ki Bayu Aji also considers *karawitan* a medium for inner healing and self-balance. In his view, *gamelan* vibrations contain spiritual frequencies acting on deeper layers of human consciousness. Every resonance is believed to relieve inner tension, calm the mind, and restore harmony to the soul. Listening to or playing *gamelan* serves as an active meditation that connects humans with a deeper consciousness, emphasizing its dual role as both art and spiritual practice.

The musical structure of *Wisanggeni Krida* depicts the human spiritual journey from energy to stillness. The dynamic opening song "*Ayak Abdi*" reflects the spirit of life and human striving. The tension culminates in the intense *Sampak Srepeg*, depicting the inner turmoil and conflicts of life. The performance ends with the gentle and solemn *Umbul Donga*, symbolizing humanity's return to tranquility and spiritual awareness. This sequence forms a transformative path, from the hustle and bustle of the world to inner balance.

Ki Bayu Aji interprets this path as the process of *ngelmu urip* (learning the science of life), the human journey to self-control. Wild and heated energy is likened to a fire within humans that must be tamed so that it does not burn but enlivens. Through *karawitan*, humans learn to manage energy and emotions so that they become sources of harmony, not chaos. Each beat becomes an exercise in self-control. Each harmony serves as a reminder of the importance of balance between desire, action, and awareness.

This concept of *karawitan* as healing music is equal to modern music therapy practices in Germany and Western Europe, which use soft tones and repetitive rhythms to calm the nervous system and stabilize emotions (Wheeler, 1999; Wigram et al., 2002). *Karawitan* operates on

similar principles, but it is rooted in Javanese spirituality and feeling: sound is not simply a series of notes, but a vibration of life that organizes the body and soul.

Furthermore, the experience of listening to *gamelan* can deepen concentration and accelerate the attainment of inner stillness. In the silence between the two beats lies a wordless prayer space, where humans become one with themselves and find peace. Musical activity transforms into contemplation. Listening to *gamelan* becomes a spiritual experience that unites aesthetics and consciousness.

Therefore, *gamelan* serves as a medium for healing and self-control, teaching patience, perseverance, and harmony. It serves as a bridge between the outer and inner worlds, between sound and silence, between art and spirituality. In *karawitan*, humans rediscover the natural rhythm of life. A harmony that is not only heard but also felt and experienced as a path to true balance.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that *gamelan* plays a crucial role in developing the dramaturgical structure of *wayang kulit* performances, particularly in *Lakon Wisanggeni Krida* in Ngampel Wetan Village, Kendal Regency. *Gamelan* music serves not only as accompaniment but also as the primary driver of the dramatic atmosphere that brings the story to life. Through the planned choice of *gending*, *pathet*, and sound dynamics, *karawitan* can create a flow of feeling that unites the musical, narrative, and spiritual dimensions of the performance.

The interaction between *dalang* and *pengrawit* demonstrates a musical sensitivity rooted in feeling as a shared consciousness. The maintained spontaneity and improvisation that emerge during the performance demonstrate how tradition remains alive and adapts without losing its essence. The harmony created is not only the result of technical training but also the

result of the inner togetherness that develops among the *karawitan* performers.

More than just an aesthetic expression, *karawitan* reflects the Javanese perspective on balance and inner serenity. Through a musical journey that moves from energy to stillness, *karawitan* teaches the value of harmony between humans, nature, and spiritual forces. Therefore, *karawitan* is not only a sound art, but also a way for humans to understand life and find the meaning of their own balance.

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