



Transformational Creativity in the Process of Creating Musical Works by Students of the Music Composition Programme at ISI Yogyakarta

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Abstract

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Departement of Music Composition ISI Yogyakarta has a vision and mission to be a center of the development of the music compositions, which pays attention to music in general and also Indonesian traditional musical idioms. Lack of interest to learn and get know Indonesian traditional culture has resulted in the erosion of elements of traditional music and becomes a challenge for students to carry out the vision and mission. This qualitative research examines the basic ideas and foundations of creation in student music work as well as an overview of the creativity process in combining elements of Indonesian traditional music idioms with western music concepts. The samples are four final projects of students who have passed and are selected based on indications of the use of traditional music idioms which are visible in the title of works. The result is there are basic ideas related to the music traditions of their hometowns. In the process of making the works, the four students performed transformational creativity, by changing the existing domain, in this case the musical elements of tradition, and adding and combining the other domains of western music elements, resulting in new and imaginative music works.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of globalisation means that today's younger generation is increasingly influenced by foreign cultures, leading to a decline in interest in learning about and understanding Indonesia's traditional culture (Abid, 2019). This has led to the gradual erosion of elements of traditional music; indeed, some of these elements have disappeared and are no longer recognised by the younger generation—in terms of form, function and character—thereby influencing their way of thinking and behaviour (Setiawan & Darmawan, 2016). Preserving traditional culture amongst the younger generation amidst the rapid development of the current era of globalisation is certainly no easy task and requires support from various parties.

The Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta offers a degree programme specialising in music composition: the Music Composition Programme. This programme aims to become a nationally recognised centre of excellence in the development of music composition, focusing on musical creativity in general—drawing on Western musical concepts—as well as on the idioms of traditional Indonesian music.

Traditional culture in Indonesia embodies the local wisdom of the community. This culture is a distinctive feature of the region that has emerged and been passed down through generations within the community, and its forms and cultural values constitute the traditional wealth of that region.

As a culture regarded as both appealing and practical, the influx of Western culture into Indonesia has led to the erosion of Indonesian traditions and cultural values. Malinowski argued that, through cultural contact, a culture deemed superior and dynamic—in this case, Western culture—would influence traditional Indonesian culture, which is viewed as inferior and passive.

One way in which students can contribute to the preservation of traditional Indonesian music is by creating new musical works that blend Western musical concepts with traditional musical idioms. These new musical works can be regarded as an evolution of traditional music with a distinct flavour, serving to broaden and enrich the global understanding of traditional Indonesian music

This initiative is supported by the Music Composition Programme at ISI Yogyakarta and is hoped to serve as a reference for future student compositions. Therefore, there is a need for a study on the concept of composition involving traditional musical idioms as one of the efforts to preserve traditional music.

This forms the objective of the research, namely to identify the fundamental ideas and foundations underlying the creation of musical works by students of the Music Composition Programme at ISI Yogyakarta. An overview of the stages, design, and creative processes of students in their efforts to incorporate elements of traditional Indonesian musical idioms into the creation of musical works based on Western musical concepts is also a topic of investigation. Musical creativity in the creation of new musical works is undertaken as a reaction to events that occur and as a life experience that serves as a source of ideas for a composer. Creative expression is shaped by knowledge, information and insight. These play a vital role in the creative process.

In a creative process, there are three factors involved: the identification of a problem, which includes its identification, definition, and so on; the generation of original and flexible ideas; and the evaluation and assessment of these ideas (Mazzola, Guerino; Park, Joomi dan Thalmann, 2011). According to Boden (Thompson & Vempala, 2014), there are two types of creative thinking processes. The first is exploratory creativity, in which the composer remains within the same domain whilst attempting to create something new, yet unique and original. In this exploratory creativity, the composer studies elements rarely used within the

domain and utilises them in the creation of a new, yet unique and original work.

The second concept in the creative process is transformational creativity. In transformational creativity, a composer may have several creative objectives and expand their creative domain to accommodate their creative needs (Thompson & Vempala, 2014). Composers also alter their creative domain by incorporating methods, techniques and knowledge. These changes are made based on their own imagination or by drawing on elements from other domains.

According to Mikke Susanto (Rusli, 2017) imagination is a mental faculty that depicts experiences that occur and are experienced by an individual. Imagination arises from the combination of various elements perceived through a person's senses. A complete mental image emerges as a result of this combination.

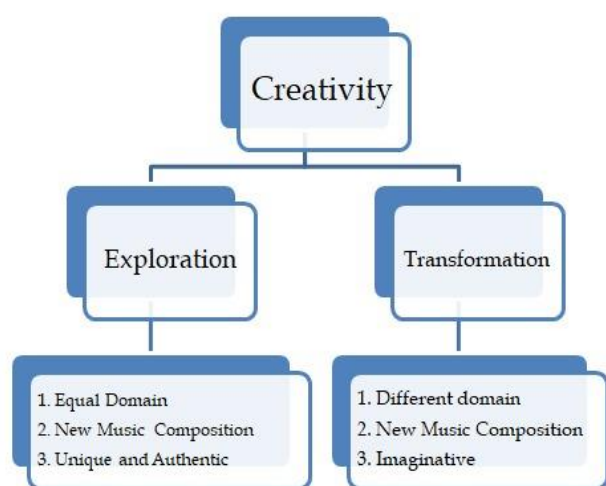


Figure 1.

A diagram of the creative process according to Boden's theory

In the process of incorporating traditional musical elements into works based on Western musical concepts, a reciprocal relationship is required. The reciprocal relationship between two distinct musical elements, formed through the fusion of several components, is referred to as interrelation (Kristiana, 2016). Interrelation is established between Western musical elements and traditional musical elements, which can give rise to a distinctive new meaning. Interrelation is regarded as an attempt at resituating (creating a

new context) for traditional music, which can give form to an identity within a new, imaginative and unique musical work. It will also show that through the process of interrelations, traditional music will not only transform, but will also show its adaptability and sustainability in the modern era, with a creative blend of old values and new musical developments (Ardi & Raharjo, 2025).

METHOD

The research was conducted using qualitative methods with a multidisciplinary approach, musicology and ethnomusicology. This qualitative research method is characterized by emerging and evolving insights derived from the experience of data collection. During the data analysis process, these insights are developed into more detailed and accurate knowledge (Creswell, 2013).

The sampling procedures and techniques in this study were selected and carried out using Simple Random Sampling. This technique involved selecting samples relevant to the research theme, followed by random selection without regard to stratification within the population, ensuring that every item in the population had an equal and inclusive chance of being selected. The sample in this study consists of four final-year projects by students of the Music Composition Programme, selected from 16 final-year projects by students who graduated between mid-2018 and early 2020. The selection of these four works was based on indications of the incorporation of traditional musical idioms.

The four final project samples are titled: 1) "Arok Dedes Musical Composition for Choir" by Athitya Dyah Monica Natalia, 2) "Tonotokng: A Musical Composition Representing the Atmosphere of the Notokng Traditional Ritual of the Dayak Kayan tribe" by Wandi Murti, 3) "Outsider: A Gondang Musical Arrangement with a Mixed Ensemble" by Rimanda Sinaga, 4) "Javanese Jaranan Art Musical Composition: Turonggo Suryo Manggolo" by Stevanus Febriyan. Data collection was carried out through observation and analysis of the intra- and extra-musical aspects of the four works. The next stage involved data selection and analysis, interpretation of the analysis results, and drawing conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first work analysed is the choral composition “*Arok Dedes*” by Athitya Dyah Natalia Monica. This work features the historical figures of East Java, *Ken Arok* and *Ken Dedes*, as depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s novel **Arok Dedes**. The choice of this story was influenced by the composer’s background, having been born in Malang, East Java. The foundation for the creation of this final project is the fusion of vocal music or choral music with art songs, incorporating traditional *Malangan karawitan* instruments—namely the *bonang*, *kendang*, and *gongseng*—and the use of rhythmic patterns from the *Beskalan* dance. The traditional instruments in this work are combined with vocal pieces that draw upon literary works, incorporating narrative, descriptive, and evocative elements from a blend of art song and programme music.

The musical work “*Arok Dedes*” is divided into eight sections, each recounting the plot of *Arok Dedes* as depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s literary work. The composition of the work was carried out through several stages, namely (1) the development of the concept and general outline of each section, (2) observation of traditional East Javanese music in the *Malangan* style and the *Beskalan* dance, (3) observation of Slamet Abdul Sjukur’s work entitled *Tetabeuhan Sungut* as a reference, (4) the selection of traditional instruments to be included, (5) exploration to develop the process of integrating traditional musical elements with choral vocals, and (6) the composition of lyrics. Two stages of exploration were carried out: an exploration of the tonality of traditional musical instruments, and a rhythmic exploration of the *kendang* percussion instrument. The rhythmic exploration of the *kendang* was conducted so that the sounds could be imitated by the choral vocals.

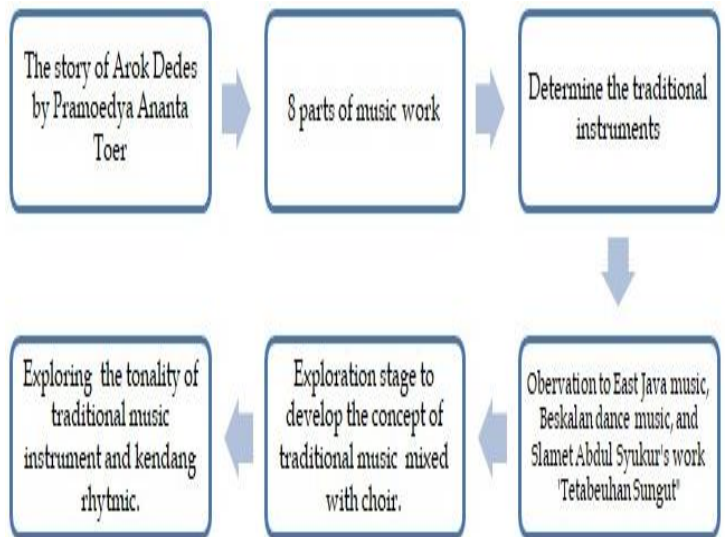


Figure. 2

The phased approach, concept and design developed by Athitya for the work “*Arok Dedes*”

The first section of this piece is titled *Om Avignam Astu Nami Sidham*. This section features a cappella parts for soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The scale used is the pentatonic scale in the *pelog* mode. The piece is in an andante tempo and follows a structure of introduction – A – B – C – coda. The second section is titled *Mula*. The vocal parts are the same as in the previous section, namely soprano, alto, tenor and bass, performed a cappella. The scales used are diatonic and pentatonic in some sections. The tempos used are andante and allegro, with a structure of introduction – A – B – C.

The third section is titled *Arok*. The vocal parts in this section are soprano, alto, tenor, baritone and bass, with a baritone soloist. The soloist sings in pentatonic and diatonic scales. In this section, two traditional instruments are introduced: the *bonang* and the *kendang*. The structure of this section is introduction, A – B – C – D – E, with tempos of andante and allegro. The fourth section is titled *Dedes*, featuring soprano 1, soprano 2, alto 1, and alto 2, with a mezzo-soprano soloist. The traditional instrument used is the *bonang*. The structure of the piece is introduction – A – B – C, and the tempo is largo

The fifth section is entitled ‘The Southern Battle’. This section features double voices: soprano, alto, tenor and bass – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The traditional instruments featured in this section are the *kendang*, bamboo, *bonang* and

gongseng. The structure of this section is A – B – A' – C – D – A'' – E. The tempo is *allegro*. The sixth section is titled *Ekagrata*; in this section, the soprano, alto, tenor and bass parts are performed a cappella with a mezzo-soprano and baritone soloist. The tempo used is *andante e legato* with a structure of A – B – C.

The seventh section is titled *Kutukan Mpu Gandring*. In this section, the soprano, alto, tenor and bass parts are performed. The traditional musical instruments used are the *kendang*, *bonang* and *gongseng*. This section has an A-B structure with an *allegro* and *largo* tempo. The final section is titled *Rajawangsa*, featuring a double vocal arrangement of soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The traditional instruments used are the *kendang*, *bonang* and *gongseng*, with a structure of A-B-C and a tempo of *andante* and *allegro*.

The second work is “*Tonotokng*”, a musical composition representing the atmosphere of the *Notokng* traditional ritual of the *Dayak Kayanatn* tribe, composed by Wani Murti. The title “*Tonotokng*” is derived from two terms: *Notokng* and *Totokng*. *Notokng* is a traditional ritual to pray over the skull of a deceased person (Nurbalika et al., 2015). *Totokng* is a traditional *Dayak* musical melody that accompanies the dance during the *Notokng* traditional ritual (Imanisa et al., 2016). The instruments used in *Totokng* are traditional *Dayak* instruments consisting of the *Dau* (similar to a *bonang*), *Agukng* (gong), and *Kubeh* (*bedug*). In the work “*Tonotokng*”, Wandi Murti represents the *Notokng* traditional ritual by capturing the atmosphere of the sequence of the *Notokng* ritual ceremonies through musical elements and incorporating the original *Totokng* music.

The musical work “*Tonotokng*” is arranged using string instruments comprising first violin, second violin, viola, cello, and double bass, supplemented by a choir, floor drum, and cymbal. Two traditional *Dayak* instruments are used in this piece: the *dau* and the *agukng*. These traditional *Dayak* instruments were chosen to create a deeper sense of the *Notokng* traditional ritual atmosphere. This also serves to realise the idea of incorporating traditional musical elements into a musical work based on Western musical concepts.

The underlying concept of this musical work is developed by highlighting three aspects of the

atmosphere within the *Notokng* traditional ritual in an additive and visual manner, namely the sacred, mystical and boisterous atmospheres. These three ritual atmospheres are constructed and elaborated upon based on the subjective experience of Wandi Murti.

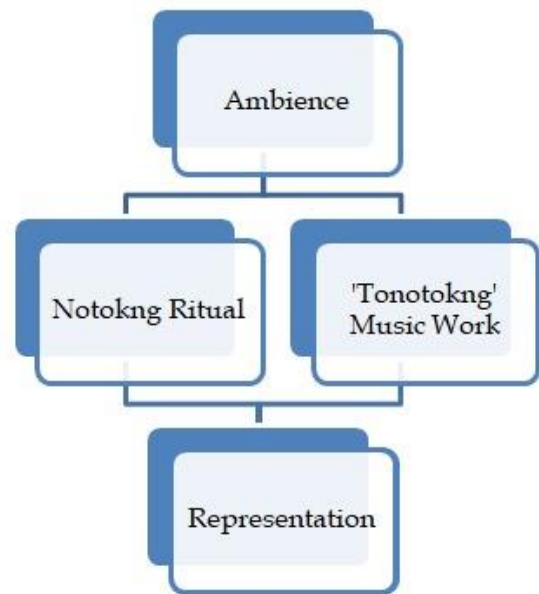


Figure 3.
Conceptual and design framework for the musical work “*Tonotokng*”

This work consists of three parts. The first part is *Nyangahatn*. *Nyangahatn* is a prayer sung at every traditional ritual performed by the *Dayak Kanayatn* community. The sacred aspect of the *Notokng* ritual is the central element of this part, with a musical concept that highlights both solo and choral vocals at a slow tempo. Lyrics have been composed for this section. These lyrics support the delivery of the prayer.

The lyrics are composed in the *Kanayatn* language and sung by a solo vocalist in the *Nyangahatn* style. A harmonic concept inspired by Eucharistic liturgical music is employed in this section, performed by a choir. The melodic pattern for the solo vocalist is recitative and articulate, unconstrained by metre and more flexible in the delivery of the lyrics. The string section serves as an accompaniment and responds to the vocals as the main melody in both the high and low registers. The

accompaniment pattern has a repetitive character in terms of beats per minute.

The second section is '*Sumangat*'. This section of the work evokes a mystical atmosphere within the *Notokng* traditional ritual. '*Sumangat*' derives from the *Kanayatn* language, meaning 'soul'. The atmosphere in this section is dominated by monodic melodies and the use of dissonant chords in the homophonic passages. Lyrics are still used in this section and are largely sung by a solo vocalist. The tempo here is slow, featuring many lyrical and dissonant melodies. The accompaniment accompanying the main melody makes extensive use of sustain and harmonic techniques. The harmonisation of the accompaniment is predominantly played in the higher register, with intervals that are not too wide, with the intention of influencing the harmonic texture to help create the mystical atmosphere of the ritual.

The final section is *Komokatn*. *Komokatn* derives from the *Kanayatn* word '*bakomok*', meaning 'to gather'. The lively atmosphere of the *Notokng* ritual, as perceived by the audience, emerges in the closing section of this musical work, '*Tonotokng*'. The atmosphere of the *Notokng* ritual's commotion in this section is inseparable from its mystical and sacred nature. There is a treatment of musical aspects in terms of harmony, melody, rhythm, technique and even a variety of timbres in each instrumentation. This section uses polyphony to present sustainable and articulate melodic patterns, as well as the use of rhythmic patterns from the original *Totokng* music composition, supported by a fairly extensive, dense and rhythmic instrumentation.

The third work, titled "Outsider", is a *Gondang* music arrangement with a mixed ensemble by Rimanda Sinaga. This musical work is based on the concept of the *Gondang* ensemble. The *Gondang* ensemble is a traditional musical ensemble of the *Batak Toba* people, the ethnic group and homeland of Rimanda Sinaga. The *Gondang* ensemble serves as a medium for the traditional ceremonies of the *Batak Toba* people, such as weddings, funerals, harvest celebrations, and so on (Manurung, 2015).

The composer explores the elements of *Gondang* music through the lens of diatonic music composition theory (concepts, techniques or compositional tools). The exploration focuses on the

playing style of *Gondang* music. Diatonic music composition theory is applied through the use of modes within the Major scale, a technique commonly employed in jazz improvisation. This work utilises a chordal system across each mode, featuring distinct harmonic structures and nuances. Chordal extension is also employed by adding notes to the chord formation.

This work incorporates chord and melody substitution for replacing a chord whilst retaining the same root. Chord substitution is used because it can produce a new harmonic rhythm with fewer chord progressions than the original. In jazz music, almost all repertoire utilises chord substitutions. Improvisation using substitution techniques is also employed in composing melodies (Cataldo, 2018). This approach allows for the application of 'inside' and 'outside' nuances.

Mirror writing, as a technique used to find inversions within a scale or chord, is also applied in this work. Mirror writing is likened to an image reflected in a mirror. This is also analogous to the overtone series: when mirrored, it produces an undertone series. Quartal harmony is also employed in the performance of the *gondang* musical instrument. Quartal harmony is constructed from the superimposition of 16 fourth intervals, with the notes of the chord separated by a distance of a fourth to maintain the characteristic quartal sound. There is an application of the serial system in the treatment of scales and rhythm in *Gondang* music, and there is also an application of the Coltrane change progression. In this progression, unconventional substitutions are used, as it employs descending major third substitutions and ascending minor third substitutions.

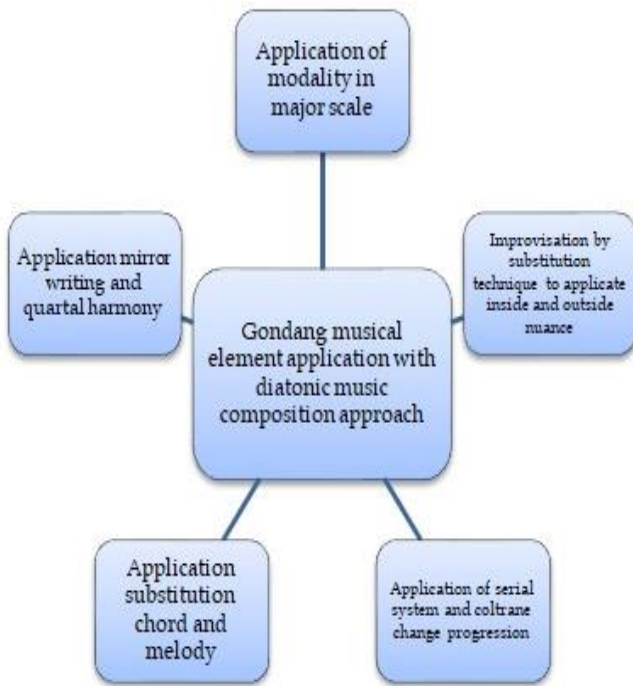


Figure. 4

Conceptual and design framework in the musical works of Rimanda Sinaga.

Outsider consists of five movements. The first movement is *Metal Toba*. This piece tells the story of the resurrection of a dead soul from the chaos of a wild life beyond expectations as a person comes of age. The structure of this movement is: A-B-C-A'. The melodic theme is played on an electric guitar, drawn from a melodic motif in a *gondang* piece titled "*Marjin Marnono*". The instruments used are the flute, B-flat trumpet, tenor saxophone, jazz guitar, piano, bass and drums. One section of this piece features the use of a symmetrical scale employing whole tones.

The second section is entitled 'Dialogue of Anxiety'. This section explores the question of whether reality is the result of fate or a chosen path in life, independent of fate. The main theme is taken from a passage in the *Gondang* song '*Sibukka Pikikiran*'. The instruments used are the *sulim*, trumpet, tenor saxophone, electric guitar, piano, bass and drums. The form of this repertoire is A-B-A'-B'-A' (one repetition)-B'-A'

The next section is 'Remembering My Silence'. This section depicts the composer's memories of his father's character and way of thinking, which taught him about life. The

instruments used are the *sulim*, electric guitar, pads, piano and bass. The form of this piece is A-B-C-B'-A'. The fourth section is 'Outsider'. In this piece, 'Outsider' is portrayed as a reflection on the dogma of differing interpretations that has led to hate speech, which has trapped humanity. The use of quartal harmonic progressions from the Lydian mode is employed to create an 'outside' feel. The instruments used are the flute, tenor saxophone, synthesiser, distorted guitar, bass, *taganing*, and drums, with a structure of A-B-A-B'-C-A'.

The final section of this work is 'Changes'. The shift in human mindset signifying a life full of dynamism is depicted in this section. Coltrane changes are applied within it, and *gondang* music is arranged using mirror writing, quartal harmonic development and serialisation. The form of the work is A-B-A', featuring the tenor saxophone, trumpet, guitar, piano, bass and drums.

The final work analysed is the Javanese *Jaranan* art music composition "*Turonggo Suryo Manggolo*" by Febriyan Stevanus Kurniawan. The fundamental concept behind this work stems from observations of the traditional Javanese *Jaranan* art form in Febriyan's hometown of *Tulungagung*. The accompaniment music of Javanese *Jaranan* has a minimalist musical form with repetitive, meditative and dynamic elements, as well as a simple style in the use of sound material such as notation, instruments, timbre and technique. The musical instruments of Javanese *Jaranan* consist of four instruments, namely the *kendang*, *kenong*, *gong* and *slompret* (Mahardhika, 2021).

In this work, the composer seeks to transform the Javanese *Jaranan* art form into a new and imaginative musical composition. This is an effort to ensure that the musical tradition accompanying the Javanese *Jaranan* art form is not lost. The composer employs absolute musical composition techniques as a new framework and domain for the exploration of sound. The concept utilised by the composer in this work is hybridity. Hybridity serves as a driving force in the process of creating musical works and shapes the composer's subjectivity in producing new music. Hybridity in this musical work also holds power in the creation of music that is experimental, observant and subjective. This is evident in the blending of traditional elements from *Jaranan* music—as a

traditional art form of Javanese society – with the percussion instruments used in Western symphonic orchestras.

Hybridity lies within the realm of instrumentation, encompassing timbre, function, melody and frequency. The concept of hybridity is realised through the fusion of traditional instruments—including the *kendang*, *gong*, *kempul*, *kenong*, *congklir* and *slompret*—with symphonic percussion instruments such as the timpani, concert tom, grand cassa and vibraphone.

rhythmic patterns on the *kendang* are extensively developed and form a hybrid strength with the symphony orchestra's percussion instruments.

The concept of the work in this section conveys a sense of dynamic tension and incorporates elements of musical dynamics. The compositional techniques employed include phasing and layering. The instruments used include the *kendang*, *slompret*, *gong*, *grand cassa*, *concert tom*, *vibraphone*, *timpani*, *congklir*, *kenong* and *kempul*.

The third section is titled *Perangan*. This section depicts a battle between mounted soldiers and their encounter with supernatural beings in the forest—manifesting as dragons and other wild beasts—with the visualisation of the *Barongan*. The notation in this section employs the imitative notation concept of “Piano Phase”, a work by Steve Reich.

The instruments used at the beginning of the section consist of the gong, vibraphone, *congklir*, *kenong*, *slompret* and *kendang*. These instruments form the core layer at the start of this section. In the middle section, there is a rhythmic development through repetition between symphonic percussion instruments and traditional Javanese *Jaranan* instruments, experimentation with layering, shifting and phasing techniques, as well as rhythmic improvisation using the *gonggomino* rhythm pattern. There is also rhythmic processing through interlocking, rhythmic development through augmentation, and the use of motifs in a diminutive form.

The fourth section is titled *Ndadi*. This section depicts soldiers practising martial arts. It features a performance by several dancers entering a trance-like state. The structure of the piece employs a pattern of improvisation with low tension, a slow tempo, and soft dynamics, creating a magical and contemplative impression, atmosphere and mood.

The traditional instruments used are the *kendang* and the *slompret*; the *kendang* music serves as the accompaniment and is played improvisationally using the ‘*ndadi*’ drumming pattern with rhythmic variations. Improvisation and ornamentation play a very significant role

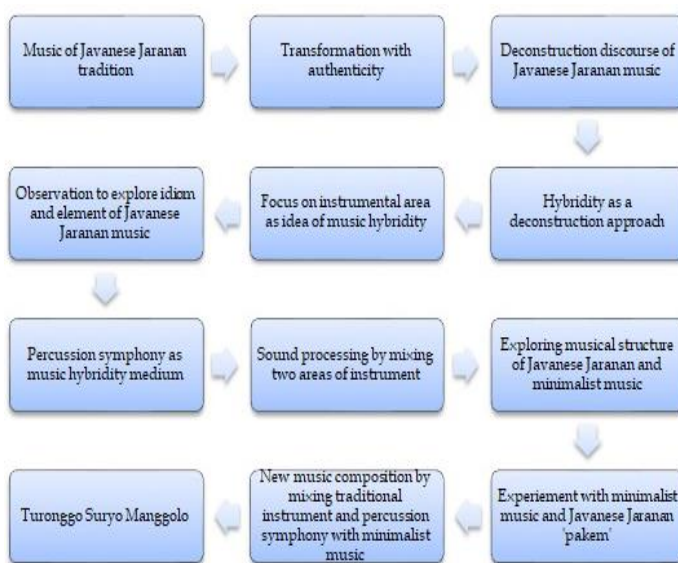


Figure 5.

Stages and design of the musical work "Turonggo Suryo manggolo"

This work consists of four movements. The first movement, entitled '*Buka*', depicts soldiers training for battle in a mounted barricade formation. The motifs are sparse and employ rhythmic patterns with phasing techniques. The atmosphere is built to be very calm, creating a magical impression. The instruments used include: vibraphone, timpani, a grand cassa struck with a mallet, *slompret*, *kendang*, concert tom, and concludes with the use of a reverb cymbal. The second section is titled '*Ukel*'. This section depicts soldiers racing on horseback and hunting animals in the forest. Each motif and rhythmic pattern represents movement and is elaborated in a complex manner to realise the concept of minimalist music. The dynamic

and are employed to follow the dancers' movements and respond to the behaviour of dancers in a trance-like state. This is performed spontaneously by the dancers. The *slompret* playing pattern performs melodies derived from Javanese *gending*, whilst the *kendang* accompanies using the *gonggomino* rhythmic pattern. The motifs of the *kendang* and *slompret*, which seek to break free from the musical context, are key to this section.

CONCLUSIONS

A common thread can be drawn through the process of creating these four students' musical works. There is a shared fundamental idea or creative foundation relating to the past or history of the four students. All four musical works incorporate Western musical concepts whilst drawing on traditional musical idioms from the regions where the students hail from.

Athitya Dyah Nathalia Monica, from Malang, utilises traditional Javanese *karawitan* musical idioms, specifically the *Malangan* style, and draws upon the story of *Arok Dedes*, believed to be a very famous folk tale in Malang. Wandu Murti, a young man from the *Dayak Kayan* tribe, highlights aspects of the *Notokng* tradition and the accompanying *Totokng* music, which is a ritual once performed by his ancestors in the past. Rimanda Sinaga, a member of the *Batak Toba* ethnic group, draws upon the traditional *gondang* ensemble music of the *Batak Toba* people, whilst also seeking to convey memories of her parents from the past. Febriyan Stevanus draws his core inspiration from the traditional *Jaranan* art form of *Tulungagung*, the region where he lives, and this concept is also linked to the role of his grandfather, who was directly involved in the traditional *Jaranan* music in the past.

In addition to the above, there are similarities in the creative processes employed by the four students. A process of transformational creativity is evident in these four musical works. Transformational creativity involves transforming an existing domain. In this context, the domain refers to the elements of traditional music incorporated into the works, which are then adapted and combined with another domain,

namely Western musical concepts. The result of this creativity is a new and imaginative musical work.

The differences observed in the stages and creative processes involved in the composition of these four musical works are closely linked to the creative abilities possessed by the composers. These creative abilities are related to their family background, educational background, life experiences and the insights they have gained.

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