



Take a Peek! Into *Lagu Melayu Asli*

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Abstract

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Every music has its own unique identity. These special features need to be exposed and published, or else they perish. With that in mind, this paper explores or, as suggested, “Take a Peek!” into Lagu Melayu Asli or Malay Asli songs. In doing so, an extensive documents analysis was conducted as our methodology processes. After relevant documents for Lagu Melayu Asli was gathered, we used a qualitative content analysis technique to investigate distinctive characters about Lagu Melayu Asli. To strengthen our arguments, personal interviews were conducted. In discussion, a discourse summarising facts found within the literature presented in two-dimensional ways, instrumentation related in Lagu Melayu Asli, and Lagu Melayu Asli’s musicological aspect.

INTRODUCTION

Music goes a long history of creating and merging into social cultures. These social cultures in the context of music prove human activities in daily lives by manipulating and reconnecting various sounds into music (Sapriadi et al., 2021). *Malay Asli* music, for example, consists of many sub-genre of other traditional Malay music, as suggested by Matusky and Tan (2017), such as *zapin*, *inang*, *dondang sayang*, *joget*, *boria*, *keroncong*, *bangsawan* and *ghazal*. But, we beg to differ from including *bangsawan* as a music genre because it is a form of theatre performance (Rahmah, 2019; Nur Afifah, 2017), not as music per se. Abdul Fatah (1980) pointed out other interesting facts, saying that Lagu Melayu Asli was developed in the 1940s when *bangsawan* theatre was popularised.

Another unique feature of *Lagu Melayu Asli* is a type of music labelled as syncretic music, which integrates several musical stylistic cultures (Matusky, 1985; Mohamed Ghouse, 1989; Nor Azura, 2014; Irving, 2014; Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Nik Shareena, 2018; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko et al., 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan, 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko et al., 2021). Syncretism happened due to colonisation around the Malay Archipelago many centuries ago, overlapping with musical stylistic of Portuguese, British, and Dutch (Irving, 2014). Others also reported that *Malay* music influenced Asian countries like India and Arab (Munif, 2003). Along with times, the emergence of multiple cultures created what is known as *Lagu Malay Asli* today.

Generally, every music partakes in its distinguishing characteristics: pop, jazz, rock, and many more. In *Lagu Melayu Asli*, there are specific rhythmic patterns that go together with a slow tempo, around 55 to 75 beats per minute (Rizaldi, 2010; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Fadzril Nidzam, 2018; Nik Shareena Rosny, 2018; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko et al., 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan, 2020). Customarily, the singer will sing melodies of Lagu Melayu Asli in a melismatic way, extending one syllable with different notes (Leonhardt, 2020; Moultrie, 2021).

In the literatures, *Lagu Melayu Asli* also known as *senandung* (Rizaldi, 2010; Takari & Fadlin, personal interview, September 30, 2014; Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko et al, 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan, 2020). The reason why *Lagu Melayu Asli*

known as *senandung* is because the melody and tempo will be played using a slow tempo, either sung by a singer (Or Azura, 2015; Tengku Ritawati, 2017; Fadzril Nidzam, 2018) or instrumentally (Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Nik Shareena, 2018, Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2021).

Apart from the above general statement about *Lagu Melayu Asli*, the next section of this article will explicitly explain *Lagu Melayu Asli* in the view of musicological. It is important to note that although a lot of research had been done on *Lagu Melayu Asli*. Still, we agree with Mohd Nasir's (2012) statement saying that most of the information gathered is based on music experts' own experiences, which sometimes may result from one's own beliefs and ignorance. Hence this is why controversy on the authenticity of *Malay Asli* music still occurs among *Malay* Music practitioners now (Mohd Nasir, 2012; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan, 2020; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko, 2021). To find the common ground of what Lagu Melayu Asli in general, this article will discuss further below

METHOD

To gain sufficient data, this study uses document analysis to collect data. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse collected data and explain the phenomenon, which is about Lagu Melayu Asli. The analysis process consists of three phases: preparation, organising, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

Preparation phrases include finding relevant documents on *Lagu Melayu Asli* using the Google Scholar database. The keyword "*Lagu Melayu Asli*" was used because this study focuses on Lagu Melayu Asli, not Muzik Melayu or Malay Music, which includes other sub-genre as explained in the Introduction section above. Types of qualitative content analysis in this article are more directed content analysis, extending or validating the findings from previous research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In the second phase, all necessary documents will be collected and organised. To select the most relevant records of *Lagu Melayu Asli*, a scheming process is conducted. Last but not least, gathered data will be reported in the result and discussion section below. To understand explicitly and make sense of what previous researchers said, an explanation of findings on *Lagu Melayu Asli* will be guided using musicology analysis, which is a process of inquiry, investigation and reflection of music as subjects (Beard & Gloag, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings on *Lagu Melayu Asli* will be divided into two main themes, music instrumentation and musicology of *Lagu Melayu Asli* itself.

Musical Instrumentation In Lagu Melayu Asli

A Malay music ensemble, usually consists of these musical instruments, as shown in **Table 1** below:

Table 1. Instrumentation related in *Lagu Melayu Asli* ensemble

| Music Instrumentation | Previous Research |
|------------------------------|---|
| Vocal (12 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Munif (2003) • Rizaldi (2010) • Shafa'atussara (2010, 2013) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Nor Azura (2014) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Matusky & Tan (2017) • Tengku Ritawati (2017) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) • Khairul Faiz & Tajul Aripin (2018) |
| Violin (11 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Munif (2003) • Rizaldi (2010) • Muhammad • Hafiz (2010) • Manoharan et al. (2011) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Mohd Nasir (2012) • Nor Azura (2014) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Nik Shareena (2018) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Accordion (10 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Munif (2003) • Rizaldi (2010) • Muhammad Hafiz (2010) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Mohd Nasir (2012) • Nor Azura (2014) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Nik Shareena (2018) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Rebana | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Munif (2003) |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| (13 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rizaldi (2010) • Muhammad Hafiz (2010) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Mohd Nasir (2012) • Manoharan et al. (2011) • Mohd Nasir (2012) • Nor Azura (2014) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Matusky & Tan (2017) • Nik Shareena (2018) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Gong (8 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rizaldi (2010) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Manoharan et al. (2011) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Matusky & Tan (2017) • Nik Shareena (2018) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Flute (4 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Mohd Nasir (2012) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Guitar (9 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muhammad Hafiz (2010) • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Nor Azura (2014) • Ismail & Ab Samad (2015) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) • Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan (2020) • Chamil Arkhasa Nikko et al. (2020) • Chamil Arkhasa Nikko (2021) |
| Oud (1 count) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) |
| Harmonium (2 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurmaisara et al. (2011) • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |
| Bass (2 counts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nor Azura (2014) • Suflan Faizdal (2015) |
| Drum Set (1 count) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nor Azura (2014) |
| Tambourine (1 count) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fadzlil Nidzam (2018) |

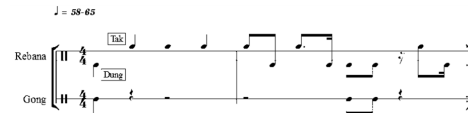
Although mixed Western and traditional music instruments are illustrated in Table 1, Malay ensemble usually consists of two sections, the main categories of basic music instrumentation such as violin, accordion and *rebana* (Munif, 2003; Ismail & Ab Samad 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015). In this instrumental setting, violin or accordion will play the main melody and be accompanied by *Lebanon* for rhythmic parts. Not just a single frame drum like *Lebanon*, in the performance of *Lagu Melayu Asli*, rebana will be paired alongside a set of the *gong* (Fadzril Nidzam, 2018). Melody lines in *Lagu Melayu Asli* can be played instrumentally using violin, accordion and guitar or singing by vocalists. Other music instruments like tambourine, drum set, bass, harmonium and oud (*gambus*) indicate that this type of instrument is a smaller amount, which falls into the categories of accompaniment instruments compared to accordion violin, vocal, *rebana*, gong, flute and guitar.

Musicological Aspects In Lagu Melayu Asli

When listening to any *Lagu Melayu Asli* music, various sounds of instrumentation are played simultaneously. These textures in known as polyphonic, multi-layered with melody, rhythm, dynamic and harmonic. Likewise, when a singer sings the melody lines, accordion and violin will accompany the singers with modifications of songs in the same tune. As a result, forming a musically texture known as heterophony. In other words, this variation of melodies is known as '*Berbunga*' symbiotically as blooming flowers. *Berbunga* is a similar musical term, for example, acciaccatura, mordent, glissando, turn and trill (Suflan Faizdal, 2015), which referred to as ornamentation in music and use to embellish song melodies with melismatic features (Munif, 2003; Mohd Azam, 2015; Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Tengku Ritawati, 2017).

Apart from textures, rhythmic pattern in *Lagu Melayu Asli* played by *rebana*, in the count of 8 beats over a 2 bar phrase 4/4 meter. On the first four beats, *rebana* played regularly on beats 2, 3, and 4 and played beat 1 and 2 in the second bar with syncopation on beat 4. Meanwhile, the gong will play on beat one and play twice on beat 7 (Ahmad Razali, personal interview, September 16, 2014). Hence, counting in rebana using 8 bit, which is similar to 8/4 time signature (Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Chamil Arkhasa Nikko & Mohd Hassan, 2020, Zuarman personal interview, March 30, 2020). This irregular timing of

the 8/4 time signature is commonly used in dancing to get the song's pulse (Peter, 2019). Referring to notation one below is the example of *Lagu Melayu Asli* rhythmic pattern:



Notation 1. The rhythmic pattern of Lagu Melayu Asli (source: Suflan Faizdal, 2015)

In any *Lagu Melayu Asli*, vocal sings texts from a poem (Munif, 2003; Rizaldi, 2010; Nor Azura, 2014; Ismail & Ab Samad, 2015; Suflan Faizdal, 2015; Fadzril Nidzam, 2018; Nik Shareena, 2018), consist of 4 phrases and subdivided into two parts, which structured as ABAB rhyme scheme with the first lines of section (A), followed by section (B) lines (Writer, 2020; Masterclass staff, 2021). The poem's use in *Lagu Melayu Asli* can be translated for many reasons. It is not accessible to critic the higher-up rulers during that time. To do so, the poem is used to convey or express social justice, feeling of love, and the natural beauty of our mother nature (Suflan Faizdal, 2015). Section A will be on the first and third line, while section B falls on the second and fourth line. Figure 1 below will explain ABAB structure, using lyrics from *Lagu Melayu Asli* song titled Seri Mersing:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Tidaklah boleh... ku kenanglah kenang... Air lah mata jatuh berlinang... | Section A → |
| Karam di laut dapat ku renang... Karam di hati aduhailah sayang bila kah nak senang... | Section B → |
| Seri Meresing... lagu lah Melayu... Digubahlah oleh biduan dahulu... | Section A → |
| Hati ku rusing bertambahlah pilu... Mengenangkan nasib aduhai lah sayang yatim lah piatu... | Section B → |

Figure 1. Example of ABAB form from Seri Mersing song lyrics

After analysing *Lagu Melayu Asli*, we found out a series of musical phrases within, terms as musical phrases. These melodic phrases are divided into four main categories, as shown in Table 2 below:

Tabel 2. Four main musical phrases in Lagu Melayu Asli

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Buka Lagu</i> /Intro | Melody intro for a song, which each of Malay |
|-------------------------|--|

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| | traditional song has its intro |
| <i>Pengantar Lagu/Forephase</i> | Refers to a string of notes, the selection of which is from specific notes of the scale or modes in tune. It is sometimes played within the poem's first line but always played after its third line. <i>Pengantar Lagu</i> introduces (leading) to the last line of the poem, which tells the real meaning of the whole poem. The final note of the <i>Pengantar Lagu</i> always shows the previous melody lines |
| <i>Sendi Lagu/Melodic Bridge</i> | <i>Sendi</i> in Malay means 'joint', connecting and bridging the first two lines and the last two melody lines of the poem. |
| <i>Penutup Lagu/Outro</i> | A closing section in a piece of music. These melodic phrases are played when two poem phrases (<i>pantun dua kerat</i>) are ended. |

Figure 2 below exemplify four main musical phrases:

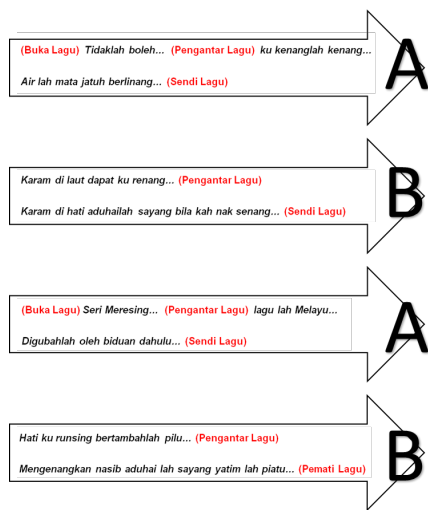


Figure 2. Four main musical phrases incorporated in *Lagu Melayu Asli* song titled *Seri Meresing*

CONCLUSION

To wrap up from the above analysis, generally inform us of the beauty within *Lagu Melayu Asli* music. The use of musicology and documents analysis enables us to examine how the intellectual discourse of practitioners and musicians at that time structured traditional music by using AB song form and ornamentation. Hence, it was found historically that Malay traditional music is crafted carefully with the high philosophical values of Malay culture.

Although the Malay world has been imbued with the colonisation of Dutch, Portuguese and British and others over many centuries, indirectly, it has shaped Malay traditional music with numerous influx of musical instrumentation all across vast geographical of Malay Archipelago. We also agreed with previous research stating that Malay music appeals to Europe and gained a reputation as Italian of the east due to the distinctiveness and sweetness of *Lagu Melayu Asli* melody.

Hopefully, the future generation will continue to promote, nurture and modernise *Lagu Melayu Asli* with other musical idioms, as long as we keep the essential elements of *Lagu Melayu Asli*. Otherwise, *Lagu Melayu Asli* will be presented conventionally, and who knows, one day it will perish in future.

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