

An exploration of the malay kompany

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE MALAY KOMPANG Name: Chan Tsui Sze Dora

Matriculation Number: U1210644K Seminar Group Time: 1330 – 1530

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the Kompang The Malay Kompang ensemble refers to a Malay drum ensemble that ranges between three performers in a small chamber or accompaniment setting, to a large group of 30 drummers. As an instrument, the Malay Kompang is so familiar to most Singaporeans, yet it encompasses a rich history pning more than 700 years that would astound and intrigue many.

Kompang is mainly an oral tradition (Abdullah, 2005). Like all other non-notational music forms, it is inevitably highly characterized by change, self-improvisation and influences from other cultures. While Kompang music today is admittedly not so frequently heard nor performed as before, there have been efforts to assimilate this traditional music genre into today's popularculture. This paper will address the diverse cultural influences on Malay Kompang from Arabic, Portuguese, Thai and African sources.

Through the main musical elements of instrumentation, rhythm, form, and performance context, a comprehensive musical analysis of the influence of the different cultures on Kompang music will be made. This paper will also examine how elements of popular culture can be infused into the traditional Malay Kompang music genre, and discuss the general developmental direction that Kompang music is taking.

1. 1 Features of the Kompang

The Malay Kompang is part of the membranophone family.

It is a wooden-framed, circular, one-sided handheld drum with a skin made up of animal hide and played using the free hand (Abdullah, 2012). There are two main types of tones on the Kompang – the lentong beat played by hitting the side of the drum with closed fingers, and the cerang played by slapping the center of the drum with the palm (Abdullah, 2012). The lentong typically produces a lower-pitched, rounder sound while the cerang typically produces a higher-pitched slapping effect. One of the unique features of the Kompang is its “wet” and rumbling timbre due to the strong effects of reverberation.

Another special feature of the Kompang is its interlocking technique and the unique musical texture heard from this effect.

1. 2 Features of Kompang Music

Even though most musical repertoire of the Kompang is oral in nature and neither notated nor formally defined, there is undeniably a wide range of repertoire in the Kompang genre. There is purely instrumental drumming as well as Kompang used to accompany vocal parts, like zikir. The variety in form – the organization of musical elements in time to create structure (Kamien, 2013) – used in Kompang music is very wide.

There is the use of Pukulan, which the first section is called Pukulan Mula (introduction beat), the second is called Pukulan Asas (basic beat) and the

third is Pukulan Naik (ascending beat), followed by a combination of other sections including Pukulan Turun (descending beat) and Pukulan Naik. Finally the last section is identified as Pukulan Mati (ending beat). (Abdullah, 2005) There is no rule as to how many times each Pukulan has to be played; the combination of Pukulan sections is determined by the length as well as the function of the entire performance.

Also, the form of Kompang pieces is also specific to the community that is performing the pieces. For example, the Kompang music performed by the Kompang Ezhar community in Malaysia typically begins with a call-and-response recitation of the Selawat, a reading of a holy scripture, and then continues with the various Pukulan sections. Additionally, there are even more types of Pukulan found in various forms of dance music (Abdullah, 2005). A summary of the different Pukulan specific to the Kompang Ezhar community is shown in Figure 1 below: Figure 1: A summary of the various types of Pukulan found in the Kompang Ezhar (Abdullah, 2005)

In Kompang, rhythm is mainly characterized by the interlocking of different parts divided within the Kompang ensemble. Interlocking is basically done with two or more Kompangs playing simultaneously, with one part playing the Basic beat which is usually the downbeats; another part playing the Rhythm beat which is usually the off beats; and an additional part(s) playing the Leading beat which is usually characterized by triplets or a syncopated rhythm that creates a unique interlocking texture specific to the Malay Kompang musical genre (Hahril, 2010).

In addition, instrumentation is a musical element that is relatively fixed in Kompang; there is usually a group of Kompangs playing together, and <https://assignbuster.com/an-exploration-of-the-malay-kompang/>

occasionally, accompanying voice. 1. 3 Performance Context In the Singaporean context, the Malay Kompang is usually seen performed at weddings and celebratory ceremonies, or at traditional showcases. As the Kompang is usually performed in large, open spaces, it is important that it produces loud, penetrating and thundering sounds. Kompang performances are also popular at social functions like cultural festivals, dinner shows and events, as well as for the royalty (Abdullah, 2005).

All these factors underscore the importance and essentiality of this unique instrument in the entire Malay community. Chapter 2: Influences on the Malay Kompang The Malay Kompang is influenced by many cultures, especially from those cultures that introduced the musical genre into the Malay community in the early 13th century. As Malacca was ruled by different cultural groups throughout its history, the performance of Malay Kompang was also inevitably influenced by these cultures that took over the land at different points in its history. 2. 1 Arabic Influences One main influence on Kompang music is the Arabic culture and its music.

In this context, it is of relevance to discuss the main hand drum that is greatly symbolic of Arabic music – the goblet drum, a large single-headed drum introduced in 1100 BCE (Sadie, 1980). Figure 2: African goblet drum The goblet drum is played either with the drum held under the player's arm, or with the player sitting down and placing it sideways on his lap, or with the drum strapped around his neck. Similar to the Malay Kompang, it is played using only the hands. There are three main tones used. The doum (bass) tone is produced by hitting the center of the drum head with the palm.

The tek (higher-pitched) is produced by hitting the edge of the drum head. The pa is a percussive effect produced by hitting the drumhead and then muting it with the palm to create a closed sound. Figure 3: Doum tone on the Arabic goblet drum Figure 4: Tek tone on the Arabic goblet drum Thus, it can be seen that the playing techniques of the Malay Kompang is somewhat derived from the playing techniques of the Arabic goblet drum – such that a higher-pitched sound is heard by tapping the side of the drum and letting the sound ring, and a lower-pitched sound is produced by hitting the middle of the drum using the palm.

Although the muting percussive tone is not as established in Kompang performance techniques, this is probably due to the limitations of the Kompang in that it can only be hit with one hand and held with the other, making it hard to execute a muting effect.

2. 2 Portuguese Influences

Portuguese musical elements are also evident in the music of Kompang, particularly in its repertoire. This is not unexpected, as the Portuguese took over Malacca after its successful assault on the city in July 1511 (Leo, 2013) – leading to infiltration of Portuguese elements into the Malay culture and practices then.

The main hand drum in the Portuguese tradition is the Tabor. It is a double-headed snare drum made of cylindrical wood, played with one hand. The skin heads are tightened with leather straps and rope tension (Harms, 1989). Figure 5: The Portuguese Tabor The repertoire of the Tabor is mostly military in nature and is used frequently in marching band processions. Additionally, the Tabor is commonly played together with the Portuguese pipe. The player

commonly plays the pipe with his left hand and hits the drum with a wooden stick in his right hand.

Portuguese pipe music is folk in nature and the rhythms played on the Tabor are accompanimental and characterized by dotted rhythm. As the musical repertoire of the Tabor is not extensive, there is little notation available. Hence a short transcription of the Tabor parts from a Portuguese Pipe and Tabor ensemble has been attempted: Figure 6: Transcription of Pipe and Tabor ensemble recording As seen from Figure 6, each of the three Tabor parts plays different rhythms, but the performance culminates in an interlocking effect such that the three different parts compliment each other's beats of emphasis.

Hence we can derive two insights regarding the Portuguese influence on the Malay Kompang – firstly, the use of the Kompang in Malay processions and weddings could be influenced by the use of the Tabor in Portuguese marching processions. Secondly, the interlocking feature in Kompang music could be taken from Portuguese Tabor ensembles and then developed to the several complex interlocking parts of today, which includes triplets and more complicated syncopation parts. 2. 3 Thai Influences Yet another cultural influence on Kompang music is Thai music.

The Malays and the Siamese have had long, diplomatic contact for over half a decade during the Siamese empire of 1403 – 1909. This allowed the Malays to adapt to the Thai culture and music. Two Siamese musical forms that were of great influence to the Malay Kompang were the Wayang Siam and the Makyong (Abdullah, 2012). The Wayang Siam is essentially accompaniment to shadow puppet theatre. The form of Wayang Siam music is mostly free in

nature and depends on the theatrics and drama of the performance. Characters are free to move onstage in more or less than the traditional eight-bar phrases (Baier, 1995).

The Makyong musical form was primarily performed by a small ensemble of instruments used to accompany theatrical acts, and included improvised monologues and dialogues (UNESCO, 2005), underscoring the flexibility of the form. Similarly, Kompang ensembles accompany dances, weddings and processions and require a certain amount of flexibility to suit the occasion. Despite the flexibility in combination and number of repetitions of Pukulan sections played, it is not as free as the form in Wayang Siam. Nevertheless, the flexibility in form can be seen as a main influence of Wayang Siam on Kompang music. . 4 African Influences The way that the drummers in an African djembe ensemble interact musically is also of influence to the Malay Kompang. One main feature of African djembe ensemble playing is polyrhythm, in which each djembe player plays a repetitive cycle of its own accompanying rhythm which is in a different measure from the other djembe players. This creates a very unique rhythmic texture as there are different downbeats heard simultaneously with the playing of two different measures. This can be seen in the example below, depicting a polyrhythmic effect:

Figure 7: Example of polyrhythm

In addition, there is usually also a solo, virtuosic part heard above all the different accompanying parts, which gives even more rhythmic variety to the music. The influence that this has on Kompang is clear in the different parts that are taken on by the different players in the ensemble. However, the interlocking effect in Kompang is not as complex in that it is not as texturally

thick as djembe as all the ensemble players are still playing in the same measure. Nevertheless, it still shows a very important influence that African drum music had on the Malay Kompang.

In the 13th century in the Malay Archipelago, little polyrhythmic or even contrapuntal music could be found. Hence the interlocking feature of Kompang music was drawn from the polyrhythms in African djembe. Chapter 3: Future Changes in the Malay Kompang In the 21st century today when most people including those in the Southeast Asia region are exposed to popular music due to factors like technological advances and the strong wave of social media, there is inevitably a strong inclination towards fusing traditional music with pop elements.

In addition, due to the increased westernization of Asian cultures, many traditional musical forms are gradually evolving into a more Westernized structure. Besides this, the culture where Kompang is performed today also has an effect on how it is performed. For example, Kompang Melayu is a modern style of playing Kompang, specifically found in Singapore (Hahrill, 2010). Based on my research and analysis, there is a strong possibility of two main directions that musical developments in Malay Kompang can take – the pop-infused style and the westernized style. 3. Pop and Media Influences Pop music is a main influence on Kompang music today. Since the 21st century, technology has allowed a growing number of people to be connected to the Internet. With today's wireless connectivity and infiltration of social media, the immense volume of technological information sharing inevitably causes people to be influenced by songs that are literally popular – those that are accessible to the widest audience (Lamb, 2013). Elements of rock, R&B,

country, disco, punk, and hip-hop have been integrated into pop music for the past few decades.

The rhythmic elements in these styles have the potential to be incorporated into Kompang. In addition, the form of pop music – verse and chorus – could be another element that could possibly influence Kompang music in the future.

3. 2 Western Influences

Due to increasing westernization of Southeast-Asian cultures today as well as the flourish in Western Musiceducationthat uses mainly western notation, Kompang music is more frequently notated these days. This is evident from the difficulty that cross-cultural ensembles face in rehearsing due to differences in notational practices. Ross, 2011) Western orchestras, bands and ensembles have also been introduced to the Malay culture in recent years. There could potentially be new compositions that incorporate the Kompang into the scored music. For example, percussion ensembles with Kompang as one of the instruments, or even Kompang concertos could be written in the near future as part of efforts to popularize traditional instruments.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In conclusion, the Malay Kompang, although a considerably specific musical genre, is still influenced by a myriad of elements from other cultures.

This is especially so withglobalizationtoday, causing homogenization of culture throughout many countries. As discussed above, Kompang music was initially influenced by Arabic, Portuguese, Thai and African musical elements. In recent years, it has started to be influenced by pop and western elements, which are mostly caused by the infiltration of media and technology, and the slow but definite westernization of Asian cultures. As such, the growth of

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%20music%20scores&f= false Musical Elements : Key, Musical Texture,