

TAZUL TAJUDDIN'S OPERA SERIKANDI NUSANTARA: THE DIMINUTION OF FUNCTIONAL TONALITY AND ITS SYMBOLIC ROLE FROM AN ESTHESIS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Music has become one of the essential communication forms used to evoke symbolic associations of the related extra-musicals, precisely to symbolise a series of events in a story by means of music composition. In the Malaysian context, there is a contemporary opera adaptation of short stories about the legendary Malaysian princesses entitled *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, composed by Tazul Tajuddin. The music of this opera reveals a stylistic feature different from that of the existing local folktale-based musicals. It conjures up a sense of departure from the conventions of functional tonality in which the musical ideas are organised through the contemporary musical language and imaginative use of instrumental timbre and extended techniques. A vital aspect of Tajuddin's compositional techniques that encompasses the whole work is an emphasis on integrating materials derived from the cultures of traditional Malay music and postmodern compositional practices into its music to allow for great subtlety of symbolic connection with the text. To emphasise novelty as the salient characteristic of the composition, Tajuddin developed highly personal idioms that depended more on tonal ambiguity and folk inspirations than conventional harmony, abandoning the old notions of cadences and harmonic progressions that suggest the need for discords to be resolved. Moving away from or diminishing the traditional system of harmony led him to new ways of organising a multitude of ideas, structural parameters and expressive elements in this opera. Consequently, this kind of treatment expands the possibility of conveying a more abstract level of emotional expression and dramatic effects throughout the opera.

Keywords

Opera, Music analysis, Malaysian music, Intercultural composition, Musical symbolism

INTRODUCTION

The creation of music is commonly associated with extra-musical material. Many composers utilise these non-musical subjects in the form of literature, folktales, poems, painting, architecture and so forth to draw inspiration and inform the manipulation and formulation of ideas for their creative writing. In Malaysia, local composers' practice of putting inspiration into the context of a compositional method is inextricably linked with the attempts to promote and reimagine Malaysia's cultural heritage in a modernised setting. The idea of retelling and symbolising local folklore, legends or myths from a different perspective and in a new distribution and production medium, in this case, their original compositions, plays a prominent role here.

Tazul Tajuddin is a Malaysian composer who needs no introduction to the world of contemporary art music, locally or internationally. He is regarded as the first composer in Malaysia to write music for an opera in the Malay language in a manner inspired by the story of Puteri Saadong—a legendary princess from Kelantan state—using a combination of contemporary musical language and traditional Malay techniques. Focusing on the concept of incorporating extra-musical material pertinent to the Malaysian context into the creative process, Tajuddin's

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compositional approach was further embedded and demonstrated in his recent opera composition, *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, where a compilation of stories about Malaysian legends drawn from Raman Krishnan's Legendary Princesses of Malaysia was utilised as a source of inspiration to develop this large-scale work.

What can be observed by viewing the existing musical adaptations or renditions of local folktales and legends through my analytical lens is, on the one hand, that they seem to conform to the conventional musical design within the scope of the traditional major–minor-scale system, which was intended as a symbolic representation of the related extra-musicals. These musical adaptations revolved mainly around the mainstream music setting and relied exclusively on a traditional tonal framework for their musical expression and desired musical character. For instance, most musical theatres inspired by Malay mythologies are generally constructed with diatonic materials, limiting the possibilities for a more profound expressive correspondence between music and their extra-musicals. On the other hand, Tajuddin's opera work shows a significant development in terms of compositional style due to his emphasis on the dissolution of traditional tonal functions generated by the fusion of Western contemporary and Asian or Malay musical traditions throughout his original creation. Composing music by abandoning or reducing the sense of traditional tonal functions will enable a composer to generate the music with more latitude and expression as well as to embed their cultural backgrounds more freely as the major key element for their creative voices.

The tendencies towards new musical language, which led to the use of unusual scale resources, new principles of pitch constructions and new kinds of metric and rhythmic approaches, started to emerge among the composers during the post-romantic and impressionistic era, where ambiguity, metaphor, symbol and colour or mood of a particular moment became crucial to their compositional aesthetics. It was the developments in literature and psychology in the late nineteenth century that prompted the opera composers of that period to extend the traditional musical means to reflect and express the new literary assumptions rooted in the operas, conveying the symbolic dimension of the underlying emotional and psychological states of the characters (Antokoletz, 2004). In other words, this new musical language was established when the conventional tonal and harmonic vocabulary could not accommodate the abstract quality of opera's symbolism with regard to the evocation of a sense of imagery, allusion, mystery and certain nonverbal phenomena.

The marriage of stylistic traits derived from the cultures of new music and folk music was influential in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* for expanding the possibility of articulating a more defined, thorough and expressive meaning of the literary texts through music in this opera. In conjunction with the Malaysian government's effort to uplift public interest and appreciation towards local arts, the making of this large-scale artwork in the form of an opera is aimed at approaching originality as well as embodying part of the cultural identity into this folklore-based music as opposed to the familiar sound-world of the Malaysian mainstream or popular music. It can be noted that there is little exposure to the mass audience in Malaysia concerning the opera adaptations of this type of folklore within the landscape of modern music. Therefore, this study is intended to focus on the realisation of the tonal instability, nonfunctional harmony and new ways of organising rhythms in Tajuddin's *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* by exploring and demystifying the symbolic significance between the organisation and interaction of musical ideas with the dramatic occurrences of the inspired tales from an analyst or researcher standpoint.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the creative process regarding integrating and combining various sonic elements of Malay traditional music and contemporary Western compositional techniques to reflect the dramatic symbolisation in Tajuddin's *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*.

2. To construct a reflective commentary on how composing an opera in a contemporary musical idiom by avoiding or minimising the elements of functional tonality can contribute or give rise to the symbolic manifestation of the reimagined stories of the selected Malaysian legends.

To gain information and achieve the objectives, this project adopts a multifaceted approach to musical analysis and symbolism in music drawn from the theoretical writings of Elliot Antokoletz. Component parts of this analytical approach are used in combination to outline and deduce the cause-and-effect relationship between new musical language and its relation to the design of the dramatic scenes—which primarily addresses the fusion of elements from Western contemporary music and East Asian folk music as the structural basis for symbolic representation. The outcome of this study provides a commentary outlining a contextual and substantive strategy for composing music inspired by the tales of legendary Malaysian princesses and offering insight into the creative procedures for adapting and transforming specific dramatic events into the corresponding musical settings.

Furthermore, this study helps inform future generations of composers, music educators, and musicians in Malaysia about incorporating and combining various strands and expressions of Malaysian traditional music and contemporary Western art canon into a new musical composition. The treatment of these Asian or Malay traditional musical materials in this composition is not viewed as “exotic” and additional source material but as one of the key elements that structure this creative work (Tajuddin, 2022, p. 78). In brief, this study documents the result of an exploration into the intelligible relationships between primary dimensions of music and their assigned symbolic meaning from a researcher or analyst’s perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE USE OF FOLK SONGS IN NEW COMPOSITIONS

Folk or traditional music has been associated with the creation of art music compositions musically or culturally for ages. This connection refers to utilising musical strands or expressions drawn from folk music as a source of inspiration and thematic bases to generate and inform the organisation or manipulation of musical ideas for the new composition. Among the master composers who employed this kind of practice are Rimsky Korsakov, Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartok, Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, Franz Liszt, Aaron Copland, Jean Sibelius and other great composers. In Malaysia, the creative works inspired by traditional Malay music and instruments give little to no mention of information on the process of contextualising related inspirational sources or ideas into the realisation of new music. The discourse on the cross-cultural approach within the Malaysian context needs to be expanded, outlined and documented for the benefit of composers, researchers, musicologists and educators in integrating materials from two distinct musical techniques and stylistic idioms into a new musical piece (Tajuddin, 2022).

McGab (2002), in his article in the *Berklee Today Fall 2002* magazine, shares some thoughts about utilising folk tunes in new musical pieces. He briefly describes how he integrated folk music melodies into and around his original musical works while preserving the spirit and integrity of the selected folk songs. The intention is not to arrange or harmonise the folk melodies but to create unity, interrelationship and fluency between the melodies and original musical materials, whether rhythmically, harmonically or contrapuntally through these original creations. Although McGab always mentions the importance of conserving the spirit and integrity of folk songs in new compositions, there needs to be more explanation and justification for the particular method used to achieve such aims.

Just as McGab concentrates on how reinterpreting folklore can contribute to the creation of new work, Ginting (2019) similarly discusses the premise of a musical adaptation of folklore in

“Music Creation Based on Folklore” article, which aims to reimagine and transform the story of Senggulat Mbacang, a North Sumatra folklore into a musical setting. In forming a folktale-based piece of music, Ginting (2019) focuses on integrating his cultural background into his musical expression by exploring and realising Karo traditional music through a Western art music perspective. This intercultural exploration involves adopting the rhythmic patterns found in traditional Karo music and experimenting with new sounds through various treatments of a particular set of musical and non-musical instruments using traditional Western notation. A prioritised and important aspect in Ginting’s new composition centres on how his reinterpretation of the story’s structure and elements helps inform his aesthetic principles and influence artistic goals regarding symbolic affiliations between musical gestures and the cultural context of the narrative.

EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL COMPOSITION

In addition, the initial inspiration for a musical composition can also be drawn from subjects outside the musical domain, such as painting, poetry, folktale, sculpture and landscape. Also known as extra-musicals, these initial ideas are normally explored in combination with existing musical materials as part of the creative compositional process. Examining the musical structures and elements of a musical piece—in light of the extra-musical content—that influenced its creation is intended to reveal its symbolic dimension and realise the meaning behind the piece.

It is the consequence of the interpretation and engagement of a composer with this non-musical content domain that inspires and finds symbolic significance in the musical ideas incorporated in the composition (Tiutiunnik, 2013). A number of Tiutiunnik’s compositions use selected maqāmāt of Middle Eastern music for the construction of melodies as opposed to the common major–minor-scale system encountered most frequently in the Western tradition. The manifestation of concepts linking specific melody types of non-Western culture with extra-musical domains in these compositions is motivated by her research into the development of the musical heritage of the Middle East, particularly the affective dimension of music as a symbolic form in the Arab or Islamic ethos. For example, multiple symbolic affiliations attributed to maqamat were incorporated into the pieces as the inspirational extra-musical framework intended to convey another level of musical meaning of specific physical, emotional and spiritual states or stations through their musical structures.

Similarly, in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, Tazul Tajuddin (2022) has employed both extra-musical and musical sources related to various traditional Malay features and Western art music techniques where they act as the structural basis and generative elements for the orchestral and contrapuntal fabric of this work in correspondence with their symbolic references to contrasting dramatic moments. Apart from the musical scores as the creative output, there is an accompanying documentation in the form of a published article written by Tajuddin to outline his theoretical stances and to document how his composition process operates in varying stylistic traits (Tajuddin, 2022). It is interesting to observe that the non-Western musical materials are used as prominent figures and unifying elements, with their characters intensified throughout this opera rather than merely adding some “ethnic” sound to the texture of the music—by acting as the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic support—which is commonly found in most local mainstream or popular music.

METHOD

Content analysis is the primary means for this study by which the composition of Tazul Tajuddin’s *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* in the primary form of musical scores and an audio recording of its premiere in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were investigated and documented as a critical and

reflective commentary. A considerable part of the analysis necessitates the process of theorisation contributed by the secondary data sources that involve reading aesthetic, practical and philosophical texts, listening to recordings and studying the related scores of nineteenth- and twentieth-century music composers. This analysis focuses on the scores of the seven selected arias or songs out of the nine arias of this opera. The two arias, *Puteri Gunung Ledang* and *Puteri Hang Li Po*, were excluded from the study subjects as they possess little to no implication of the contemporary musical language and cross-cultural techniques compared to the other seven analysed arias and choruses. Regarding the content of the analysis, several dimensions of the music, including motivic/phrase construction, melody, rhythm, texture and instrumental timbre, are determined and specified as the musical units used for conducting and reporting the analysis.

The function of musical analysis in this project is twofold. The first is to assist in generating an extension of knowledge and a practical strategy for intercultural writing, into which materials from Western and Asian musical traditions were integrated and manipulated. It also illustrates how music techniques that emphasise the composer's aesthetic principles through abandoning the traditional thematic development are employed in the opera, contributing to the composition's originality. To effectively convey the narrative of the treatment of materials in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara*, a multifaceted analysis method comprising explanatory texts and graphical views of the proportions of the pieces is used within a post-tonal context. Guided by the analyst's aesthetic goals, these analytical approaches are used in combination to exemplify how individual elements are designed by the composer, to identify meaningful musical relationships between pitch-class collections and to what extent his compositional logic or intention relates to the intercultural activity and prompts unifying effects in the diminution or absence of traditional tonal functions.

ANALYSIS OF ARIAS AND CHORUSES FROM THE OPERA *SERIKANDI NUSANTARA*

CIK SITI WANG KEMBANG AND PUTERI SAADONG

Developed within the scope of minimalism, the musical texture of the first song of the opera, titled *Cik Siti Wang Kembang and Puteri Saadong*, is non-imitative polyphonic based on the concept of vocal recitative and drone music. Using a sustained note placed at the lowest part of the texture to accompany the quasi-recitative vocal style helps generate drone and static effects in the background level throughout the song. This underlying drone sound played on a viola serves to imitate the sound and function of rebab and to support the upper voice layers alongside the independent percussion lines coming from the playing of gendang (two-headed drums), gongs and tubular bells. The interplay between the drone and other textural layers is continuously sounded and heard in every part of the song to reflect a calm and serene atmosphere, illustrating the pleasure in mutual recognition and reciprocal interaction between the two characters, Cik Siti Wan Kembang and Puteri Saadong.

When referring to the overall texture of the song, the viola appears to have two functions simultaneously. The lower line is simply a held drone played on the viola's open C string, while the upper line is rhythmically and melodically independent. The latter occasionally shares similar phrasal contours or shapes with the soprano and mezzo-soprano melodies and embraces subtle microtones in a number of phrases, as shown in an example in Figure 1. Having these two contrasting layers or features, specifically, the sustained drone and brief microtonal melody played at the same time on the viola, signifies and sheds light on the composer's intention to produce and experiment with impure sound quality and microtonal inflexions characteristic of traditional Malay music through Western compositional techniques.

Figure 1: Bars 52–56 from Tajuddin’s *Cik Siti Wang Kembang* and *Puteri Saadong*.

On another note, although the piece uses the simple common-time metre of 4/4, its rhythms do not articulate the sound of a clear and consistent metre or beat because of the contrasting metrical stress patterns between the rhythmic ideas and the notated beats. With the presence of the characteristics of vocal recitative in the foreground melodies and the flexible rhythms of the viola, the listener perceives no regular pulse throughout this piece since too many rhythmic figurations do not correspond and align to a consistent beat unit of the implied metre. In other words, the summative effect of using ametric music or rhythmic patterns that conflict with the notated metre tends to cause the music to sound like it does not have any perceivable metre and constant tempo, permitted by the disappearance of the sense of a regular hierarchy of rhythmic stress in a measure of 4/4 metre.

PUTERI BIDASARI

Compared to the other arias in the opera, the musical fabric of Tajuddin’s *Puteri Bidasari* aria is considered a thin and expanded monophonic texture. Apart from a vocal line made up of a mixture of melodic phrases that differ in length, it is also accompanied statically by several quarter-note beats of handbells to reinforce and conclude every phrase statement. There is an extensive treatment of tuplets and feathered beams in the melody of this song, which helps stimulate a sort of rhythmic and tempo fluctuation or rubato throughout. The length of the phrases constantly changes, but the melodic outlines remain similar as if there is only one substantial pattern of melodic contour. The phrases do not undergo true development, only variation. Despite the number of notes contained in those melodic motives varied, some with many notes and some with fewer notes, it is clear that they are almost identical in melodic outline due to the limited use of pitch materials and their conformity to the scale or mode of the moment.

Regarding the directionality of the individual phrases, the combination of motifs that make up the phrasal contours for the entire melody is recognised to revolve around the sequence of ascending and descending motions of the hemitonic pentatonic scale in F (comprising semitones), resembling the alternation of the arch and inverted arch shapes. The total effect of each melodic phrase—whether it provides degrees of closure or openness—depends on the placement of the structural tones. In this context, they refer to repeated notes, notes with longer time values than the notes surrounding them, accented notes via syncopated or anticipated rhythms and the highest notes of a phrase. Here is an excerpt of all embellishing tones surrounding the structural tones (labelled as ST) within the F pentatonic sphere at bars 7–10.

Figure 2: An excerpt from Tajuddin’s *Puteri Bidasari*, bars 7–10.

As seen in Figure 2, the embellishing tones make explicit statements about the tonal hierarchy of the F hemitonic pentatonic scale (F, A, Bb, C and E) throughout the melodic phrases—where they move upwards, downwards and stationary—bound by their relationship with the tonal centre, F. Employing a non-diatonic note as the cadence for a phrase, for example, D# within the F hemitonic pentatonic scale, draws attention to increased melodic tension, which sets up listener expectations for the resolution or a sense of forward movement.

The permutation of the hemitonic pentatonic phrases strengthens the melody's character through a series of arch and inverted arch contours, which symbolises Puteri Bidasari's current emotional state after experiencing a traumatic event. Her fluctuating emotions and the decision to escape from this painful situation led her to hide and live in the depths of the forest to alleviate the pain. Bidasari, through her faith, trust and devotion, gradually overcomes the darkness and sadness of her soul but once in a while has doubt and conflicting feelings about her inevitable fate, believing that she has no control over what will happen to her. The indication of Puteri Bidasari's vulnerability to the psychological impact of her traumatic event, followed by an expression of achieving a satisfactory resolution of her pain and suffering after being rescued by Sultan Djouhan from the cruelty of the wicked queen Lida Sari is represented in the final section of the aria.

Towards the end, the vocal line unfolds—through connecting repeated lower tones with varied higher pitches and several zigzag leaps—in a partially recitative style to model the speechlike patterns of rhythm besides heightening the *parlando-rubato* rhythm and the emotional intensity of the hemitonic pentatonic progression. This method is viewed as a way of reducing the composer's control over the duration of sounds, allowing more flexibility in rhythmic notation by giving the singer liberty and autonomy to interpret the musical score based on their affective and perceptive faculties, guided by the composer's brief performance notes.

PUTERI WALINONG SARI

The piece is characterised by the use of repetition, which can be said to be a central stylistic feature of Tajuddin's music in this opera. We can see that although each voice and instrument, in its own way, encompasses repetitive material, these repetitions do not overlap with one another, leading to a series of contrapuntal textures and asynchronous overlapping rhythmic periods so they do not start and end at the same time. In addition, the rhythmic aspect and pitch stratification of this aria evolved as a direct result of the voices and instruments of distinct timbres being assigned to their own distinct pitches, rhythms, functions and gestures, which imbue the piece with a sort of nontonal style, a vivid difference of character and the layers of complexity in a coherent musical context.

It is interesting to note that the presence of continuous drone-based effects as generative drivers for the background structure of the song exemplifies Tazul Tajuddin's aesthetic priority and emphasis on the static musical language and quality, in which the almost total absence of harmonic development or progression is evident not only in this song but throughout other songs of the opera.

Furthermore, part of my observation derives from the attempt to answer the question: "How do the story's setting and historical aspect relate to the opera's compositional and contrapuntal logic?" The legendary story of Puteri Walinong Sari is believed to have taken place in Inderapura, known to be the capital city of the medieval kingdom of Pahang, many years ago. Focusing on reimagining the climax part of the tale, Tajuddin integrates musical strands associated with the traditional music of Pahang, precisely the rhythmic and motivic materials emanating from the performance of *Gendang Silat Pahang* into the musical expression of the piece through the Western compositional method. This intercultural realisation mirrors a fighting scene between Puteri Walinong Sari and Raja Mambang Segara, who were renowned for their mastery of the Malay martial art called *Silat*.

The percussion instruments utilised in this aria provide the rhythmic foundation or backbone for the entire song. It brings to mind the irregular, repeating rhythmic patterns in the music of *Gendang Pahang*, which can be seen from bar 58 to the end of the aria.

Figure 3: Percussion part of Tajuddin's *Puteri Walinong Sari* (bars 58–61).

Figure 3 shows that the interlocking rhythms associated with the performance of *Gendang Silat Pahang* were assimilated into the rhythmic language of the work through the percussion lines, giving it a distinct rhythmic profile. The independent sequence of pitches, interlocking rhythms and distinctive timbral interactions constructed in this work is the consequence of the composer's synthesis of traditional Malay elements and nontonal techniques, which convey different layers of meaning related to the intrinsic movements, conflict and dramatic situations involved during the Silat duel between Puteri Walinong Sari and Raja Mambang Segara.

PUTERI SANTUBONG AND PUTERI SEJINJANG

Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang are among the well-known mythological tales of Sarawak. It is a story about two beautiful princesses believed to be associated with the existence of Mount Santubong and the islands of Kera, Satang and Talang-talang (Krishnan, 2013). The notion of incorporating Malay folk traditions thematically into and around the music is continued in this aria, in which its melodic progression was inspired by a portion of a melody derived from the Sarawakian folk song itself, Puteri Santubong. The story's themes and settings are musically articulated by means of two musical sections consisting of contrasting pitch organisation, textural detail and musical statement to portray the two distinct realms and social environments inhabited by both princesses.

In accord with its settings and moods, a further musical representation referring to the polarity of two individual acts or specialities between Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang can be observed through analysing the interactions of two chief melodies and their accompanying SATB, demonstrated in two types of gestures. Treating the traditional Malay melody in free-style canonic passages depicts a joyful atmosphere surrounding the first segment as a symbolic realm for the clouds, where both princesses live. The two voices seem to manifest an imitative counterpoint formed by the call-and-response phrases between identical melodic fragments and sometimes a succession of varied and independent melodies.

The subsequent scene gives rise to a dramatic buildup in the transformation of moods, reflecting an argument and violent fight—that took place on earth—between both princesses until Princess Santubong and Princess Sejinjang are cursed to become Mount Santubong and the islands of Kera, Satang and Talang-talang, respectively, for breaking a promise to the king. This dramatic moment is symbolised within the rhythmic tutti and atonal passages by transforming a diatonic pitch-class collection into a pervasive chromaticism, particularly the near chromatic-

completion intrusions into the folk melody sphere. In this regard, based on the transformation of tonality from a folklike quality of melodies to a nearly atonal idiom or from traditional to nontraditional pitch collections, these two contrasting characteristics of Tajuddin’s orchestral textures are ideally suited to the realisation of the musico-dramatic relationships within the aria: polarity between the realms of the clouds and the earth. The principles regarding some of the polarities between the clouds and earth realms and their corresponding musical structure and process are outlined in the following Table 1.

The Realm of the Clouds (The Pleasant Atmosphere)	The Realm of the Earth (The Argument)
Diatonic scale	Chromatic scale, nearly atonal idiom
Traditional tonality, folklike quality	Near-atonality, nontraditional modulation
Imitative counterpoint, polyphonic construction	Rhythmic tutti, parallelism
Two-voice texture for choir SATB	Chaotic spoken texture for choir SATB
Use mostly stepwise motion	Extensive use of intervallic leaps
Bars 1–101	Bars 102–134

Figure 4: The musico-dramatic polarities for Tajuddin’s *Puteri Santubong and Puteri Sejinjang*.

Additionally, due to all the voices moving in parallel motion through the same and repeated rhythmic patterns, this homorhythmic texture (parallelism) underscores the interaction between the symmetrical intervallic properties of the two melodic lines and a complete spoken text by the accompanying SATB. When it comes to expressing musically both of the princesses’ attempts to dominate each other to prevail over the quarrel, the multiple dissonant leaps, together with the overlapping differing texts set to the background and foreground vocal lines, play a substantial role in providing a sense of chaotic conversation and spoken texture, which to a certain extent, becomes confusing and unintelligible for the listener. The effect of this musical organisation on the vertical dimension of music inclines toward generating distorted and ambiguous effects in terms of vocal sound production resulting from a synthesis of chromatic inflexion and overlapping recitative style.

PUTERI ULEK MAYANG

The *Puteri Ulek Mayang* piece demonstrates a distinctive spectrum of the canonic imitation being applied to the melody of the Ulek Mayang folk song. This Malay folk melody is realised as a four-voice canon supported by a bass voice ostinato. Although the four upper voices carry the same melody canonically, slight motivic modifications within the original line create a free canon with a loose imitative relationship between the lines whilst maintaining and preserving the integrity and spirit of the folk melody. What differs between the canonic technique utilised in this chorus and the other conventional canon is that the canonic lines here receive multiple roles and characteristics throughout.

50

no measure, free Mezzo-soprano

ngat si - a - nu tu-juh ber - a - dik

se - ma - ngat si - a - nu tu - juh ber - a - dik

MANTRA: spoken 'Engkau jadi...' *p* *f* Soprano

no measure, free

Alto

Ku-se-ru se - ma - ngat si - a - nu tu - juh ber - a - dik

MANTRA spoken: Ku seru semangat si anu *p* *f*

no measure, free

Tenor

mf

Ku-se-ru se - ma - ngat si - a - nu tu - juh ber - a - dik

MANTRA spoken: Marilah engkau padaku *p*

no measure, free

Tenor

f

Man-te - ra Man-te - ra Man-te - ra

Figure 5: Bars 50–54 from Tajuddin's *Puteri Ulek Mayang*.

As shown in Figure 5, each canonical voice can be seen to alternate its function between melodic motion, vocal effect and spoken text segments. Using graphic notation for the special effects and the overlapping spoken texts allows more freedom for the singers to interpret and express the music according to their artistic and perceptive capabilities. Concerning contrapuntal relationships, the voices are not treated rhythmically proportionally to each other in relation to the treatment of time intervals, which eventually contributes to the asymmetrical and dense rhythmic texture.

Moreover, this piece is often surrounded by a static mood in the background layer since it only uses a bass line ostinato that serves as a monotonous ground bass to accompany the upper canonic figures. With the absence of functional harmony and by not clearly stating or implying the chord factors of the underlying harmonies, the cumulative effect of the vertical sound is relatively minimal and ambiguous in its harmonic implications. Toward the end, a brief, chaotic texture can be heard when the occasional spoken and sung words are used alternately as a symbolic reference to a shaman's attempts to release a young man's soul from sea spirits by chanting ritual spells or incantations against the sea spirits. This conflict reaches its climax when it calls for the attention of Princess Ulek Mayang, who arises from the sea to help save the young man's life. In short, the fusion treatment of materials gleaned from traditional Malay music and Western European classical tradition provides a fresh and exotic interwoven within the musical fabric of the chorus.

PUTERI ZALEHA

Further stress on the horizontal aspect of the music can be noted in the composition of Tajuddin's *Puteri Zaleha*, a two-voice aria inspired by the tale of the Princess Zaleha of Kedah, best known as the princess of the moon. Two types of melodies were built on polyphonic texture and assigned to solo soprano and viola, each with its own melodic directions, rhythmic motions and unique characters. Viewing the principal melody at a macro level, we can notice the presence of borrowed material from one of the Kedah's heritage: the construction of the soprano melody is influenced by the folk melody of the opening song of *Mek Mulung* performance, a traditional Malay theatre originating from the Kedah state. The repetitive traditional melodic motives of the *Gerak Timpuh* song that characterise the beginning of the *Mek Mulung* dance performance were occasionally contextualised for modern audiences, in which slight variations or modifications are applied to the intervallic structure to avoid monotony in the melody (Jamaludin, 2019).

Encompassing the soprano voice is the fixed seven-bar and three-note (D, E and F#) melodic segments in D Major that repeatedly appear in all phrases and almost always vary in some way with small changes in rhythmic and melodic cells, as shown in Figure 6.

Phrase 1
 Soprano Solo *mp*
 Wa - hai_ bu - lan_ ja-ngan kau_ su luh si - nar cah'ya mu

Phrase 2: rhythmic values remain the same, but the pitches change slightly
 A - ku_ Pu-te-ri_ Za-le - ha.

Phrase 3: rhythmic values remain the same, but the pitches change slightly
 S. Solo *mf*
 Pu - te - ri Lin du - ngan bu - lan
 ke - tu - ru-nan ra - ja me - mi li - ki da - rah_ pu - tih

Figure 6: Soprano Solo Part of Tajuddin's *Puteri Zaleha* (Bars 1–25).

Based on the melody sung in the *Gerak Timpuh* song, Tajuddin manipulates some characteristic features of its motives to create a theme or a larger musical grouping and further develops the entire piece by retaining the important rhythmic values of a phrase but changing its interval features and contour motives slightly. Because the chosen folk song is originally monophonic, it tends to provide some latitude to the composer with regard to the possible harmonic setting and treatment. However, Tajuddin opted not to harmonise or arrange the melody but to generate a different layer of independent melody for the viola through repeated tones, intervallic tensions and ascending and descending movements of seconds within a narrow melody range.

The cadential areas in almost all phrases are imbued with structural and tonal ambiguity. Interestingly, although they seem rhythmically closed in terms of the rhythmic phrase structure—due to all their last rhythms being articulated on the downbeat of beat one—the dissonant harmonic intervals on the viola provide various degrees of tension at the cadential points. Besides, through a clearly defined melody that operated within a very limited body of an identifiable three-tone folk nature, a sense of forward motion and resolution normally found in the popular aesthetic of standard repertoire is replaced or at least reduced by the more static and irresolute tonality of mood and atmosphere in this piece, which appears to be inextricably correlated with the condition of the main character and her acts on the surroundings. The interaction and gestural shape of the soprano and viola lines represent the chief part of Princess Zaleha's action (princess of the moon). This refers to the moment when the princess evokes response and protection from the moon so as not to reveal her presence in the forest to Sultan Iskandar Musa, symbolising the polarity of light versus darkness.

Conceived as the creative output of the composer's interpretation with the extra-musical and existing musical domains, the composition of the score manifests how realising music from several cultures can influence the compositional process. In this context, Tajuddin's compositional approach includes infusing the exotic resonance of a folk melody into the contrapuntal design of an art music composition and simultaneously contextualising his practice with regard to the cultural expression of a traditional Malay art form associated with Western musical idioms.

TUN FATIMAH

Every aria or chorus in this opera is embedded with its recognisable attribute in the music, giving each work its character and identity. This unifying feature throughout *Tun Fatimah* aria can be perceived in the counterpoint of the upper and middle voices, which has the underlying sixteenth-note modulating scales built solely on the first, second, fourth, fifth and sixth notes

of natural minor scales and played by various definite pitch percussion instruments through a succession of keys and thematic material. It modulates from one key to another as it progresses, enabling the composer to have chromatic flexibility while still employing a diatonic tonality in the entire contrapuntal fabric. What differentiates this song from the others is the application of shifted tonality and restless modulations or sudden transpositions of the motivic fragments. Without involving a pivot chord and stopping to cadence, these abrupt modulations occur anywhere within a section or phrase, sometimes when a new phrase is introduced, and sometimes in the middle of a phrase. The layering of melodic passages in different keys is conceived in a contrapuntal context, specifically a free imitative canon at intervals other than the octave, as outlined in Figure 6.

BARS	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88
VOICE 1				Canon at the thirds in G minor			Melody in A minor			Sustained B note	
VOICE 2	Canon at the thirds in C minor			Melody in D minor			Sustained D note				
VOICE 3	Melody in C minor				Canon at the thirds in D minor			Sustained G note			
VOICE 4	Melody in G minor			Canon at the unison in A minor			Sustained C# note				
KEYS/CHORDS	C minor	G minor		D minor			E minor		B minor		

Figure 7: Map of canon for Tajuddin’s *Tun Fatimah*, bars 78–88.

Polytonal writing becomes obvious from bar 78 onwards when two keys are sounded simultaneously, resulting from the overlapping melodic phrases in different tonalities between two textural fabrics: the vocal and percussion lines. As we can see, the ending notes of certain phrases were retained through harmonic succession, generating a sustained intervallic tension and unresolved dissonance within a number of measures. In the context of the piece’s tonal design, this no-resolution musical event is typically absent or rarely found in the compositional idioms of Malaysian mainstream or popular music. Tajuddin’s concept of experimenting with texture and resonance by projecting diverse keys in two-part interpolations is particularly relevant to the musical symbolism that suggests another level of dramatic association in reference to Tun Fatimah’s traumatic reaction to her catastrophic experience.

CONCLUSION

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the tonal system, which is based on the diatonic scales and triadic harmony, had begun to collapse under the weight of increasingly complex chromaticism. The radical departure from traditional tonal functions was also matched by another departure from earlier organisations of rhythm, which has seen the cultivation of more flexible uses of rhythm and phrase patterns in music.

Nonetheless, it is a different case in the Malaysian music ecosystem, where the dissemination and distribution of information and commodification about this musical modernism has little impact on the general public compared to the mass appeal of popular entertainment. In an attempt to articulate the stories of the selected legendary Malaysian princesses musically by means of contemporary musical language, Tazul Tajuddin presents new ways of organising a multitude of ideas, structural parameters, durations and expressive elements in *Opera Serikandi Nusantara* to evoke a more abstract level of dramatic association and a vast range of emotional expression. Since this musical work is viewed as neither completely tonal nor completely atonal, many of the musical features and techniques developed in this opera are discussed beyond the framework of functional tonality.

One of the obvious musical features employed in this opera is related to how the composer organises the opera's rhythms and metrical framework in nontraditional ways and how they are connected to the musical attributes of twentieth-century music. Apart from utilising irregular phrases, many of the rhythmic patterns in this opera do not line up neatly with the notated beats. This metrical displacement technique prevents the rhythms from accentuating the strong beats of the basic metre, which causes listener expectations to rise by shifting the regularly recurring strong–weak stress patterns to different beats and accents, leading to temporary contradictions between the concurrent rhythmic stress and metric stress. To this extent, there is a feeling of ametric music or lack of perceivable metre throughout certain arias and choruses of the opera.

A closer inspection of the operatic piece reveals that it has a certain informality and freedom in the spatial stratification of musical parts. Tajuddin's treatment of the opera specifically portrays different principles of adopting and structuring the raw materials of music into unified phrases and gestures, for instance, employing diatonic and pentatonic collections in complex and independent canonic or contrapuntal manners and quoting folk melodies in fragmentary and repetitive ways. There is little to no functional use of its seven- and five-scale degrees to form the harmonic figures. The melodic or horizontal dimension is nearly always the focal point of the music and not so much the vertical dimension as the consequence of the superposition of lines. Through his music, Tajuddin aimed for complete integration and mediation of the vernacular language, the philosophical and the aesthetic from the cultures of both Western art canon and traditional East Asian music in accord with his goals of creating a large-scale composition pertinent to the Malaysian context.

REMARKS

All depictions and notations are by the authors before printing.

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