



**Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding
A Compendium of Music Discourses**

Edited by Jay Afrisando and Muhammad Rayhan Sudrajat



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Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding: A Compendium of Music Discourses emerges as a space for complex discourses on Indonesian music phenomena.

The book offers diverse points of view to provide a fresh look at Indonesian music discourses with their complexity. The book represents an array of disciplines, scopes of studies, and approaches, including ethnomusicology, music psychology, composition, performance studies, aural diversity, soundscape, popular music, theater, ethnography, and artist statement.

With contributors from various fields, *Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding: A Compendium of Music Discourses* aims to present a more accurate reading of Indonesian music and inspire artists, writers, curators, listeners, and readers to profoundly investigate Indonesian music from a myriad of perspectives.

Jay Afrisando is an artist and researcher working on aural diversity, acoustic ecology, and cultural identity through multisensory and antidisciplinary practices. His works include film installation *In Which to Trust?* and spatial composition *Ungklang-Angklung*, among others. He earned a Ph.D. in Music Composition from the University of Minnesota.

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Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding Reading Indonesian Music

An Editorial Note

Jay Afrisando and Muhammad Rayhan Sudrajat

**Translated by Terry Perdanawati from its original text titled "Membunyikan Indonesia, Indonesia Berbunyi: Membaca Musik Indonesia"*

In this era, is talking about Indonesian music still relevant?

"What is Indonesian music?" is a common question lingering in artists' minds, especially those working in music. Perhaps, one of you, readers, has heard it during conversations in various communities or social media. This question is provocative, rhetorical, as well as satirical. It is provocative, for it may trigger a deeper contemplation. It is rhetorical since it needs no answer—it would be too bombastic to formulate Indonesian music and get a single answer to satisfy everybody. Further, it is satirical because it questions whose voice is being highlighted when talking about the term "Indonesian music" and who has the authority to do so. Or, perhaps—similar to Ahmad Sahal's concern 28 years ago in response to the nationalism and national identity narrations (Sahal)—the way to formulate the definition of Indonesian music is made by certain groups as political rhetoric and a response to global capitalism. Therefore, is talking about Indonesian music still relevant?

Observing the opposing arguments and the possibility that some groups may have particular agendas on formulating "Indonesian music" as political rhetoric and a response to global capitalism, we attempt to offer readers, artists, writers, thinkers, curators, and listeners to keep paying attention together on the construction of the notion of Indonesian music. The purpose is not to find an answer, but rather to understand what really happens in (and to) Indonesian music. Reflecting on this purpose, we offer a way to approach this matter through multi-angle reading on Indonesian music occurrences: evaluating our ways of thinking, seeing from different points of view, looking back to the past and present, and reevaluating definitions. If we can find an answer to the question, it will not be singular and rigid. The answer is rather complex and

dynamic; the answer will be strong yet flexible to face future problems; the answer may have seemingly opposing arguments, so the discourse will keep developing.

Discussing Indonesian Music and Its Problems

The flexible characteristics of Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia—the language spoken by Indonesian people) can create various interpretations of the term “Indonesian music.” This phrase can be translated as “Indonesian typical music” and “music made by Indonesian people.” As a start, those two definitions already show complex interpretations of Indonesian music.

The definition that Indonesian traditional music—both those that still live in society and those that have become extinct—is a “typical music” of Indonesia is indisputable. Yet, what about the music that emerges in this contemporary era due to its intersection and interaction with Western music, including “Western classical music” and “Western art music”? Suka Hardjana, in his “*Catatan Musik Indonesia: Fragmentasi Seni Modern yang Terasing*” (Notes on Indonesian Music: the Fragments of Alienated Modern Arts) (Hardjana), explained the development of modern Indonesian music. He elaborated on the three big waves of the global north influence through European colonialism (16th century to early 20th century), American “New World imperialism” (the 1930s -1960s) marked by the trend of gramophones, and global information culture (since 1970s) marked by the trend of cassette tape and television. Those three waves, according to Hardjana, have made Indonesian music more diverse and more alienated at the same time. The music is diverse as a result of acculturation that gave birth to many scenes, such as keroncong, dangdut, Malay music, seriosa, orchestra music, popular music, and experimental music; names like Tjok Shinshoe, Annie Landouw, Maladi, Koesbini, Trisutji Kamal, Irvati M. Soediarso, Slamet Abdul Sjukur, Koes Plus, Bimbo, The Mercy’s, Rahayu Supanggah, Djaduk Ferianto, Jaya Suprana, Guruh Soekarnoputra, Rhoma Irama, and many more; and programs such as pop singer festivals, music auditions and TV shows, top ten charts, and Western music broadcasting and concerts such as jazz and Western classical music. On the other hand, it is alienated because the development of music in Indonesia, especially since the 1970s, has arisen with weak roots and foundations. Hardjana saw two fundamental problems. First, the birth of modern Indonesian music was also tainted with “grafted values,” i.e., values adopted without considering the facts and history of Western classical music in Europe and music in the USA. Second, modern music in Indonesia also represents the “history of others’ tastes,” in which the development has been performed by those lucky enough to ride the previous history.

Hardjana’s writing should be read carefully because he did not once suggest refuting the global north influence in Indonesian music identity. Refuting Western music’s influence in the formulation of Indonesian music identity is a naivete. It may mean refusing the existence of cello in keroncong, syncopated rhythm à la swing in *Indonesia Raya*—the National Anthem, *electone* (a

popular name for electronic keyboard) in dangdut, chord progressions and melodies in *tembang kenangan* (Indonesian evergreen songs), and so forth. Instead, Hardjana implied a fundamental point from which we can learn to see Indonesian music development as well as global influence: paying attention to the basic concepts and human history.

Studying basic concepts and human history is the primary step to discussing Indonesian music because, basically, music is not living in a vacuum space. There are contributions from the entities around it: humans, fauna, flora, or non-living being. Musical phenomena that we experience is a complex result of the interaction between human (cognition, memory, perception, sensory, and whole body), propagation media (air, liquid, solid matter), source of sound (biophony, geophony, and anthrophony), and the space where the music happens. Further, musical phenomena also occur due to complex human interactions since centuries ago, including social, political, economic, geographic, ecologic, educational, and historical aspects.

What happens in Indonesian music is partially caused by the “objecthood” perspective, that music is merely an object: a performance, an experiment, a top chart, a vinyl record, a cassette, a digital component in the form of WAV, MP3, FLAC, and OGG, a streaming entity, and a business. George Lewis (in Dunaway 38-39) criticized John Cage’s idea written in his manifesto *Silence* that tried to distance the concept of sound from culture, history, and memory as well as formulated the definition of sound as something that “comes into being from itself,” including its loudness, duration, pitch, and timbre. Lewis’s critique can be a criticism for everyone who practices and experiences music since music fundamentally cannot be separated from what forms it. Therefore, reading it becomes a fundamental and urgent need.

The importance of seeing music and our ways of seeing all the aspects that form musical phenomena brings us to the significance of critical music education, from higher education to music education in elementary school and kindergarten. Music education is a vital aspect of representing and discussing music. Music education provides a place to learn ways of reading musical phenomena. Music institutions offering narrow perspectives on music will only provide knowledge that might not be useful for their students in this complex and ever-changing world. As far as our concern, that is what happens in most music institutions in Indonesia.

The effort to preserve Western classical music education in Indonesia that has happened in Indonesian higher education since the 1960s (Hardjana 12) has continued to occur until today without meaningful curricula development. It does not mean Western classical music should not be taught at music institutions. Rather, music institutions, as well as other art institutions, according to Franki Raden (Raden 34-40), should produce artists that can make artworks focusing on the relevant and actual life problems in society, study musicians’ works in the social and societal contexts, and become institutions that prioritize intellectuality over commodification.

Higher education that only focuses on objecthood without providing their students with awareness of the cultural and political system behind music production will only produce students that merely see music as a commodity and taste. This kind of education will only create a view—that tends to be subtle—that the art and research practices they do are the most appropriate, high, right, and perfect. Examples include the notion that notation is the only norm in composition, notation is the most accurate analysis medium, proscenium stage and concert hall are the standard performing spaces, black attire for musicians, no hand clapping in the middle of a performance, instruments tuning and rigid timing for the sake of ‘harmony,’ etc. It goes without saying that these practices create a relatively negative appreciation of other music practices. How music programs at higher education are categorized also makes it worse. The “Music” program tends to be an umbrella to the curriculum that highlights Western classical music with its conventions, while the curriculum for *karawitan* and other music falling under “Indonesian tradition” tend to be included in the “Karawitan” or “Ethnomusicology” program with barely any dialogue to bridge the different perspectives between those practices (the Western and the Indonesian).

Furthermore, the colonial and imperialist perspectives that come along with Western art music in many ways—from colonization to education—have created the “settler colonial logic.” Ironically, this phenomenon has not only happened in Indonesia but also in global north countries, including Canada and the USA. Dylan Robinson, a xwélmexw (Stó:lō) writer, explained that he, as well as the majority of Indigenous people, has learned the way to listen (to music) in the settler colonial’s perspectives that have been normalized and unobserved in Canada and the USA (Robinson 4). He elaborated on how Western music performance logic not only decides how collaboration is done but also strengthens the uneven perspective on what music is (8, 113-233).

Robinson also elucidated the importance of increasing the awareness of one’s positionality in listening. This awareness questions how someone should put oneself in seeing race, class, gender, and ability that actively select and frame meetings between subject listeners and what is being listened to (11). This awareness will help someone avoid “extractivism” derived from the settler colonial logic. As explained by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Anishinaabe artist and academic, and scholar Naomi Klein, extractivism is not limited to mining and drilling but also to perspective and approach to nature, ideas, and humans (Simpson and Klein). In music, extractivism emerges in the perspectives that culture, sovereignty, and the life of a group of people can be used as unlimited resources of material interest for art and aesthetics (Robinson 13-15). Furthermore, extractivism also extends to recording practices that have also contributed to global capitalism, in which all sounds are considered unlimited resources that can be used as extensively as possible for archiving and composition, that can satisfy capitalism’s interest and ego of possession yet at the same time violating the sovereignty of certain groups of people and other living and non-living beings (Wright; Smolicki). At the same time, settler colonial logic also creates an “inclusionary” perspective that hints at the structural

accommodation and is coercing within Western classical music composition and performance system so that artists and Indigenous performers become 'appropriate' in their enriched music art performance programs (Robinson 6-9). Advancing diversity is not enough only by inviting those who are different into the system and using diversity terms in the system's mission statement; rather, time, energy, and effort should also be devoted to acknowledging and appreciating diversity (see Ahmed). In every context, diversity can be advanced if the cultural and political system in the said system is transformed.

Although not necessarily identical to what has happened in Canada and the USA, similar things have also happened in Indonesia. Therefore, we need to reread the meetings of two or more cultures. Acculturation that has influenced Indonesian music should not be seen as a perfect approach to developing arts. Many Indonesian ethnicities like Dayak, Nias, and Dani treat music as a vital and integral practice in their lives, including in gardening, war, medicine, communication, etc (Raden 34). Like in the case of *tiwah*, a funeral ceremony in Dayak Katingan culture in Central Kalimantan, the ceremony leader uses a gong as a seat, and it is believed to give him the power to lead the ceremony (Sudrajat 101). All their practices and interactions with their surrounding environment are bound into protocols, and they have sovereignty in their lives. Acculturation should not be done easily for merely compositional aesthetics and performance because the extant systems in the said traditions are different from the system in Western classical music and its derivations. By putting into account the differences between the systems, can we give the same opportunity for the cultural owners and bearers in Indonesia to decide and develop their own systems without being forced into the inclusionary and extractivism perspective? At this very moment, we need to contemplate the appropriation and assimilation issues in every aspect, not only in music.

The discourses on Indonesian music should also open the possibilities to aspects other than the interactions between ethnic cultures. Music practices outside the 'conventional stages' also need to be discussed further. These practices include music theater, music film, music that accompanies visuals (such as music for film, music for theater, music for dance, etc.), sound installation, sound sculpture, multimedia installation, multisensory works, interactive and noninteractive installation, sound poem, soundwalk, game music, site-specific works, and many others—works generally categorized into sound art/sonic art/sound-based work. Along with their background motives, the aforementioned works try to break the barrier of conventional music practices rooted in Western classical music. Most of those practicing this art are reluctant to call themselves "musicians" and to call their work "music." On the other hand, some Indonesian composers produce those kinds of works and call themselves "composers" and call their works "compositions" (or just "music"). The others do not really care about the attribution and terminology that entail for their practices and works. The debates about whether sound art and music are different entities—or that the separate definition is unnecessary—can be one of the ways for us to discuss Indonesian music. The same goes for the arguments that attempt to investigate the axiology (or studies about values) of

Riwayat Artikel

“**Membaca Etnomusikologi Indonesia dan Tawaran Etnomusikologi Terapan**” oleh **Michael H.B. Raditya** ditulis pada tahun 2018 (dalam rangka Hari Musik Indonesia) sebagai refleksi terhadap konstelasi etnomusikologi di Indonesia beberapa tahun belakangan. Tulisan pernah dimuat pada laman <https://www.indonesiana.id/read/124493/etnomusikologi-indonesia-dan-tawaran-etnomusikologi-terapan#> pada tahun 2019.

“**Perkembangan Musikal Dangdut**” oleh **Aris Setyawan** pernah diterbitkan sebelumnya dalam buku ketiga Aris Setyawan berjudul *Aubade: Kumpulan Tulisan Musik*, sebuah kumpulan tulisan/antologi, yang diterbitkan oleh penerbit Arung Wacana tahun 2021. Artikel ini merupakan sebuah laporan penelitian yang disusun untuk program “Hello Dangdut” yang diselenggarakan oleh Bekraf dan Irama Nusantara pada September 2018.

“**Melihat Hubungan TNI dan Musik**” oleh **Amor Seta Gilang Pratama** merupakan hasil riset S1 dan S2 yang kemudian dirangkum dan dikembangkan. Sebagian dari hasil riset tersebut pernah diterbitkan lewat artikel berjudul “Kekompakan dan Kebersamaan Antar Siswa yang Dibangun Melalui Lagu-lagu Dalam Binsik Siang” dalam *Jurnal Ekspresi Seni: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Karya Seni*, Volume 20, No. 1, 2018.

“**Miss-Uo: Mengolah Pengalaman Aural dan Visual di Panggung Pertunjukan**” oleh **Rheisnayu Cyntara** ditulis dalam sebuah forum lab Selisik Aksara pada tahun 2022.

“**Cyborg Orchestra: Pandemi, Teknologi, dan Peristiwa-Peristiwa Musikal**” oleh **Halida Bunga Fisandra (Dida)** ditulis berdasarkan sebagian data dari artikel “Orkestra sebagai Peristiwa Mediasi: Jakarta City Philharmonic, Tubuh dan Materialitas” (Fisandra, H. B., & Danusiri, A, 2022) dalam *Resital: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan*, 23(1), 1–14 <https://doi.org/10.24821/resital.v23i1.6162> dan “Musik sebagai Teknologi: Mediasi Bunyi Orkestra di Keraton Yogyakarta”, Depok: Universitas Indonesia (Fisandra, H.B. (2022).

"Mendengarkan adalah Kegiatan Aural, Visual, dan Vibrasional: Mengedepankan Gagasan Keragaman Aural Melalui Komposisi Musik" oleh Jay Afri-sando disarikan dari naskah disertasi yang dipublikasikan pada tahun 2022 berjudul "Listening is Aural, Visual, and Vibrational: Advancing the Notions of Aural Diversity through Music Composition." Naskah bisa diakses di laman <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/241300>.

"Mengajarkan Piano kepada Anak Usia Dini: Sebuah Pendekatan Ilmiah" oleh Lestika Madina Hasibuan pernah diterbitkan di E-proceeding SEAMEX 2019 (ISSN Online number: 2723-3316).

"Suara Dengarkanlah Aku: Yogyakarta dan Bangunan Bebunyian di Dalamnya" oleh Irfan Darajat pernah diterbitkan di *Mata Jendela*, Volume XIV, No. 4, 2019, hal. 30-37 oleh Taman Budaya Yogyakarta. Naskah bisa diakses di laman [http://tby.jogjaprovo.go.id/assets/uploadsck/files/MAJE%20Edisi%204%20-%202019%20\(website\).pdf](http://tby.jogjaprovo.go.id/assets/uploadsck/files/MAJE%20Edisi%204%20-%202019%20(website).pdf).

Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding: A Compendium of Music Discourses emerges as a space for complex discourses on Indonesian music phenomena.

The book offers diverse points of view to provide a fresh look at Indonesian music discourses with their complexity. The book represents an array of disciplines, scopes of studies, and approaches, including ethnomusicology, music psychology, composition, performance studies, aural diversity, soundscape, popular music, theater, ethnography, and artist statement.

With contributors from various fields, *Sounding Indonesia, Indonesians Sounding: A Compendium of Music Discourses* aims to present a more accurate reading of Indonesian music and inspire artists, writers, curators, listeners, and readers to profoundly investigate Indonesian music from a myriad of perspectives.

Jay Afrisando is an artist and researcher working on aural diversity, acoustic ecology, and cultural identity through multisensory and antidisiplinary practices. His works include film installation *In Which to Trust?* and spatial composition *Ungklang-Angklang*, among others. He earned a Ph.D. in Music Composition from the University of Minnesota.

Muhammad Rayhan Sudrajat is an educator and modular synthesis artist. He is also an Integrated Arts lecturer at Bandung's Universitas Katolik Parahyangan in West Java, teaching Sound Arts. By connecting ancestors' legacies from the past with the futuristic world of today, Rayhan hopes to preserve the heritage of his ancestral line.

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